# LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS' DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES OF REMOTE VERSUS OFFICE WORKING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON WELL-BEING

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## Abstract

Is the experience of working from home versus working in the office in a hybrid working model, different for leaders in contrast to employees? and how do these differences influence their well-being? Given that leaders and employee roles have very different demands, the context of recent transitions to hybrid working may have significantly different impacts, personally and professionally, for the two groups. Focusing on four aspects of working, namely, workload, perceived job autonomy, and perceived isolation, and overall well-being, we study the different experiences of leaders and their followers as they engage in homeworking versus "office' based working. Results from the first two waves of a longitudinal study in a tertiary education setting (n = 665 & 432) suggest that home versus office working does influence well-being with unexpected positive increments from office working even though office work is associated with increased workload for both leaders and followers. These results are discussed in light of the on-going debate regarding the effects of different forms of working (remote, hybrid, office) on worker well-being.

*Keywords: Hybrid work, wellbeing, workload, job autonomy, isolation, leader and employee.*

## 1. Background

Models of work have undergone radical evolution in the last years since the Covid19 pandemic (McPhail et al., 2024). Post pandemic work models have evolved with many workers seeking to maintain aspects of home working (Bick et al., 2023). Recently, hybrid work has become among the most common work arrangements particularly for knowledge workers. Hybrid work has offered employees an array of positive work outcomes such as greater flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance. However, research has also reported some negative impacts of hybrid work such as social isolation, lack of job visibility and predictability (Uru et al., 2022).

When it comes to the effects of hybrid work on different work roles (e.g., leaders, employees) there is a paucity of evidence regarding potential differential experiences by role, as most of the research has investigated overall worker effects. Contemporary research identifies several key influences on workplace well-being including workload levels (Warr, & Inceoglu, 2012), autonomy (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), and experienced isolation (Hughes et al., 2004) amongst others. Post-Covid research has begun to map the experience of some of these key antecedents of well-being in the new emerging work models (e.g., remote, hybrid working) including benefits for perceived autonomy (Gibson et al., 2023), workload control (Gratton, 2021) although there are concerns regarding experienced isolation (Sewell & Taskin, 2015). However, what remains unclear is whether the employee experience of hybrid working differs from that of their managers/leaders. While evidence exists to suggest that some of the core functions of manager-leaders become more challenging and exacting in hybrid work contexts (Barber et al., 2023), research has thus far neglected to directly understand the impact of new hybrid working models on manager/leader experience of their roles and how these matches or differs from that of their followers.

In this research we seek to understand the attitudes and experiences of both leaders and their followers as they adopt a new hybrid working model. Specifically, we assess both leaders and followers experience of key antecedents of workplace well-being in both remote working and office-based working.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

Data was collected, upon consent, from an educational institution in Ireland using a 4-wave longitudinal design (collection in 2 time points to date). The survey was distributed to all employees within the institution through a survey monkey link. T1 (N, employees=558; leaders=107) and T2 (N, employees=356; leaders=76) survey used the same four measurement scales but differed in context. In survey 1 participants were asked of their work experience when working remotely, whereas in survey 2 participants were asked of their work experience when working in the office.

### 2.2. Measures

All responses on the focal measures were recorded on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Job Autonomy was measured using Morgeson and Humphrey (2006), 9 item job autonomy scale ($\alpha$=90). Isolation was measured using Hughes et al. (2004), 3 item workload scale. ($\alpha$=72). Workload was measured using Rodell and Judge (2009), 4 item workload scale ($\alpha$ =.94). Wellbeing was measured using Goldberg, Waite, and Williams (1988) 12 item General Health Questionnaire ($\alpha$ =.83).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Mean, standard deviations and correlations of survey 1 & 2 leader vs employees

Mean, standard deviations and correlations for the employee Survey 1 (remote work) is presented in Table 1. As depicted, employee wellbeing was positively related to above average workload and low isolation with p values <.01. No significant relationship was found between employee wellbeing and job autonomy. Mean, standard deviations and correlations for the leader Survey 1 (remote work) is presented in Table 2. As depicted, leader wellbeing was positively related to above average workload and low isolation with p values <.01. No significant relationship was found between leader wellbeing and job autonomy.

Table 1. Survey 1, Employee, Working Remotely.

| | Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Workload | 5.02 | 1.38 | | | |
| 2. | Autonomy | 5.69 | 1.01 | .11** | | |
| 3. | Isolation | 2.49 | 1.56 | .18** | -.02 | |
| 4. | Wellbeing | 4.05 | .48 | .37** | -.06 | .36** |

Note: N = 558, ** $p$ < .01, * $p$ < .05.

Table 2. Survey 1, Leader, Working Remotely.

| | Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Workload | 6.08 | .87 | | | |
| 2. | Autonomy | 5.91 | .73 | .16 | | |
| 3. | Isolation | 2.86 | 1.56 | .18** | -.02 | |
| 4. | Wellbeing | 4.39 | .47 | .37** | -.06 | .36** |

Note: N = 107, ** $p$ < .01, * $p$ < .05

Mean, standard deviations and correlations for the employee Survey 2 (working in the office) is presented in Table 3. As depicted, leader wellbeing was positively related to above average workload and low isolation with p values <.01. No significant relationship was found between employee wellbeing and job autonomy. Mean, standard deviations and correlations for the leader Survey 2 (working in the office) is presented in Table 4. As depicted, leader wellbeing was positively related to high workload, low isolation and high autonomy with p values <.01.

Table 3. Survey 3, Employee, Working in the office.

| | Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. | Workload | 5.50 | 1.23 | | | |
| 6. | Autonomy | 5.69 | 1.08 | .16** | | |
| 7. | Isolation | 3.01 | 1.72 | .12** | -.11** | |
| 8. | Wellbeing | 4.22 | .60 | .37** | .06 | .28** |

Note: N = 356, ** $p$ < .01, * $p$ < .05.

Table 4. Survey 2, Leader, Working in the office.

| | Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. | Workload | 6.40 | .91 | | | |
| 6. | Autonomy | 5.98 | 1.09 | .30** | | |
| 7. | Isolation | 2.57 | 1.63 | .29** | .02 | |
| 8. | Wellbeing | 4.70 | .79 | .55** | -44** | .46** |

Note: N = 76, ** $p$ < .01, * $p$ < .05

### 3.2. Comparing means between remote working and in office working, leader versus employees

T-tests to determine if there is a significant difference between leader and employee means on the four constructs (wellbeing, workload, autonomy & isolation) in the two time-posts was run using SPSS. Table 5, shows findings with majority of construct comparisons showing a significance of p<.01 or p< .05, expect for isolation in Survey 1, which showed no significance.

*Table 5. Leader vs Follower Survey 1 & 2, t-test.*

| | Home Working (Survey 1) | | t | df | Sig | Office Working (Survey 2) | | T-value | df | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Leader M | Employee M | | | | Leader M | Employee M | | | |
| Well-Being | 4.4 | 4.1 | -6.723 | 668 | .000** | 4.7 | 4.2 | -5.919 | 431 | .000** |
| Work-load | 6.1 | 5.0 | -8.711 | 773 | .000** | 6.4 | 5.5 | -6.152 | 490 | .000** |
| Au-ton-omy | 5.9 | 5.7 | -2.393 | 710 | .017* | 5.9 | 5.7 | -2.204 | 468 | .028* |
| Isola-tion | 2.9 | 2.5 | -.396 | 679 | 0.692 | 2.6 | 3.0 | 2.030 | 452 | .043* |

L=Leader, E=Employee, Survey 1= N, (E=558; L=107), Survey2 N, E=356; L=76= ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

## 4. Discussion

The results of the present study show that high workload does not impact wellbeing, as previously suggested in the literature, even for leaders that show a mean score of M=6.4. Both leader and followers perceive as having a slightly heavier workload when working in the office, which could suggest that when working in the office employees interact more around work related problems. In contrast to the belief that working from home could result in higher employee isolation the results of this study show that employees feel higher isolation when working from the office, this could be due to the educational setting that this study was conducted. However, in agreement with the literature low levels of isolation are positively related to employee wellbeing. Job autonomy, considered in the literature as a predictor of employee wellbeing did not show a significant relationship with employee wellbeing, apart from leaders when working in the office. This result could suggest that leaders are more able to delegate work when in the office managing their own work in a more autonomous manner that could then be attributed to their higher wellbeing.

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