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Impact of COVID-19 Induced Teleworking Arrangements on Employees in NGOs: Implications for Policy and Practice for Leadership

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Abstract

The article sought to address real or perceived "teleworking hesitancy" by generating empirical evidence on employee exposure to teleworking in a global south context. The results of the empirical investigation were integrated with the growing body of research on the future of the post-pandemic workplace. The results depicted the opposite and significant effects of perceived workload and organizational teleworking support on employee teleworking experience and the (growing) desire to utilize flexible working options. Furthermore, the results showed the significant effects of nonwork demands (negative) and resources (positive) on work engagement and the moderating role of external support contacts. The results further affirmed the mediating role of work engagement on perceived productivity. Based on these results, incremental "A-E" policy and practice considerations that place talent at the heart of organizational efforts to remain sustainably future-fit are proposed. The proposed policies and practices carry a futuristic bias, a conscious recognition that the future workplace will be "hybrid." Areas for future research are presented.

Keywords

Evolving workplaces, moderated mediation analysis, thematic content analysis, policy and practice considerations

Introduction

Organizational leaders face an emerging set of challenges, products of a disruptive pandemic that exacerbated an already complex operating environment. That the COVID-19 pandemic may yet become one of the most consequential events of the 21st century is undoubted (Busby, 2020); however, it is the extent to which organizations will adapt while continuously creating new sources of value that remains a paradox of sorts for leaders. With the slowdown of the COVID-19 pandemic in most countries, the temptation to quickly (or otherwise) transition back to the "default workplace" is real. Teleworking hesitancy, more so on the part of the employer, is a reality given the "advantages" associated with on-site work arrangements, including but not limited to innovation and collaboration (Yang et al., 2021). However, almost two years since most countries introduced COVID-19 lockdowns to combat the spread of the pandemic, the shift in employee values, norms, habits, beliefs, cultures, and desires under the teleworking regime cannot be ignored, lest organizations fail dismally to inspire and energize their talent. This study developed and tested two statistical models whose results could shape professional judgments on the future of the workplace.

First coined by Nilles (1975), telework (or telecommuting) is the act of satisfying the needs of the work domain outside the confines of a conventionally designed workplace, for example, working at home. The practice is facilitated by information and communication technologies (e.g., computers, telephones, data, among others). Although Kelly (1985) prophetically described it as the "next workplace revolution," other players felt it was the "least revolutionary of the lot" (Flip Chart Fairy Tales, 2014). The calendar year 2020 witnessed the teleworking tide gain unparalleled momentum and in so doing changed the workplace as it had

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been traditionally known by many, more so in the developing world.

Teleworking allowed organizations to continue satisfying the needs of their stakeholders in the presence of hostile disruption. This was more important for entities that provided "essential services," such as nongovernmental organizations, government, private service providers, among others. By creating such possibilities, the teleworking phenomenon warrants imagination and mindfulness by organizations and researchers alike. This is important given the need to attract and retain talent. In addition, effectively appreciating the desires and values of employees in evolving work circumstances can be a source of motivation and employee engagement.

Teleworking hesitancy is a conscious (or otherwise) bias against the evolutionary shift to alternative working options. It can manifest at the individual, group, or organizational levels and is greatly shaped by cognitive biases. Effective management of such biases requires evidence to raise awareness on the part of organizations and employees alike.

The study tested the extent to which the mediating effect of the telework experience on the desire to telework varied between levels of perceived workload and organizational telework support. Furthermore, it tested the mediating effect of work engagement on the relationship between work-work demands (NWD) and resources (NWR) on perceived work productivity. The results were used, in an integrative fashion, to develop "A-E" policy and practice considerations for organizations as they face an emerging workplace.

The study is located in Eswatini and Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has witnessed a myriad of socio-political-economic challenges since the turn of the millennium (Musavengane, 2018; Stoeffleret al., 2016). The socioeconomic fabric of Eswatini is greatly influenced by its proximity to the regional political-economic powerhouse, South Africa (Khumalo et al., 2017; Zakharov et al., 2016).

Internet penetration in both Eswatini and Zimbabwe has increased exponentially since the turn of the new millennium. Eswatini has a penetration of about 57.3% and experienced a growth of 6,552% between 2000 and 2019. Zimbabwe has a penetration of 56.5% and reported a 16,700% growth between 2000 and 2019 (https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm).

The cost of data remains prohibitive in both countries. According to the Ecobank Research Report (2018), Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, and Zimbabwe were the top three most expensive countries (in real and income-relative terms) in Africa where a gigabyte of data costs more than $20 ($21.86 in Eswatini and $25 in Zimbabwe compared to $2.08 in Mozambique). In addition to cost-related constraints, internet speeds and connectivity in both countries remain a challenge (Williams Green, 2019). This is despite the proximity of both countries to the Mozambique's Indian Ocean fiber grid. In Zimbabwe, the situation is exacerbated by constant power outages (Ngulani & Shackleton, 2019).

Theory and Model

While the neoinstitutional, diffusion, and technology adoption theories (Daniels et al., 2001), among others, provided an appropriate vantage point for comprehending the teleworking phenomenon since the turn of the 21st century, the COVID-19 induced mass teleworking could be explained from a disruption perspective. As a disruptive agent, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the architecture of the conventional workplace and ignited changes that require organizational leaders to focus on unanticipated opportunities, challenges, and improve their comprehension of what works. To effectively understand the effects of this disruption on employees, understand their perspectives on the future of the workplace while remaining considerate of employer expectations on work engagement and productivity, the study seamlessly integrated the theories of desire (Griffin, 1986), conservation of resources (COR; Hobfoll, 1989, 2001, 2012; Hobfoll et al., 2018); ecological resources (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000); as well as the job demands and resources theory (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The theory of desire is anchored on the appreciation of the state of the mind and how that influences the way employees think, act, and perceive (Griffin, 1986) given their exposure to mass telework. This exposure, it is argued, created specific attitudes to telework. Such attitudes manifest themselves in the form of specific desires. Satisfying such desires can determine the degree of happiness, and by extension, the energy levels of employees, *ceteris paribus*. The COR and ecological resources theories highlight the interaction—from a resource perspective—between the work and non-work domains. In the study context, the effects of external support contacts (ESCs), NWRs, and NWDs on the shaping of the results in the work domain are evaluated. By extension, the job demands and resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2018) was used to (i) evaluate the unique, direct, and indirect effects of ESCs, NWRs, and NWDs on work engagement and (ii) the mediating role of work engagement on perceived productivity.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for the study. The conceptualization was motivated by the theoretical need to uniquely capture employee-employer perspectives, which could guide decisions on the future of the workplace. Developing talent-sensitive policies is considered a means to creating sustainably future-fit organizations.

Model A depicts variables that hypothetically influence the desire of employees to telework. Perceived workload is assumed to moderate the hypothesized direct relationship between quality of life and the experience of telework. It is

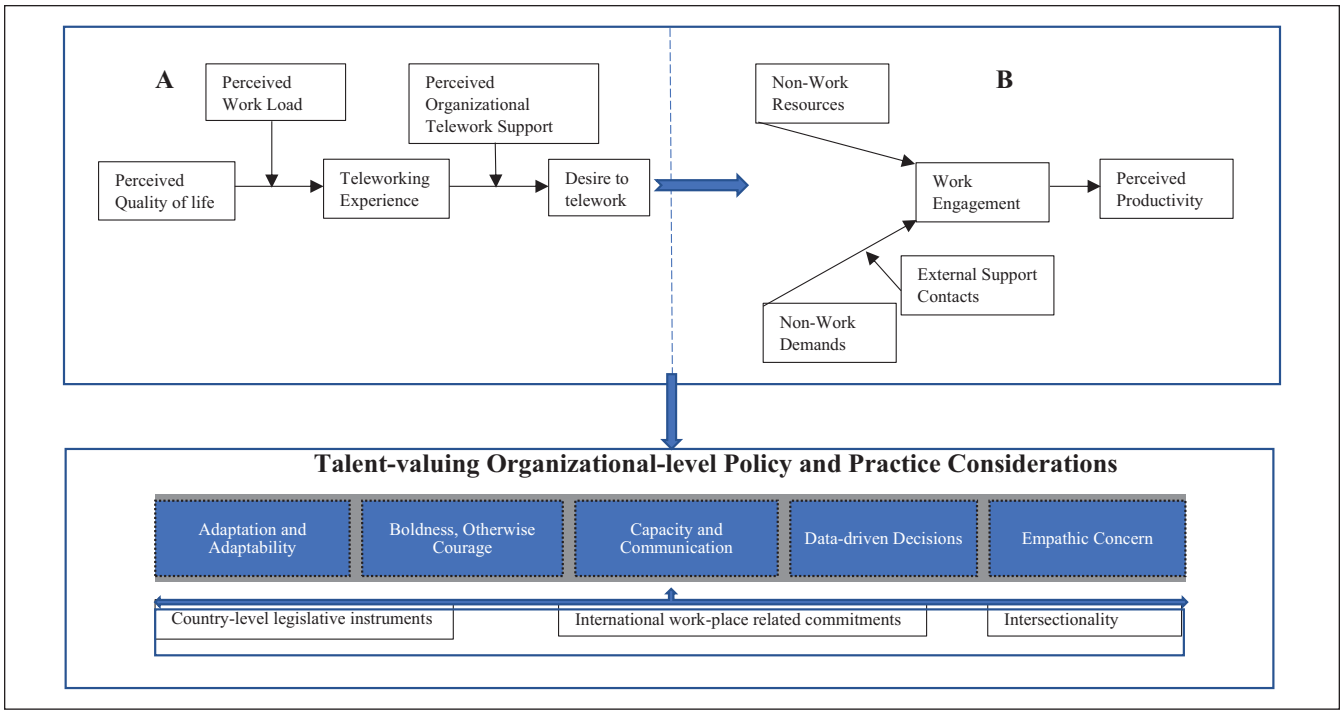

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

further argued that perceived organizational support for telework moderates the mediated relationship between telework experience and the desire to telework. The thrust in Model A is to identify predictors that shape employee perspectives on teleworking. Employees are viewed as active agents in any organizational decisions that affect the future of the workplace. If the hypothesized relationship is significant, it can guide organizations on which aspects to focus on in improving the quality of employee teleworking experience and, by extension, on their desire to exploit alternative working models.

Model B, on the other hand, emphasizes effective comprehension of the work/non-work interface. The model depicts the central role of work engagement, that is, it tests the mediating effect of work engagement on the relationship between NWDs/NWRs and work productivity. The blurred work/nonwork interface suggests that the nonwork domain influences outcomes in the work domain. Evidence shows the value-creating role of highly engaged employees. Increased productivity allows organizations to efficiently satisfy the needs of their stakeholders, including their clients. Therefore, by testing the mediating effects of work engagement on productivity, this model could drive employee-employer discussions and strategies to harness "resources" in the non-work domain to effectively drive organizational agendas without compromising the needs of the non-work domain. It is argued that creating harmony in these two domains could be a central theme, one worth comprehending if organizations are to retain talent.

Together, Models A and B are used to frame policy and practice considerations for organizations as they contemplate the transition—at varying degrees—to hybrid working environments.

Methods

Procedure

A convenience sample of 185 participants was drawn from employees in NGOs operating in Eswatini and Zimbabwe. Anderson and Gerbing (1984) suggested a minimum sample size of at least 100 while Wolf et al. (2013) also used the Monte Carlo simulation method and reported that a sample size between 30 and 460 cases would suffice for structural equation modeling (SEM) oriented research. Similar to most of the research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study utilized an online platform, SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com), to collect the data using the snowball technique. Pre-identified participants were kindly requested to share the survey link with their colleagues in the NGO sector.

Fifty-one percent were male. Ninety-seven percent attained tertiary education. Sixty-five percent of the sample were married. Of those who were married, 95% had under-five children and or children in school. The average age was 35.6 years ($SD = 7.13$). Junior-level employees constituted 48% of the sample with middle and senior-level employees making up 32% and 20% of the total sample respectively. Average tenure was 6 years ($SD = 5$ years).

Table 1. Characterization of the Measures in Use.

Variable	Number of items	Coding and sample items	Omega coefficients **and 95%** confidence intervals
Quality of life	This construct was measured using the 26-item World Health Organization Quality of life Instrument, that is, WHOQOL-BREF (WHOQOL, 1996).	Five-point Likert-type scale, different for each set of questions. ***Sample item***—How would you rate your quality of life?	.81 [0.80-0.82]
Workload	Three elements were used to gauge the perceived workload under the teleworking regime.	Three-point Likert-type scale (1 = Decreased, 2 = Continued the same, 3 = Increased). ***Sample item***—My working hours have . . .	.85 [0.84-0.86]
Teleworking experience	Four questions were used to describe the experience of teleworking of employees	Five-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree). ***Sample item***—I am fully engaged with the teleworking situation.	.79 [0.77-0.81]
Organizational telework support	Seven elements were used to measure this construct.	Five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). ***Sample item***—Clear goals, objectives, and activities were defined during the remote working period	.80 [0.79-.81]
Desire to telework	The "Desire to telework" was derived from the question "Would you like to telework in the future?"	Participants self-rated their responses using a binary response code, that is, 1 = Yes; 0 = Otherwise.	N/A
Non-work resources	Four items were used to measure the level of non-work resources	A five-point Likert type scale (1 = Very dissatisfied; 5 = Very satisfied). ***Sample items***—spousal emotional support informational support, availability of domestic appliances and ICTs, and adequacy of teleworking space	.80 [0.78-.82]
Non-work demands	Four items were used to measure non-work resources	Employees self-rated the presence or otherwise of the following demands: homeschooling needs, daily child and other care needs, spousal demands, and role conflict/ambiguity).	.78 [0.76-0.80]
External support contacts (ESC)	Four items were used to measure access and utilization of external support contacts	Five-point Likert type scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree). ESC items—child care, including teaching services; other care support; psychosocial support; and socio-economic support	.76 [0.73-0.79]
Work engagement	The study used the ultra-short version of the item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, that is, the UWES-3 (Schaufeli et al., 2017).	Seven-point rating frequency scale (1 = never, 2 = hardly ever, 3 = occasionally, 4 = sometimes, 5 = often, 6 = very often, 7 = always). It consists of one item each that measure vigour, absorption, and dedication.	.75 [0.73-0.77]
Perceived productivity	The productivity construct was measured using three items which dealt with perceived efficiency, level of collaboration with peers, and productiveness.	For analysis purposes, the Likert-type scales were converted into binary codes, that is, 1 = high level; 0 = Otherwise.	.79 [0.78-0.81]

Measures

Table 1 summarizes the details of the measures in use, including reliability and validity of the measures. Omega coefficients were used to measure the internal consistency reliability of the constructs in use and yielded the following results: quality of life (.81), workload (.85); teleworking experience (.79); organizational telework support (.80); NWDs (.78), NWRs (.80), ESCs (.76), work engagement (.75), and productivity (.79). A .70 cut-off point, as postulated by Nunnally (1978), is referenced in literature as the preferred level of reliability (Mehta, 2014) and hence confirms the internal consistency reliability of the measures in use. Omega reliability

coefficients are more aligned to factor models where items do not contribute equally to a scale as is the case with scales in use and hence were referenced in this study.

Convergent validity checks whether the items that are meant to be correlated are indeed correlated. All factor loadings for the variables in use were statistically significant, that is, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) >0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) thus confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity, on the other hand, seeks evidence of low or no correlation among the variables, that is, each of the specific items for the variable should be uniquely measuring that specific variable (Zaiț & Bertea, 2011). In testing for discriminant validity, reference is made to the square root of the AVE of each of the four latent variables. This output should be much larger than the correlation of the specific latent variable with any of the other latent variables (Zaiț & Bertea, 2011). Based on that, discriminant validity was also confirmed.

Analytical Approach

Two tests were conducted: The *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin* (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. These two tests serve as a minimum standard in determining whether to use factor analysis or not for the study dataset. A KMO value of 0.89 confirmed sample adequacy (Cerny & Kaiser, 1977), while Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also significant, that is, p = .000 (Bartlett, 1954).

For model A, the hypothesized multi-level moderated-mediation model was tested using MPlus v8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). To quantify the indirect effects at different levels of the two moderators (perceived workload and organizational telework support), the sub-group approach proposed by Edwards and Lambert (2007) was used. The hypothesized opposite effects of perceived workload and organizational telework support were used to facilitate sub-group comparison, that is, the sub-group indirect effects of perceivably *"lower workload and higher organizational telework support"* were compared against the *"higher workload and low organizational support"* sub-group to determine the significance of the moderated mediation.

For model B, two structural equation models were developed to test the relationships between the observed variables, including the moderating effect of ESCs. Further, the method of bootstrapping (Borst et al., 2019) was applied to test the mediating effects of work engagement on the hypothesized relationship between NWDs/NWRs and perceived work productivity.

Based on outputs from the quantitative analysis, an ATLAS.ti project was created and selected documents—publicly available reports on teleworking as well as sample labor-related legislative instruments, human resources policies and procedures—were added. Inductive thematic analyzes were conducted using ATLAS.ti 8 to develop a coding system and, consequently, identify the key themes to frame the policy and practice considerations.

Ethical Procedure

The purpose of the study was clearly explained on the survey landing page. All participants gave their informed consent. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. No personally identifiable or organizational information was collected, and the study adhered to strict rules of confidentiality and anonymity.

Results

Fifty-three percent of the respondents had previously teleworked to varying degrees prior to the lockdown. Senior-level employees were nearly five times more likely to have teleworked before than their junior counterparts ($\chi^2_1 = 4{,}828$; $p = .028$). Employees whose organizations had telework policies in place were twice as likely to have teleworked before than those from entities without such policies (OR = 1.88; 95% CI [0.920–3.852]).

Although 54% of the employees reported that their respective organizations had teleworking policies in place, the majority of international NGOs, only 50% of them reportedly received training on the policy. Only 10% of the employees surveyed reported signing telework agreements before going into lockdown. In general, two in five employees felt their organizations were not adequately prepared for telework.

Senior-level employees (45%) were better equipped to telework than middle (32.5%) and junior-level employees (22.5%) in terms of access to a dedicated workspace at home, availability of data, presence of relevant organizational platforms for collaboration, in addition to a smartphone and a laptop or desktop computer.

Most of the senior (89%) and middle (68%) levels of employees reported that their workload had increased, most likely due to the novel demands related to COVID-19 and the need to make high-profile decisions and provide oversight in rapidly changing circumstances. On the other hand, most junior employees (36%) reported that their workload had been reduced, which could be explained in part by the reduced scale of "contact" activities as a result of the pandemic.

Most of the employees reported that teleworking had a positive impact on their finances due to reduced travel (78%), employee work life, including inclusion in meetings/discussions (70%), family life (65%), as well as work and life goals (64%). On the other hand, a significant majority felt that it affected their physical health (54%), mental health (52%), and social life (55%). This could be

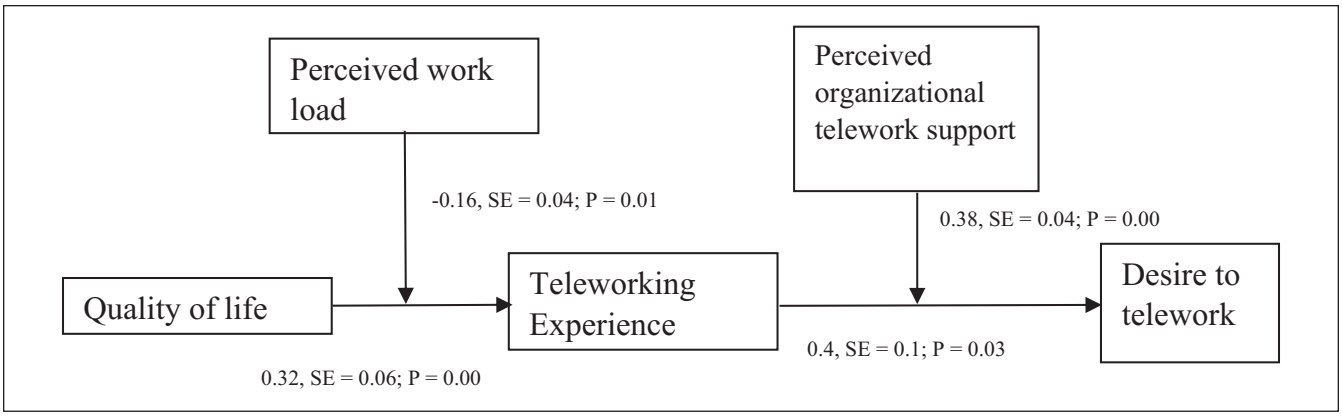

Figure 2. Predicting the employee desire to telework.

explained by the restricted movements and increase in working hours, that is, one in two employees reported an increase in working hours, the majority being senior employees (89%).

Fifty-eight percent of the employees reported an increase in work productivity. Work hours and productivity were negatively correlated, although moderately (r (183) = −.28, p = .048). Furthermore, there was an insignificant relationship between working hours and work engagement (r (183) = −.113, p = .15). Using the total work engagement scores, two in five employees were engaged at work. Work engagement, as measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Survey (UWES), is unidimensional (De Bruin & Henn, 2013; De Bruin et al., 2013), hence the choice to use total scores to gauge the level of employee engagement.

Almost 7 out of 10 employees (65%) expressed a desire to telework in the future. Men were significantly more likely to desire teleworking than women (69% vs. 60%; OR [95% CI] = 1.419 [1.210, 1.615]; p = .036). Similarly, those working at national levels (OR [95%] = 1.70 [1.219, 2.41], p = .02) and senior level employees (OR [95% CI] = 3.10 [2.09–4.13]; p = .046) were more likely to prefer teleworking than those operating at subnational levels and junior staff, respectively. There was no significant difference by age.

Predicting the Desire to Telework

The perceived quality of life under the teleworking regime was positively associated with employee teleworking experience (β = .32; SE = 0.06; p = .00), see Figure 2. Perceived workload (β = −.16; SE = 0.04; p = .01) moderated the relationship between employee quality of life and telework experience (interactive effect: β = .19; SE = 0.05; p = .00), that is, perceived high workload diminished the strength of the relationship between quality of life and the teleworking experience of employees.

As shown in Figure 2, the experience of telework by the employee was positively associated with the desire to telework (β = .4; SE = 0.01; p = .03). Perceived organizational telework support significantly moderated the relationship between the experience of telework and the desire to telework (interactive effect: β = .68; SE = 0.2; p = .00), that is, employees' perceptions on available organizational telework support significantly influenced their desire to use alternative working options. The mediated relationship between perceived quality of life and desire to telework was significant and greater among employees with perceivably lower workload and higher organizational telework support, that is, β = .073; 95% CI [0.001, 0.002]. The converse is true, that is, the mediated relationship between quality of life and desire to telework was significant and negative among employees who reported higher workload and low organizational support. Despite a perceived higher workload, the mediated relationship between quality of life and desire to telework was significant and positive among employees who perceived greater organizational telework support.

Predicting Work Productivity

As shown in Figure 3, NWRs were positively associated with work engagement (β = .503, p < .01). NWDs had a negative association with work engagement (β = −.317, p < .01). Work engagement was positively associated with productivity (β = .56, p < .01).

ESCs had a moderating effect on the relationship between NWDs and work engagement, that is, ESCs significantly reduced the negative effect of NWDs on work engagement, see Figure. The explained variance of the work engagement increased by 11.2% (R^2 = 0.112) when the interaction term (NWD × ESC − β = −.03, p < .01) was added to the model. Higher ESCs reduced the strength of the negative effect of NWDs on work engagement.

The direct effects of NWRs on perceived work productivity were positive, but insignificant. Similarly, the direct effects of NWD were also negative, but insignificant.

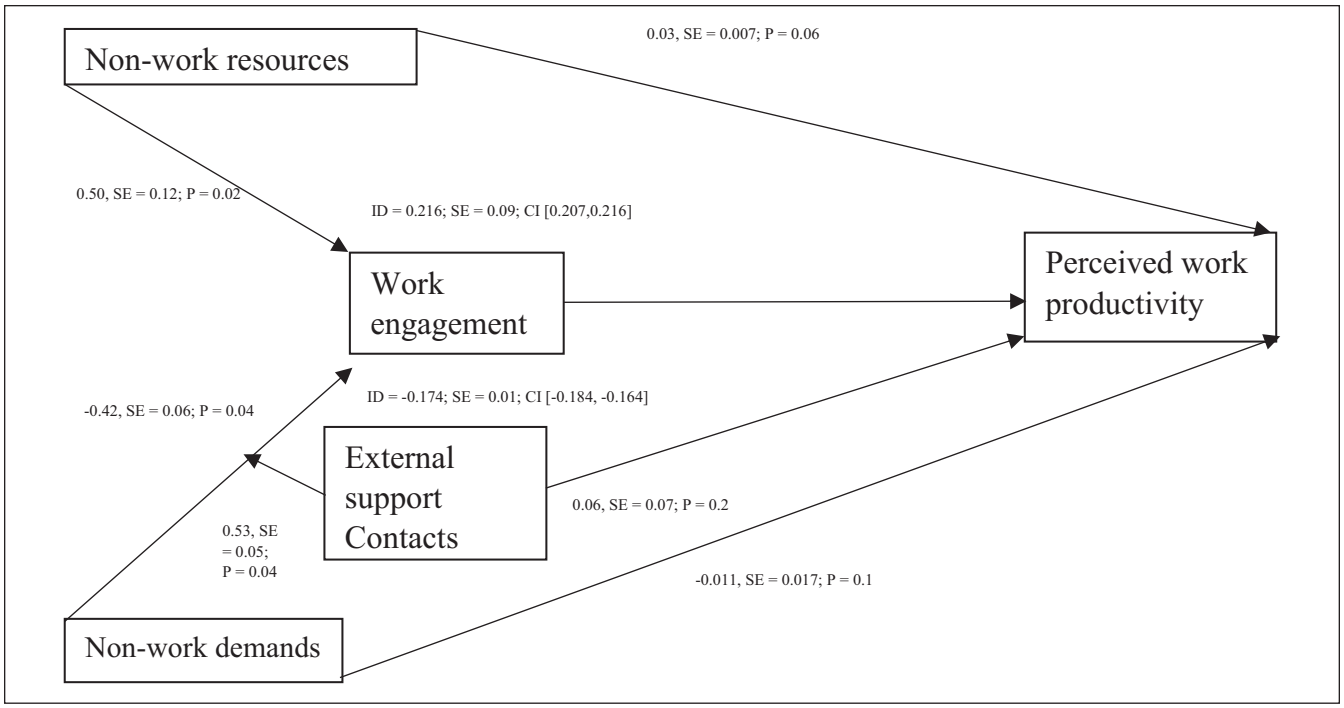

Figure 3. Predictors of work productivity.
Note. ID = indirect effect; *SE* = standard error; CI = 95% confidence interval.

However, the indirect effects through work engagement were significant, that is, β = .216, *SE* = 0.009, $p < .05$ for NWR and β = −.174, *SE* = 0.01, $p < .05$ for NWD. The results suggest that work engagement mediates the relationship between NWRs/NWDs and perceived work productivity. As such, organizational leadership can positively influence work productivity by influencing the non-work (and work) antecedents of work engagement

Discussion

Quality of Life of Employees

The results showed the mediating effect of the teleworking experience on the relationship between employee quality of life and the desire to telework. This allows organizational leaders the opportunity to positively influence the experience of their teleworkers by having targeted approaches to improve the quality of life. The mental and physical health aspects of quality of life are critical and may require both specialist services and other low-cost strategies to improve them.

Workload

Almost three in five of the employees reported experiencing a higher workload, more so among senior and middle-level employees. This higher workload partially manifested itself through longer working hours and causes exhaustion and burnout, which can have medium to long-term negative effects. A global workforce study in 2021 reported that 54% felt overworked (Microsoft, 2021), which is comparable to this study and highlights the effects of longer working hours. Employee access to work communication via the gadgets they receive from employees makes it difficult to "officially disconnect." Flexi-time also increases the pressure to collaborate "every other time." As highlighted above, meetings also increased. Creating a balancing act between flexitime and the need to disconnect will be important, more so for parenting employees.

Teleworking Experience and the Desire to Use Alternative Working Options

Although mass telework was involuntary and laden with challenges, more so at the beginning, the majority of the employees indicated a strong desire to telework in the future. While the study did not explore the desired frequency of teleworking, it points to an important shift that warrants attention from organizational leaders. Effective understanding of employee-specific teleworking experiences could be useful in improving "what did not work" while "strengthening the positive aspects."

Nonwork Demands, Resources, and External Support Contacts

The results suggest the importance of NWDs and NWRs in determining the outcomes in the work domain. Sixty-eight

percent of the employees had to co-manage parenting and or caretaking responsibilities with work. Expectedly, there was a negative relationship between NWD and work engagement. One of the key findings of this research is the diminishing effect of ESCs on NWDs. However, NWRs were positively associated with work engagement. These results confirm the important interaction between the work and nonwork domains. Effectively understanding the quality and direction of these interactions will be critical going forward if organizations want to effectively benefit from their teleworkers.

The Perceived Organizational Telework Support

The perceived organizational support for telework had a positive effect on the relationship between the experience of telework and the desire to telework. This result corroborates similar findings by Mihalache and Mihalache (2021) and Gab Allah (2021), who reported the positive effects of perceived organizational support. Tailoring such support to complement nonwork resources and demands could be critical in shaping work and nonwork outcomes. The asymmetry of resources by levels of work implies the need to carefully consider options to provide targeted telework support to employees across the board. The global 2021 Work Trend Index survey reported that 42% of teleworkers lacked essential office supplies; 10% did not have an adequate internet connection; and 46% did not receive employer assistance to meet telework expenses (Microsoft, 2021). The similarity of the findings suggests a common pattern that organizational leaders will need to confront if they are to fully realize the benefits of teleworkers.

Work Engagement

At least two in five employees in the survey were fully engaged in their work. This is twice higher than the global average (20%; see the 2021 State of the Global Workforce Report by Gallup). This may be explained in part by the fact that more than 50% of them had teleworked before the pandemic. According to Gallup (2021) and McKinsey & Company (2021b), work engagement increases productivity by between 17% and 20%. Hence, the need to comprehend and enhance the drivers of work engagement in the work/nonwork domains.

Perceived Productivity

Sixty-two percent of the employees reported that their productivity at work had improved under teleworking circumstances despite the increase in meetings and other communication. The results are similar to those of the global 2021 Work Trend Index survey, where more than one in two teleworkers reported that their productivity remained the same or higher (Microsoft, 2021). Despite challenges with the internet connection and power outages, the employees reported that they still collaborated extensively, more so internally. Other studies have expressed concerns about the quality of collaboration, the absence of spontaneous idea exchanges, and "contact" as affecting work productivity (Yang et al., 2021).

Organizational Policy and Practice Considerations

The following proposed policy and practice considerations are based on the fact that in times of crisis, organizational leaders can guarantee the much-needed stability by deliberately focusing on the "how" side of the business, that is, how to respond proactively to an evolving context in a way that protects organizational talent. Such an approach views organizational leaders and employees as active participants in the environment to assure goal-directedness.

Adaptation and Adaptability

The chaotic and complex changes exacerbated by the pandemic require organizations to make incremental adjustments to the way they conduct business. Such adjustments are guided by decisions and structural changes that facilitate organizational alignment with a changing environment (=adaptation). In the same vein, learning agility (DeRue et al., 2012), emotional flexibility (McKinsey & Company, 2021a), and openness to experiences define the level of organizational adaptability (Hoff & Burke, 2017). This allows organizations to transition from resilient to thriving entities under evolving conditions.

Actions

- Organizational leaders should creatively explore opportunities to use hybrid work models that incorporate flexible working options. Such considerations should not only be a privilege for senior members of staff.
- Organizational leaders should proactively facilitate work redesigns and scheduling enhancements in a manner that optimizes workload between levels of work and recognizes the need for employees to disconnect while satisfying broader organizational goals. This will be critical to managing burnout.

Boldness, Otherwise Courage

The winds of change in the workplace require the courage to acknowledge vulnerabilities and fears. This awareness is a critical ingredient for making bold decisions that galvanize the team toward a desired future state of the workplace.

Actions

- Organizational leaders should have a dedicated champion(s) to drive the efforts toward the desired workplace. Acting with authority and support from leadership and employees at all levels of work, these champions can help reimagine the operating models applicable to their specific organization by proactively engaging employees.
  - This will be critical in shaping an emerging (healthy) organizational culture.

Capacity and Communication

Upgrading or developing organizational competencies allows entities to effectively lead change efforts. Furthermore, proactive change communication (as part of a dedicated change leadership strategy) is critical to eliminate "noise" in the corridors.

Actions

- Organizational leaders should improve human skill sets and use resources that promote alternative work options. This includes training and mentoring of staff on updated policies and guidelines, including implications on the execution of daily tasks. Broader training in various aspects of the evolving workplace will be critical and should be viewed as an ongoing process that requires the participation of both employees and leaders.
- Formal systems and procedures will need to be updated to reflect the new direction.
- Organizational leaders should lead by example in driving efforts toward the new direction. By being inclusive and actively listening, organizational leadership can reshape organizational culture, values, and norms in the direction of the new normal.
- Supervisors at all levels of work should receive appropriate training, which allows them to co-manage employees in different locations with the same level of attention and without bias.

Data-Driven Decisions

As highlighted earlier, pandemic-induced teleworking created new values, beliefs, and ways of working among employees. As such, managing cognitive biases and effectively understanding employee needs should be based on *actual data* rather than previous experiences.

- Organizational leaders should facilitate employee surveys to gauge perspectives, needs, and expectations after the pandemic. Information from anonymous, voluntary surveys should be used in an integrated fashion to guide decisions. Organizational leaders should listen to their employees, including their silent voices.

Empathic Concern

Organizations should care about their employees and be compassionate (Goleman, 2006). Empathic concern should be driven by the need to safeguard the well-being of employees given their role in generating value for the organization (Batson, 2011).

- Organizational leaders should creatively explore opportunities for preserving complementary non-work resources consumed during teleworking circumstances (i.e., there should be mechanisms to recoup telework expenditures, including own equipment as well as costs related to ESCs).
- Leaders should introduce an array of staff care programs such as online family and children unions/engagements; wellbeing webinars with psychosocial experts; online physical activities; among others, to create thriving work/nonwork domains.

Conclusions

Global trends since the latter part of the 20th century had already started challenging the traditional workplace, driven in part by technological improvements. The study results suggest the need for employers to recognize and appreciate the change in employee preferences and perspectives on the future of the workplace. A talent-savvy approach to the evolving operating environment will require organizations to challenge and reexamine old perceptions by using data to understand the needs and wants of their most important assets, the employees.

The study offered a firm base to initiate employee-employer discussions on the work/non-work interface and eliminate (or reduce) any hesitancy, real or perceived, regarding the future of the workplace. The resolution of the International Labour Conference No. 109 in June 2021 emphasizes the need for organizations to "introduce, utilize and adapt teleworking and other new work arrangements to retain jobs and expand decent work opportunities through, among other means, regulation, social dialogue, collective bargaining, workplace cooperation, and efforts to reduce disparities in digital access, respecting international labor standards and privacy, and promoting data protection and work-life balance."

It is therefore imperative that organizations proactively embrace the A-E policy and practice considerations to ensure that minimum standards of job quality are adhered to. Such considerations will help address real or perceived teleworking hesitancy and ensure that organizations promote work engagement and productivity by creating conditions that facilitate such behavior.

Limitations and Areas for Future Studies

The study focused on the NGO sector. This may not be representative of all sectors. Therefore, future studies should encompass other sectors to gain a holistic picture. Longitudinal studies will be useful in measuring how the work/nonwork domains interact across time and situations post the pandemic. Last but not least, it will be worth investigating the quality of interaction between teleworkers and on-site employees and the impact this will have on overall levels of work engagement and productivity. Effectively transitioning to hybrid working environments in the global south will require more (viz. less) evidence that, indeed, it works, hence the need for continued research on this phenomenon.

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