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Abstract

Purpose: this research investigates the challenges and benefits of working from home and the needs that organisation's should understand when adopting working from home practices.

Design/methodology/approach: self-determination theory was used to understand the drivers of motivation when working from home, to provide a deep understanding of how organisations may support employees working from home. A cross-sectional qualitative survey design was used to collect data from 511 office workers during May and June of 2020.

Findings: employees' needs for competence were thwarted by a lack of direction and focus, unsuitable work environment, work extensification, and negative work culture. Employees' experiences and needs for relatedness were more diverse, identifying that they enjoyed spending more time with family and having a greater connection to the outdoors, but felt more isolated and suffered from a lack of interaction. Employees' experiences of autonomy whilst working from home were also mixed, having less autonomy from blurred boundaries between home and work, as well as childcare responsibilities. Conversely, there was more freedom to be able to concentrate on physical health.

Originality: swathes of research were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, but overwhelmingly focused on quantitative methods. A qualitative survey design enabled participants to answer meaningful open-ended questions, better suited to explain the complexity of their experiences, which allowed for understanding and richness not gained through previous studies.

Practical implications: employee's needs for competence should be prioritised. Organisations must be conscious of this and provide the support that enables direction and focus when working at home.

Key words: working from home, COVID-19, self-determination theory, motivation, motivational quality

Introduction

COVID-19 had a dramatic impact on life and work and spurred on the shift to a new way of working (Galanti et al., 2021). It gave people the opportunity to reflect on what is important in both their work and home life and how they would like work to be developed. This move appears to be continuing following on from the pandemic, with organisations seeing opportunities that come from flexible working practices (Barrero et al. (2021). As with many organisational changes, there can be benefits and challenges to new ways of working. As a consequence, organisations will have to adopt working from home practice and understand how employees have had to adapt to be able to support them (Kniffin et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the experiences of employees working from home and the impact of those experiences on preferences for working at home provides the opportunity to ensure the effectiveness of practices moving forward.

For office employees, work has more commonly remained separate from personal home spaces, but due to COVID-19 work has encroached on this (Gratton, 2021). Working in virtual spaces and the use of technology has not only become commonplace when working from home, but also in the office,

where much of the work has continued in these virtual spaces (Gagné et al., 2022). What previously had been discussed in literature as teleworking/ remote working, hybrid working has now been identified to encompass this complexity of work design (Xiao et al., 2021). This has led to uncertainty in appropriate approaches to work design and how organisations should adapt and support employees (Gagné et al., 2022; Kniffin et al., 2021).

It has been highlighted as a critical agenda for human resource management and organisations to gain the understanding of how to support employees' psychological needs when working remotely (Gagné et al., 2022; Kniffin et al., 2021). However, reimagining how we work is complicated as there is so much at stake (Gratton, 2023). Therefore, going back to what employees need is fundamentally important. Self-determination theory (SDT) is a needs-based theory of motivation that highlights the what and how to support individual's needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT has been noted as a practical model for supporting employees motivation (Manganelli et al., 2018; Rigby & Ryan, 2018). It is important for organisations to fully understand both the positive outcomes of working from home that have enriched employees' lives, but also the challenges that are faced in this way of working, to ensure employees remain motivated, effective, and healthy whilst working from home.

This research aims to understand the challenges and benefits that come from working from home and the needs that organisations should keep in mind when considering adopting working from home practices, posing two critical research questions:
1. What are the challenges and benefits of employees working from home through a lens of SDT?
2. How can we use this knowledge to help organisations support employee's needs working from home?

Literature review

Before the pandemic just over 5% of UK workers regularly worked from home (ONS, 2019); by April 2020 more than 46% were undertaking at least some of their work from home (ONS, 2020). Similar figures were seen in the US, with around 44% of employees homeworking (Statista, 2022). This trend appears to be continuing with many maintaining working from home arrangements post-pandemic. Therefore, the issue of effective support for homeworkers becomes more prevalent for organisations (Gagné et al., 2022).

Throughout the pandemic, employees consistently expressed a desire to work from home in the future. Survey findings varied, but generally indicate between half and two thirds of employees wanted to work from home some or all of the time post-pandemic, many expressing a preference for a blend, allowing them to spend time working both remotely and from the office (Deliotte, 2021; Galanti et al., 2021; McKinsey & Company, 2021). This indicates a consistent employee voice to which many employers have responded to, confirming arrangements for flexible working opportunities in the future. However, these findings touch only on the surface of employees' preference, which may overlook deeper levels of understanding about employee experiences and individual needs. This has been said to be at the forefront for organisations hoping to implement sustainable working from home practices (CIPD, 2021). Our research aims to understand the motivation behind these emerging preferences, to enable organisations to understand employees needs.

Originally coined as teleworking, defined as the use of telecommunications and related technologies to undertake work away from their employer's main office location (Nilles, 1988), working from home, flexible work and hybrid forms of work are more recently more commonly discussed. Hybrid working however is a relatively new concept, with only one significant experiment conducted

previously (Bloom et al., 2015). Hybrid working refers to a combination of remote work and work on employer's premises (Timms et al., 2021). Although research on remote working and its many guises has been undertaken for several decades, findings are often contradictory and a lot is still unknown about employee experiences and how to support homeworking (Boell et al., 2016; Gratton, 2023). Remote working and working with technologies places pressure on employees and moving forwards we should look to understand the resulting uncertainty (Gagné et al., 2022). However, a significant proportion of the existing research was undertaken when remote working levels were at lower levels than undertaken during the pandemic.

Flexible work practices have been found to lead to work intensification and employees experiencing more pressure leading them to work harder (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010) resulting in increased stress (Kazekami, 2020). Often working from home has been provided to support specific individuals or work needs and follows rigorous planning and design and therefore employees can feel they owe the organisation (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). When the demands of work outweigh the resources available, this can lead to an increase in strain and negatively impact individuals and organisational outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This practice is not sustainable for employees.

Benefits have been found for employees who work flexibly, such as, increased well-being, better productivity and lower levels of absenteeism (Brunelle, 2013). Fonner and Roloff (2010) found that despite difficulties, workers who spent more time out of the office were more satisfied than those who remained mainly in their offices. In addition, teleworking has been found to be a better way of meeting employees psychological needs (Brunelle & Fortin, 2021). It appears though that working from home may be a complex notion to understand as benefits and disadvantages may occur concurrently and differently for individual employees. For example, factors such as boundarylessness and multitasking have both enriching and depleting implications for employees moving to hybrid working (Xie et al., 2019). Furthermore, although social isolation is widely accepted as the main risk to home working, the literature seems conflicting as to the reality of this for most home workers (Brunelle & Fortin, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that working from home can be beneficial for organisations and individuals, as well as employees expressing an interest in this continuing, and that it should be part of future organisational planning (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020; Galanti et al., 2021). In addition, Stich (2021) suggests that employees are attracted to flexibility, similar to other attributes such as pay and autonomy. This has provided an opportunity to understand more about what motivates individuals to work from home. However, understanding the complexity of changing the way we work is going to require time and systematic deconstruction (Gratton, 2023).

Self-determination theory

Working from home has provided individuals opportunities to re-evaluate what is important in life and work (Wiles, 2022) and therefore has changed, or perhaps highlighted, what motivates individuals to work. Allegories of the post-COVID workplace, such as, 'quiet quitting' and the 'great resignation', further support this plight for different ways of working (Formica & Sfodera, 2022). Certain aspects of work may have been identified as demanding, demeaning or in-adequate in meeting their needs (Deci et al., 2017). Therefore, employees have had the opportunity to identify what motivates them to work effectively and seek greater enjoyment, purpose or meaning from their work.

Motivating factors, that can be considered as job resources, are valuable motivators for employees, especially when job demands are high (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). For example, autonomy can act as a job resource, which can then reduce negative effects on well-being (Bakker et al., 2005). While

job demands are suggested to be an inevitable consequence of work, it is the imbalance between resources and demands that lead to reduced wellbeing for employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Although, job demands-resources provide a conceptual framework why employees may have better experiences in work when their environment provides the right conditions, JD-R theory does not provide a framework for why this may occur, often listing predictors (Fernet et al., 2013). However, utilising a framework of SDT has been identified as a promising avenue to support workplace environments, in which meeting employees personal needs can act as resources (Deci et al., 2001). Therefore, organisations should look to understand the factors of working from home that support core motivational needs.

Work motivation is, 'a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work related behaviour' (Pinder, 2014, p. 11). Therefore, understanding employee' motivation is key for organisations who wish to maximise performance, engagement or enhance work productivity. SDT is a macro theory of motivation, concerned with individuals' basic psychological needs that drive people (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Unlike other motivational theories, SDT highlights what motivates individuals, but also how it is directed to satisfy their needs. As outlined previously, working from home can have a depleting impact on employee's needs. Therefore, the application of SDT to understanding drivers of motivation when working from home during the pandemic may support employees working from home.

SDT posits that for intrinsic motivation to be high, basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness must be fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The satisfaction of basic needs leads to autonomous motivation, as opposed to controlled, which leads to more self-directed behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Autonomy relates to an individual's control over their own direction; competence refers to an individual's sense of effectiveness; and relatedness refers to an individual's feelings of connection to others and belonging. Meeting these psychological needs, and therefore enabling more autonomous regulation, has been found to lead to higher levels of wellbeing and fewer health problems in employees (Gomez-Baya & Lucia-Casademunt, 2018; Kovjanic et al., 2013) (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Whilst employees worked from home during COVID-19, increases in intrinsic motivation, were linked to improved organisational performance (Camilleri, 2021). Although this quantitative study found employees were motivated by organisations that met their own values, it did not explore the specific and complex factors that were important to employees' that increased their motivation during this period, and therefore are beneficial to organisations to understand to support WFH (Rigby & Ryan, 2018). Furthermore, a call for inductive studies that examine working conditions have been called for (Camilleri, 2021) to provide organisations insight into how future ways of working can be designed to meet employee's needs (Gagné et al., 2022). Al-Habaibeh et al. (2021) utilised SDT as a theoretical framework WFH experiences during COVID-19, therefore demonstrating the value of this approach, however this data and analysis remained at a surface level examining challenges and benefits of this. This was focused on how people may have adapted to work during COVID-19 or not, however did not look at the longer term of how it may motivate them to work what employees want moving forwards.

Unsurprisingly, a mass of research was conducted investigating employee experiences WFH during COVID-19, from the use of surveys (Bolisani et al., 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021), sentiment analysis from twitter posts (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020) and literature review studies (Abiddin et al., 2022). They generally find a need for more interaction with colleagues and the reduced commute as beneficial, they offer mixed results, which could be due to the complexity of working from home environments. Therefore, more research is required to understand, and contribute to explaining, the complexity of WFH. SDT is crucial in helping to unravel the uncertainty of these new ways of working to support

employee's needs (Gagné et al., 2022). Therefore, although it is apparent that meeting employees needs leads to improved organisational and individual outcomes, there is still a need to understand specific motivations when working from home.

Organisations influence needs satisfaction via the policies and practices they implement, and, these can therefore act as either needs supporting and needs thwarting (Deci et al., 2017). A focus on needs supporting behaviours within organisations can lead to positive work outcomes (Manganelli et al., 2018; Rigby & Ryan, 2018). In contrast, organisations who have environments where employees' needs are thwarted experience diminished functioning (Bartholomew et al., 2011). Different aspects of the work environment can be structured in a way that can facilitate employees needs satisfaction (Manganelli et al., 2018) through developing resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Therefore, organisations should look to promote these aspects when implementing practices that change the work environment.

SDT focuses on the type of motivation that energises behaviours. Most theories of motivation distinguish between only extrinsic and intrinsic forms; this does not however appear to sufficiently explain some forms of behavioural incentives that drive individuals. Specifically, research on working from home tends to focus on alleviating negative experiences working from home, generally quantitatively, rather than exploring these incentives. Motivation quality is lowest when someone is a-motivated, namely when there is no value seen in an activity. This follows through on a continuum with forms of extrinsic motivators depending on how an individual values an activity and intrinsic motivation. The extent of an individual's motivational quality is influenced by the degree to which autonomy, relatedness and competence needs are met (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Organisations can facilitate intrinsic motivation by supporting rather than thwarting the needs of their employees. It is important that organisational practices tap into what individuals need, rather than utilising top down, organisational led approaches (Rigby & Ryan, 2018). Common practices in organisations however tend to be place controlling and therefore thwarting of basic needs (Rigby & Ryan, 2018). For example, organisations that have implemented models with mandated working days have found these unpopular with employees (Pontefract, 2021). Furthermore, it has been suggested that current approaches to work design tend to be positioned around extrinsic, controlled motivation elements (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Unfortunately it has been observed that motivation is not considered when it comes to the integration of technological environments (Gagné et al., 2022), which is now common practice. Often not considering the longer terms needs of employees moving to this way of working post-pandemic (Richter, 2020).

Organisations that have created environments that meet the psychological needs of their employees have increased job satisfaction; this has been found to be heightened from those able to work from home (Brunelle & Fortin, 2021). Therefore, the factors of working from home that contribute to employee's autonomous motivation, through a range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators could help to understand how to implement appropriate practices that are needs supporting.

Moving towards more complex work requires a higher level of cognitive and emotional abilities which are better supported when underpinned by self-determination (Gagné et al., 2022). By conceptualising this inherent complexity in meeting employee needs through SDT and its strands of motivational quality, we can better support employees when working from home.

Methods

Qualitative survey design

A cross-sectional qualitative survey design was utilised to gain a deep insight into why working from home during COVID-19 has or has not worked for employees (Braun et al., 2021). An interpretivist research approach was taken, prioritising individuals' perceptions of their experiences working from home. The utilisation of this qualitative approach allowed for a deep interrogation of the needs of employees, rather than the reductionist approach taken by much of the research conducted within this area to date. Swathes of research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, but these overwhelmingly focused on quantitative methods. Using a qualitative survey approach allowed for the exploration of a wide variety of perspectives (Braun et al., 2021). Using the novel approach of qualitative surveys (Braun et al., 2021) offered a range of benefits. It enabled participants to answer a small number of meaningful open-ended questions rather than restricting responses, which allowed for understanding and richness not gained through previous research studies. Qualitative survey design allows for the collection of data from a wide array of experience, which is crucial for the topic and still capture rich data offered by qualitative methodologies (Terry & Braun, 2017). Due to the richness of open-ended survey responses, and the time-consuming nature of completion, only a small number of questions were asked. This also enabled the sample-size to be maximised. The main questions asked included:

- What was the biggest challenge whilst working from home?
- What was the biggest benefit whilst working from home?
- What would you like to do differently as a result of your working from home experience?
- What aspects of your working from home experience would you like to stop or reduce?

Data collection process

In total 511 employees participated, consisting of office workers who had moved to homeworking due to the pandemic. During May and June of 2020 (the first lockdown in the UK) data was collected via an online qualitative survey (Online Surveys), which was shared on the researchers' social media platforms, including, Twitter and LinkedIn, requesting individuals to like and share the survey, therefore utilising a snowball strategy. This sampling strategy was an effective and efficient recruitment strategy making it possible to obtain an increased sample size and decreasing completion time as the survey was shared quickly and widely beyond immediate networks (Leighton et al., 2021). Filter questions were added to the demographics session to ensure that only our selected sample were included. For example, a small number of participants stated they were on furlough were deleted from the final data set. To understand the demographics of participants, descriptive statistics were analysed. 86% (436) of participants were working full time and 14% (72) part time. Almost three quarters of participants were female (74%) with just over one quarter male (26%). During this time period, just 56% of participants did not care for children whilst working from home. Participants were mainly aged between 40-54 (46%) or 25-39 (39%), with smaller proportions aged between 16-24 (3%) and 55 or over (12%). 44% of participants were in professional occupations and 37% in managerial, director or senior official roles (37%). Smaller proportions worked in an administrative role (11%), sales and customer service (3%), IT and technical (2%) and other occupations.

Application of self-determination theory

The rationale for this survey design and how it integrates with SDT is explained in Figure 1. Demographic data was collected to understand the general profile of the sample. Two questions on employees' challenges and benefits of working from home were collected to thematically analyse their critical experiences, both positive and negative. The key constructs of SDT: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, were then used to categorise these experiences and position them in terms of employee needs. This allowed us to identify the level of motivational quality of each

experience. The final two questions on what employees would like to see moving forwards allowed us to identify their organisational needs and appraise whether these needs are being thwarted or supported.

Methods for data analysis

Data collected were analysed using inductive thematic analysis: a method of identifying and interpreting patterns across data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With the large data set gathered, thematic analysis enabled the researchers to reduce it into key themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Two of the three authors primarily conducted the data analysis, in collaboration with the third author, who reviewed the data and developed a coding structure through inductive analysis, and thus maintaining a continuous discussion. Initially the data was read through several times and data was coded inductively using the participants words. The coding process then begun with initial themes identified that indicated the basic needs of employees when working from home (Figure 1). The next round of coding identified broad patterns within the data underneath the deductive SDT themes of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in which the data was then categorised. During this point codes were reviewed and revised, providing more detail and complexity to the coding structure. The level of motivation quality of employee's needs was identified through examination of the low-level themes in which participants expressed their experiences of working from home. Finally, questions regarding what participants want to keep or change moving forwards was analysed which was then used to identify what organisational practices they found needs supporting or thwarting to their motivation.

Codes were then interpreted quantitatively by cross tabulating against the demographic variables, to see if this could enhance the presentation of the results or identify and confirm any patterns (Halevi Hochwald et al., 2023). However, no significant relationships were identified, and as such, it was decided not to include quantitative data for the themes generated, which can often cause a loss of meaning due to an arbitrary assignment of values or losing important relationships and patterns through reducing data to a single dimension (Halevi Hochwald et al., 2023; Hanbury et al., 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Insert Figure 1 here: SDT integration into data analysis

Data analysis

Key themes were identified about experiences of working from home and reflected the three key SDT elements of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Figure 2). Competence was experienced through how supported they felt in being able to succeed in work and more generally. Autonomy was experienced in being able to make choices in relation to their work and personal life. And relatedness was reflected in experiences that made them feel connected to work, society and the environment. Figure 2 highlights the experiences of employees working from home. Positive and negative conditions were identified that contributed to overall levels of needs fulfilment and therefore their motivational quality.

Insert Figure 2 here: Thematic analysis of working from home experiences

Relatedness

Isolation

Isolation was seen as a challenge for employees when working from home. Being "cut off from [the] workplace" and "feeling isolated from colleagues" led to a lack of motivation and missing out on crucial elements of their job. Lack of social interactions with others, specifically colleagues in work,

although sometimes with customers, created a sense of loneliness. This was said to be "draining" and created a loss of connection with others."

Interaction

Interaction with others was seen as a challenge for individuals, presenting itself in the technical sense when being able to discuss, challenge and collaborate with others. It was identified that issues around knowledge sharing, and decision making were difficult when working from home. Employees noted they felt "out of the loop on office conversations and decision making" and that there was an "inability to bounce ideas with colleagues and team members".

Family

Family time was overwhelmingly referred to as a benefit when working from home with employees' having the ability to spend more time with a partner or children, undertake the school run, and witness development otherwise missed, as well as time to look after themselves. Employees identified that they were grateful for time with children, with one employee noting "[I] saw my son's first steps!" and many saying they were "enjoying spending time with my child". Participants identified being to be able "quality time" together rather than going through only the basic movements of work with more time as a parent and less guilt associated with working. Participants also talked about spending more time with partners, as well as individual time with different family members, enabling more social cohesiveness at home.

Outdoors

Having a better connection to the outdoors was seen as an overwhelmingly positive experience. Participants noted "having the opportunity to go outside for breaks or work outside when the weather allows" was one of the biggest benefits to working from home. Some employees felt this had a calming impact on them, saying "I have spent much more time in the fresh air, natural light and has eased some of my worries when I am able to be outside." Many noted that the reduced travel to and from work was used for these more restorative activities.

Autonomy

Physical health

Employees identified that they were able to exercise more; this was overwhelmingly seen as one of the biggest benefits, but also the ability to cook more and look after themselves. One participant noted that, "I'm exercising regularly, cooking good meals, waking up later so sleeping longer". Another interesting benefit was a reduction in pressure about physical appearance at work. Participants noted they "don't need to put make up on" and "don't have to wear work clothes". Employees felt that they could be their authentic selves and didn't have to show up in a way they felt uncomfortable. Conversely, although less apparent, some individuals felt that working from home had resulted in weight gain, physical discomfort, and musculoskeletal problems. One employee noted they had "regular migraines from constantly staring at my screen without sufficient breaks." This suggests although some employees feel they have more control to enjoy personal activities, others will tend to continue to work in uncomfortable environments.

Childcare

Although an issue that was perhaps more prevalent during the enforced lockdown period, childcare was seen as one of the biggest challenges to working from home. Employees noted that there was "the pressure of parenting and work at the same time." There were problems for employees trying

to focus on work whilst having "family distractions". This issue could still be apparent post-pandemic with children being looked after in the home by another parent, or the school day starting later and finishing earlier than the workday.

Travel and commuting

Travel and reduced commuting were identified as major benefits of working from home with just under half of participants noting this was one of their biggest benefits. An employee noted that normally they "spend over 12 hours a week commuting and now have that back." Having no commute or less work-related travel meant that many employees had time and control over undertaking other activities. Furthermore, many reported they had financial gains as a result of this reduction.

Boundaries

Managing the boundaries between work and home life was generally seen as a challenge to working from home. An employee noted that that there is a "blur between work and home [which leads to] working too long". Another added that "both happens in the same place", making it hard to create boundaries and often leads to work extensification. One employee described how they try to change their mindset by "getting my head into the space, that even though I am at home, I am working".

Flexibility and freedom

Overwhelmingly employees identified a benefit to their work-life balance resulting from the flexibility and freedom it allows them. In the future it was suggested by more than half of employees that they would prefer "more personalisation when it comes to working patterns" and appears to be an important factor that motivates people to seek or undertake working from home opportunities.

Competence

Direction and focus

Being easily distracted and staying focused at home were largely seen as a challenge. Generally, it was felt there were difficulties to "keep focused on each task". There were also strong links to the general theme of relatedness, with individuals associating a lack of direction and focus with feelings of isolation and lack of interaction. Finally, having the competence to build structure into the working day was generally seen as difficult, where the main challenge was "staying focussed and also keeping to structured times".

Work environment

The home working environment was generally seen as a challenge, particularly regarding IT infrastructure and the physical workspace. IT infrastructure was generally seen as being better in the office than at home with individuals experiencing anxiety and frustration due to a lack of quality and resource with Wi-Fi, printing, and general IT support. The physical office space was generally seen as more ergonomically friendly than home working space as individuals often suffered from physical discomfort when working from home, for example whereby "shoulders really ache at the end of some workdays due to less-than-ideal use of a laptop on a kitchen table", also emphasising the lack of private space at home, particularly by having to use shared spaces.

Productivity

Generally, participants felt that they were more productive when working from home. One employee associated their level of productivity to being "more efficient with some [job] tasks", such

as administrative and organisational tasks. This in turn has led to being more productive with other job attributes, such as creativity, with one employee expressing that they are "much more productive after more than twenty years in an office environment and so much more creative".

Work extensification

Work extensification was overwhelmingly seen as a challenge, with individuals often working longer hours at home, not taking as many breaks, and finding it hard to switch off. Longer work hours were generally caused by an increase in online meetings and email traffic, which "gives less time for the additional work they inevitably generate, and the 'day job' tasks".

Work culture

The culture of some workplaces was seen as a challenge and something that needs to improve. It was identified that many organisations were not equipped for working from home, causing problems with effectiveness. Employees spoke about employers' having "high expectations from employers on productivity" and some "feel [they] have to stay online and [be] available all the time."

Mental health

Working from home caused several negative mental health effects, to which over half of the comments related to symptoms of stress and anxiety. It was evident that these symptoms frequently fluctuated, to which one individual aptly labelled their emotions as a "corona coaster". Despite these significant mental health pressures, many experienced less stress and anxiety, better sleep, feeling calmer, happier, having more self-worth, more time, more money in the bank, work-life balance, exercise, not 'always on', and more time to relax.

Discussion

We have identified employees' experiences when working from home during COVID-19 to conceptualise the benefits and challenges. These were examined through the lens of self-determination theory namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which enabled us to identify how fulfilled individuals were when working from home. This research adds important understanding to the research conducted through COVID-19 regarding WFH that can contribute to organisational decision making (Barends & Rousseau, 2018), by focusing on factors that could be considered to support employee wellbeing. So, how can we use this knowledge, to help organisations support employee's needs when working from home?

This knowledge has allowed the identification of the specific factors that were important to employees during this period that therefore impact their motivation. The data was reviewed through motivational quality (MQ) of experiences and organisational practices that could be supporting or thwarting. Table I identifies motivational quality and whether practices are supporting or thwarting when working from home. In addition, the data identified practices that employees would like to stop or activities to do differently moving forward from the 'home working experiment', which is presented in Table I.

Insert Table I here: Supporting employees working from home

This research identified that generally for the psychological need of competence, employees felt a-motivated and that their needs were thwarted. There were more positive aspects related to autonomy and relatedness, where employees' needs were generally more supported. Therefore, when working from home, organisations need to prioritise the importance of supporting employees' needs for competence, whilst not neglecting employees needs for autonomy and relatedness.

Competence

Employees' needs for competence were generally thwarted through negative experiences of a lack of direction and focus, unsuitable work environment, work extensification, and negative work culture. This is in line with a recent review that identified competence as a key factor in employees reduction in motivation due to poor work design (Gagné et al., 2022) There was however more mixed feedback regarding employees perceived productivity and mental health. Some individuals identified that their mental health was greatly supported whereas others felt it was thwarted by working from home, similarly, to perceived productivity. This is in line with previous research focused on the demands of working from home, in such that when the demands are deemed too high, employees may experience increased strain and therefore feel less effective in work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Employees identified that an unsuitable work environment was thwarting their motivation, which is in line with previous work (Bergefurt et al., 2022). However, dedicated workspaces can help support this, furthermore, offices have also been found to be distracting as well as home environments (Bergefurt et al., 2022). Therefore, policies and practices that enable flexibility in choice of space, as well as providing support in creating the right environment could be beneficial moving forwards.

Relatedness

Experiences that linked to relatedness were more diverse. Employees identified that they enjoyed spending more time with family and having greater connection to the outdoors and nature which supported their needs. Conversely, employees felt more isolated from work and suffered from lack of interaction with people outside of the household, which left them feeling more controlled forms of motivation. Although it is often identified that the negatives of homeworking as being socially isolated (Brunelle & Fortin, 2021), this often finds conflicting results. Our research suggests that spending time with family was a vast advantage for employees working from home. Therefore, the mixed results in regard to employees' experiences may be due to the complexity in social interactions, gaining more from family, but less from interactions with colleagues. In addition, this research identified that connectedness with outdoors was a personal need that individuals benefited from when working from home. This supports a wave of recent research suggesting such benefits in work (Klotz & Bolino, 2021).

Autonomy

Employees experiences of autonomy whilst working from home were again mixed. Employees felt that they had less autonomy due to blurred boundaries between home and work which thwarted their needs, as well as childcare responsibilities whilst working from home. There were mixed feelings regarding physical health as some felt more restricted which has been found in similar research (Xiao et al., 2021). Conversely, some felt they had more freedom to be able to exercise when they wanted to. Therefore, working from home more often in the future can offer benefits to physical health. Employees also identified that they felt more motivated as they could cut down on travelling and commuting, which freed up time in which they could choose what would support their needs. This is constantly referred to as a benefit to home working (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021), but this research highlights how this motivates individuals as it gives them control over their time to spend

how they wish, primarily family. In addition, employees felt a general flexibility and freedom in how they worked, (Bergefurt et al., 2022; Gratton, 2021).

This research has identified that SDT is a useful theoretical framework to understand the complexity of employees needs when working from home. Therefore, that there may not be one simple strategy that organisations can implement when creating working from home policies, however there may be a series of support mechanisms that can be implemented based on employees' individual needs. Therefore, organisations need to create opportunities to understand their employees before producing policies and procedures that may be otherwise based on assumptions or business need, and therefore would not actually be of benefit (Kniffin et al., 2021).

The data also revealed that although respondents reported lower feelings of competence when working from home in general, other basics needs may be met. Although organisations have a responsibility to the effective running of their organisation, it could be argued that to truly 'get the most' out of employees and support their wellbeing, we must understand their complexity, therefore we must create more human centric workplaces (Fenton-Jarvis, 2022). Through understanding employees basic needs, we can move from organisations that think only of an employee, but of the individual, which enabling effective working from home practices can support.

Implications for practice

It is clear that employee's needs for competence should be prioritised. Employees experienced a lack of direction and focus when working from home. Organisations must be conscious of this and provide support for direction and focus when working at home.

Employees struggled to work at home due to having unsuitable work environments. Organisations must therefore address how they will support employees to have appropriate work spaces that enable effective working and ergonomic health (Bergefurt et al., 2022), for example, through schemes that assist with IT infrastructure such as Wi-Fi and printing resources, or the provision of suitable office furniture.

Organisations are urged to set out clear expectations regarding working hours and electronic forms of communication, to establish an appropriate working from home culture (Xie et al., 2019). The risk of work extensification and virtual presenteeism should be emphasised here, to ensure a long hours work culture is avoided. Companies may wish to consider specific guidance about communication etiquette, managing electronic communications to avoid digital overwhelm, expectations around response times or the importance of taking regular breaks from work.

Location flexibility can be a double-edged sword; it can allow individuals to work when or where they want but can potentially lead to work intensification. However, prioritising the opportunities for increases in resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) through control in work-family balance may support the demands of work. Potential mental health benefits of working at home should also be emphasised to support competence needs, such as including employees in decision making (Vander Elst et al., 2017) and providing outlets to communicate stress (Russo et al., 2021). Organisations should also raise awareness of the mental health risks of working from home and provide training to managers on managing such risks.

Organisations also need to carefully consider employees needs for autonomy. Employees' needs during the research period were thwarted due to juggling childcare and having blurred boundaries

between home and work. Organisations can better support these needs by allowing more flexibility and less prescribed 'office' attendance days (Manganelli et al., 2018); (Rigby & Ryan, 2018), for example to allow employees to address personal or family needs. There were mixed experiences in terms of employees' autonomy with their physical health. It is important that organisations support these needs through appropriate health and wellbeing initiatives, such as gym memberships, ergonomically friendly home office furniture, and general guidance on being physically active whilst working from home (Xiao et al., 2021).

Finally, employee's needs regarding relatedness must also be identified by organisations who offer working at home. There is a high risk of employees' needs being thwarted due to negative experiences of isolation and a lack of colleague interaction. Organisations need to take seriously the social dimension of work, for example encouraging people to spend time together whilst undertaking their in-person working days and maintain regular interaction with colleagues and teams. Employees also felt much more connected to the outdoors when working from home (Klotz & Bolino, 2021). Organisations should encourage employees to take regular breaks during the working day and remind them of the benefits of being outdoors during the working day, reducing the requirement for fixed desk hours.

Conclusion

Changes in the ways employees work when working from home, through work characteristics, technology and work-home interactions (Xie et al., 2019), and therefore how we experience work, influences the satisfaction of needs and consequently employees motivational quality (Gagné et al., 2022). Enhancing employee engagement and satisfaction is often seen as a priority for organisations, however, this is often lacking in rigour and support (Rigby & Ryan, 2018). In addition, the intricacies of introducing hybrid working has been identified as one of the largest challenges facing HR departments in the future (Gagné et al., 2022; Timms et al., 2021). Although hybrid working has been suggested as offering the best of both worlds, it creates a complex context for work to be conducted (Gagné et al., 2022). Employees appear to be choosing to work from home more as it allows them to meet their intrinsic needs beyond that of just work. This complexity requires collaboration between organisational disciplines to ensure approaches, such as hybrid working, can be mobilised effectively to support employees across functions (Moriarty et al., 2020). Therefore, this research contributes to knowledge by applying self-determination theory to WFH to understand the complexity of this for employees and what organisations can do to support employee's needs.

Limitations and opportunities for future research

A qualitative survey was used to collect data, which has been limited in its past use (Braun et al., 2021). For this research however it proved to be a powerful tool that enabled the understanding of experience from a large sample of people during a period where quantitative data was common (for example; (Mandeville et al., 2022; Xiao et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2019). This research had a large gender split in participants with 74% being females. However, when exploring the data, a difference in preference for males and females was not seen. This research was conducted in the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore some of the responses to the benefits and challenges of working from home may be skewed by these initial experiences. This research emphasises the complexity in meeting employees needs when working from home. Research should look to how employees are experience current WFH agreements to understand if needs are now being met outside of the confines of the pandemic. In addition, with organisation moving to more hybrid models of working,

future research should aim to understand how this research can inform approaches to hybrid working, to understand how far they go to meet the needs of employees in this context.
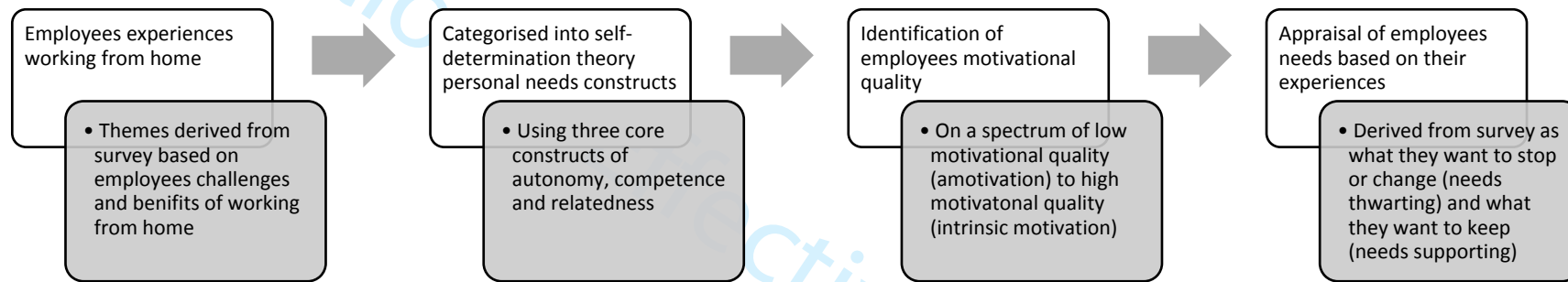
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Employees experiences working from home

- Themes derived from survey based on employees challenges and benifits of working from home

Categorised into self-determination theory personal needs constructs

- Using three core constructs of autonomy, competence and relatedness

Identification of employees motivational quality

- On a spectrum of low motivational quality (amotivation) to high motivatonal quality (intrinsic motivation)

Appraisal of employees needs based on their experiences

- Derived from survey as what they want to stop or change (needs thwarting) and what they want to keep (needs supporting)
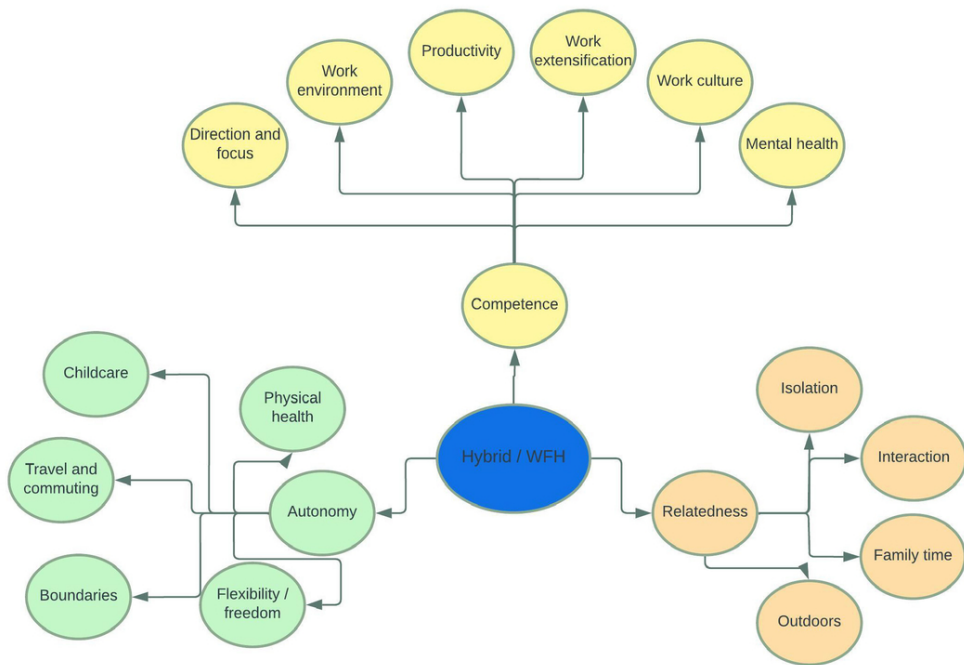
Figure 2: Thematic analysis of working from home experiences

182x136mm (150 x 150 DPI)

SDT construct	Personal experiences	Motivational quality	Supporting/ Thwarting	Personal needs
Autonomy	Juggling childcare	Amotivation	Thwarting	Separate childcare and working. Remote working when needed.
	Blurred boundaries	External pressure	Thwarting	Stop always on culture, the idea that you can access emails at any time and should be able to answer to requests. Work routines to support boundaries. Defined start and finish or working time.
	Mixed physical health	Personal value/ Amotivation	Supporting/ thwarting	Having opportunities to keep active during the day for example daytime running or maintaining walking habits. Being able to cook your own food and create healthy eating habits.
	Reduced travel and commuting	Personal value	Supporting	Work from home more. Travel less when is specifically required for tasks or for social interaction with teams/colleagues. Recognition of the financial and sustainable benefits to working from home more.
	Increased flexibility and freedom	Intrinsic	Supporting	To have more flexibility in working remotely, whilst still being able to go into the office. Also, flexibility in working hours and start/ finish times.
Competence	Lack of direction and focus	Amotivation	Thwarting	Face to face meetings. Mix of office and homeworking. Links closely with themes of isolation and interaction therefore these can support feeling of lack of direction and focus.
	Unsuitable work environment	External pressure	Thwarting	Improving home working environment, making it more comfortable and suitable for needs. Having the right technology to support work. Re-evaluating office environments to make them more suitable for activities.
	Work extensification	External pressure	Thwarting	Stop long hours, working early and then into the evening and past contracted hours. Reduce the intensity of e-mail and virtual meeting demands. Share work demands with others. Have the right infrastructure to effectively work from home.
	Negative work culture	External pressure	Thwarting	Risk of organisations forcing an always on culture. Change the perceptions of home working to be more positive, less stigma about not working productively. More freedom around how work is seen, activity not a location. Flexibility and more control over 'office days/homeworking days' through increased trust from employer.

		Mixed perceived productivity	Amotivation/ Intrinsic	Supporting/ Thwarting	Stop work extensification and intensification when working from home to support productivity. Too many online meetings stifle ability to be productive in other routine tasks and creative tasks.
					Working from home to balance online and face to face meetings, creating more flexibility and freedom. Build a better organisational culture, that is output driven, rather than time/input driven.
		Mixed mental health	Amotivation/ Intrinsic	Supporting/ Thwarting	Support mental health issues. This links closely with opportunities for interaction and reducing isolation.
					Access to outdoors, slow down pace of life and remove stress of commuting. This relates closely to many other themes. Being able to work more autonomously.
	Relatedness	Feeling isolated	Amotivation	Thwarting	Provide opportunities to see other more regularly, particularly face to face. Don't want to be working solely on a screen. Get out of the house.
		Lack of interaction	Amotivation	Thwarting	Provide opportunities for face-to-face interaction and go into the office when desired. Office environment to support different forms of working depending on individual preferences and job activities.
		More time with family	Intrinsic motivation	Supporting	Opportunities to create a stronger family unit for example, to spend more quality time with family, such as being able to have breakfast and evening meals with family instead of commuting to and from the office.
		Connectedness with outdoors	Personal value	Supporting	Utilising break times to be more active outdoors. Spending more time exercising, walking, running in the daylight rather than early morning or late evenings. Having time and access in the garden, sometimes whilst working. Having flowers on the desk and feeling in touch with outdoors.

| Reviewer comments |
| Reviewer 1 |

1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: The author(s) have integrated survey results with the Self-determination theory, categorizing these personal experiences into three dimensions within SDT. This approach represents a noteworthy aspect of the study, although I am uncertain whether it qualifies as a significant contribution. The theoretical contribution of this study is not clear. The research question regarding what the challenges and benefits of employees are working from home has been explored by many studies so far.

Several practical articles, such as those found in Indeed and Forbes, have disseminated similar information.

Additionally, a paper by Al-Habaibeh, Watkins, Waried, and Javareshk (2021) has also utilized the Self-Determination Theory in a similar context: Amin Al-Habaibeh, Matthew Watkins, Kafel Waried, Maryam Bathaei Javareshk. (2021). "Challenges and Opportunities of Remotely Working from Home During the Covid-19 Pandemic." Published in Global Transitions, 3, 99-108.

Given the existing body of work and the availability of practical resources, the study's theoretical contribution may require further clarification and justification.

2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?: The author(s) have effectively incorporated a variety of literature and studies concerning remote work, showcasing a solid grasp of the research in this field. However, they did not distinctly elucidate the relationship between the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the work-from-home experience. To justify their utilization of SDT, they asserted that the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model does not adequately elucidate the crucial factors that support well-being. This assertion is not accurate, as Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) revised the JD-R model, incorporating well-being (job engagement) as a positive psychological element within the JD-R framework. Therefore, the author(s) should underscore the relevance of SDT to the topic discussed in this paper.

3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?: The figure named " Using SDT to conceptualize the working form experience (Author's creation)" has an arrow that leads to empty space. It looks unfinished. The relationship between this figure and the research purpose is not clear. Out of the four survey questions, the first two have been extensively explored in previous research. Therefore, I would recommend that the author(s) place a greater emphasis on uncovering insights from the last two questions.
4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: The paper still has problems with figures and table. Although it is mentioned in the paper as "insert figure 1...", the author(s) did not mark which one is figure 1 in the appendix. An example should be: Figure 1 Thematic analysis of working from home experiences.
The figure named " Thematic analysis of working from home experiences (Author's creation)" has a factor " motivation and focus". It is not consistent with the discussion in the paper about "direction and focus". The different colors used to highlight the first table were not explained clearly.
5. Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?: Yes

6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the fields and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: The paper needs to be proofread as there are some typos and errors.
Reviewer 2

Recommendation: Accept

Comments:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to re-read this manuscript. I feel that my concerns and suggestions have been addressed. I congratulate the authors for the effort and thoroughness with which they prepared the review and tried to respond to all the concerns raised, especially at the theoretical and methodological levels.

I now consider that the manuscript should be accepted.

Good luck!

Additional Questions:

1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: Yes.

2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?: Yes.

3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?: Yes.

4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: Yes.

5. Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?: Yes.

6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the fields and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: Yes.

Responses

Thank you for your constructive comments.

We have added further justification and in the literature in serveral places. Page 4 - "Al-Habaibeh et al., (2021) utilised SDT as a theoretical framework WFH experiences during COVID-19, therefore demonstrating the value of this approach, however this data and analysis remained at a surface level examining challenges and benefits of this. This was focused on how people may have adapted to work during COVID-19 or not, however did not look at the longer term of how it may motivate them to work what employees want moving forwards.

Unsurprisingly, a mass of research was conducted investigating employee experiences WFH during COVID-19, from the use of surveys (Bolisani et al., 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021), sentiment analysis from twitter posts (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020) and literature review studies (Abiddin et al., 2022). They generally find a need for more interaction with colleagues and the reduced commute as beneficial, they offer mixed results, which could be due to the complexity of working from home environments. Therefore, more research is required to understand the complexity of WFH"

Although there is been a wealth of research done regarding WFH during COVID-19, which we have referenced within the paper, and organisations such as Indeed and Forbes are useful and have their place in Evidence Based Management which supports the conscientious use of multiple sources of evidence in organizational decisions (Barends & Rousseau, 2018), we feel that this paper contributes important knowledge to understanding working from home, in addition to the wide range of practical and academic literature. We would not consider these sources academic research which is rigourous and free from political biases. We have added futher justification and detailed how a thorough examination of the range of needs employees have when working from home and actions that organisations inact to support this is needed.

Thank you for directing us to this paper. This is very useful and demonstrates the value of using SDT as a theoretical framework for this context. However this, like much research conducted around the same time is also a quantitative paper, with limited open questions asscoaited with WFH which further supports the value in our paper adressing this question in a qualitative manner. Thhis paper also siggest gathering more data about concerns of juggling home life pressures, loneliness and isolation and the long term success of working from home, which our paper touches upon. Specifically in regard to the final questions around what employees would keep or change around working from home during COVID-19.

Throughout the literature review and background we have provided additional justification, as is seen in previous comments. We have also added an additional line in the discussion to reflect on the complexity of adding to this body of knowledge, but to highlight our contribution. page 10 - "This research adds important understanding to the research conducted through COVID-19 regarding WFH that can contribute to organisational decision making (Barends & Rousseau, 2018), by focusing on factors that could be considered to support employee wellbeing." and page 13 - "Therefore, this research contributes to knowledge by applying self-determination theory to WFH to understand the complexity of this for employees and what organisations can do to support employee's needs."

Thank you for highlighting this paper, it is interesting to see the positive aspects being integrated into this theoretical framework. We agree that Job demands resources framework does encapsulate indicators of wellbeing in its model. This model suggests that job resources can protect us from unhealthy effects of the work environment and that as Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) identify, job resources/control can lead to engagement. Although both models suggest that individuals will feel/work better when their environment provide the right conditions, JD-R does not provide an expanatory framework for thy this may occur. Autonomous motivation leads from the met needs of Autonomy, Relatedness and Competency. When people are deprived of basic need satisfaction, or when basic needs are actively frustrated, controlled motivation or amotivation are the result (Deci and Ryan 2000). Therefore, this gives us the opportunity to explore not just the benefits (interpreted as resources) and challenges (demands) of WFH, but which factors are resourceful or demanding instead of providing a laundry list of factors. In addition, this paper highlights factors that can support in increasing motivational quality by identifiying things organisations do that support or thwart basic needs. Due to the work limit we have added to our discussion of this on page 5.

Thank you for this comment, we have attended to this throughout the paper. We have highlted that, in addition to examining challenges and benefits through the lens of specific employees needs, how organisations can support these and motivational quality though supporting, rather than thwarting behaviours.

We have removed this figure as we felt following your comment that it is not adding additional information above figure 2.

Thank you for highlighting this. This has now been ammended from the ealier draft that was motivation and focus.

Thank you.

We have gone through tha paper and have identified several errors within the text and the figures which have now been ammended. We hope that all typos and errors have now be fixed.

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Thank you for your positive feedback and your constructive comments that have helped us refine and better our paper.