

Revitalizing Hong Kong's Business Landscape: A Deep Dive into Employee Engagement in the Era of Remote Work

^[1]Macy Wong, ^[2]June Ching Yan Fung

^[1] College of Professional and Continuing Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University ^[2] College of Professional and Continuing Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
^[1]macy.wong@cpce-polyu.edu.hk, ^[2]june.fung@cpce-polyu.edu.hk

Abstract— Remote work has increased substantially, especially since the recent global health crisis has forced many organisations in Hong Kong to adopt remote working policies to maintain competitiveness and attract and retain talent. However, such arrangements have brought to light various human resource challenges, particularly in keeping workforce performance at par. This research focuses on exploring the relationship between remote work arrangements and employee performance in Hong Kong.

This study, using Social Exchange Theory and Job Demand-Resources, to investigate whether the motivational benefits seen with remote work in Western contexts also apply in Hong Kong, a region where work-from-home (WFH) is relatively new. Through interviews with 10 full-time employees who have had experience with remote work, the research analyses changes in work engagement and performance due to WFH arrangements. The findings reveal that while WFH can enhance work-life balance and potentially improve retention rates, the effectiveness of remote work varies depending on job roles and personal circumstances.

Index Terms—employee engagement, in-role performance, social exchange theory, work-from-home arrangements

I. INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented global health crisis has precipitated a paradigm shift, compelling numerous organisations in Hong Kong to implement remote working arrangements for their workforce post-pandemic revitalisation to sustain competitive advantage. Work-from-home (WFH), also known as remote work or flexible/agile work arrangement, allows employees to complete job duties at a location other than the office [1]. WFH can be implemented in a variety of ways, such as fully working from home, intermittently working from home a number of days per week, and shifting duty rosters with colleagues [1]. Despite the various types of WFH arrangements, this research focuses on pure WFH arrangement as it is the practice that is widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study sheds light on the unique context of Hong Kong, where remote work is a relatively new concept, but it will likely become a norm rather than an exception in many professional jobs.

Even when the immediate threat of the pandemic has waned, the WFH trend has not reversed but evolved into a more hybrid model, that is, a split of employees' time between home and office. Many organisations have recognised the benefits of remote work. According to Guyot and Sawhill [2], WFH can reduce emissions from decreased commuting, better work-life balance, and lower office costs. Baert and others [3] highlight that WFH can reduce the risk of burnout and increase efficiency, while Martin and MacDonnell [4] mention WFH can enhance productivity, employee commitment and retention, and performance. It is interesting to note that these benefits foster a supportive environment for employees to thrive but also foster a more sustainable environmental footprint.

Indeed, this swift transition towards WFH is not without its challenges in human resource management, particularly in maintaining workforce performance. From a human resources perspective, the primary concerns centre on sustaining engagement, productivity, and connectivity among employees operating within a remote work infrastructure. The absence of face-to-face interactions may make it difficult for employees to demonstrate their commitment and competencies, leading to the weakening of relationships with colleagues and negatively affecting career development [3]. Additionally, Mahler [5] claimed that the WFH model exacerbates the “telework divide,” where some young workers, the least educated minorities, and working mothers, may not have the option to work from home, leading to perceived inequality and dissatisfaction. WFH arrangements also raise significant concerns on issues related to cybersecurity, data protection, and the physical safety of employees [5], as well as “telework exhaustion”, where employees may struggle with information overload, insufficient support, and social interaction [6]. This research endeavours to contextualise our recent work within this emergent framework by rigorously examining the nexus between remote work arrangements and employee in-role

performance. It aims to contribute to the discourse on organisational resilience and the rejuvenation of business practices in response to transformative events, with a particular focus on the efficacy of work-from-home (WFH) policies as a catalyst for maintaining and enhancing employee productivity in the face of unprecedented challenges. Thus, the research question is whether employees in Hong Kong are motivated by WFH arrangements, leading to improved job performance similar to Western cultures.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This investigation draws theoretical underpinnings from the social exchange theory. However, the prevailing body of research is predominantly centred on Western contexts, where remote work is a relatively established practice. Conversely, in Hong Kong, the concept of WFH constitutes a novel experience for the workforce. This disparity presents an academic void: it remains to be explored whether the motivational impetus and subsequent job performance improvements induced by remote work arrangements, as observed in Western cultures, are congruent within the Hong Kong context. The present study seeks to bridge this gap, examining whether the incentives associated with work-from-home arrangements can similarly enhance job performance among employees in Hong Kong. This research also investigates whether the work engagement of employees could be affected by work-from-home arrangements. Additionally, we consider how job performance is affected in view of the changes in employee engagement. It builds a foundation for human resources specialists to design proper remote work arrangements.

The current paper uses social exchange theory, SET, [7] as a general framework to explain the dynamics of work-from-home arrangements, work engagement, and job performance. This theory posits the interdependent relationship between parties beget a norm of reciprocity [8]. In a workplace context, employees who receive favourable treatment are obligated to provide favourable treatment in return, and the reverse would also be true [9]. When organisations offer WFH arrangements, many employees view it as a supportive and trusting gesture, resulting in higher work engagement [10]. Engaged employees are more productive and show higher job performance [11]. In relation to the reciprocity norm, if employees benefit from WFH, they feel obligated to return with positive behaviours, including increased engagement and performance, as employees may want to exert extra effort to demonstrate the trust placed in them, leading to better outcomes. Indeed, previous studies [12, 13] supported the application of the social exchange theory and the reciprocity norm to organisations.

Theory-wise, this research also grounds itself in the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) [14]. The model is an influential occupational stress model examining job demands and job resources that impact workers' well-being, performance, and other outcomes [15]. Job demands refer to job features that require effort from employees, whereas job resources encompass the motivation and support that employees receive. When using this JD-R model, WFH can be regarded as job demands because employees need to self-manage their time and workload, have a greater dependence on technology, and find it more difficult to maintain a clear boundary between work and personal life [16]. In terms of job resources, workers can design their own work schedule and environment, save time commuting to the workplace, reduce daily stress, and utilise supportive technology for communication with supervisors and teammates. According to the JD-R model, when job resources are adequate to meet job demands, leading to higher employee engagement [17]. When employees are more engaged, achieved through an optimal balance of job demands and resources, it will improve job performance [18]. Given this study's exploratory nature, blending SET and JD-R theories to examine WFH, work engagement, and performance generality is appropriate and scarce in the Asian context.

A. WFH and Work Engagement

The post-pandemic has evidently shown that organisations and individuals are attempting to adjust to the new world of work. Organisations have shifted certain sets of jobs to a WFH format, leading managers to consider WFH work engagement [19]. According to Schaufeli and Bakker [20], work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state with vigour, dedication, and absorption as its main features. Vigour means working with high levels of energy and mental resilience, while dedication refers to one's involvement in work with a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge [21]. Another job-related outcome is absorption, which is characterised by being fully concentrated in one's work [21]. Recent research continues to explore these dimensions, considering the role of work engagement in employee productivity, well-being, and organisational outcomes [22].

The concept of work engagement is a multi-dimensional construct, focusing on the relationships employees have with their work activities [23]. Within the academic literature, work engagement is a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance [23]. On the contrary, disengaged employees become disconnected from their jobs, leading to an increase in employee turnover and lower efficiency, and ultimately, detrimental to the overall organisational success [24]. In the context of WFH, it seems scarce to have Asian studies determining the engagement level of white-collar employees working from home.

B. WFH and Employee Performance

With the advent of new technologies, WFH is a viable alternative to traditional office-based employment. Research by Sellar and Peiris [25] explored how WFH differs from onsite work and identified eight factors influencing this flexible

work mode, including reduced time for communication with co-workers and supervisor's support and trust. These factors underscore the shifts in the nature of interactions among employees, peers, and supervisors under the WFH model. Thus, the type and level of job resources for employees, ranging from organisational to interpersonal and from job-specific to task-specific, have also evolved, leading to a reshaping of work tasks. Indeed, this new work mode requires reevaluating how job support is structured and delivered in remote work settings.

The past literature on WFH has had mixed responses on its impact on employee performance. Some researchers [26, 27] found that employees who WFH are less likely to resign and more productive, while others [28] believed that the flexibility given by WFH may lead to social and professional seclusion, impeding knowledge sharing and effective mentoring. Interestingly, research on WFH arrangements has largely treated technology as a hindrance rather than an asset [29]. Still, research on the outcomes of WFH arrangements remains unclear, inconclusive, and paradoxical [29]. A potential explanation is that the outcomes may vary based on the proportion of WFH implemented, whether WFH is mandatory or voluntary, and other factors like personal motivation and personal experience with remote work.

C. Work Engagement and Employee Performance

Many studies in organisational psychology have highlighted the positive correlation between work engagement and employee performance [30, 31]. Research has also demonstrated that work engagement is a robust predictor of job performance [32]. This relationship is attributed to the positive emotions experienced by engaged employees, leading to enhanced capacity for innovation, learning and growth, motivation, and improved performance [33]. Consequently, it is anticipated that employees who exhibit higher levels of work engagement are likely to demonstrate superior in-role performance when working from home.

Harter, Schmidt & Hayes [30] conducted a meta-analysis demonstrating a strong and consistent link between work engagement and performance across different organisations. The studies further concluded that engaged employees tend to exhibit high energy levels, work commitment, and a greater willingness to invest effort in their work, leading to higher employee performance [30]. Interestingly, engagement affects not only individual performance but team dynamics and team performance [34]. Engaged employees are believed to contribute positively to team interactions, foster a collaborative environment, and drive collective success [34]. When linking back to the JD-R model, employees with greater access to job resources (e.g. supervisor support, feedback, autonomy) are more engaged and perform better [35].

All in all, these bodies of literature on the relationships between WFH, work engagement, and employee performance in the context of white-collar employment are critically important to understand in today's work environment, particularly as remote work becomes the new work norm due to technological advances and shift in working culture prompted by post-pandemic.

III. METHODOLOGY

The effects of remote working practices on employees continue to be debated in the academic literature. Hence, adopting an inductive approach for this study was deemed appropriate. This approach leverages data collection to explore phenomena by identifying themes and patterns that emerge from the research [36]. A qualitative, exploratory, cross-sectional research design was utilised, collecting data through semi-structured interviews [37]. Notably, conducting this study within the Hong Kong context is particularly valuable, as findings from this region are relatively scarce, providing unique insights into the dynamics of remote working practices in this locale.

A. Participants and Data Selection

For this study, participants were carefully selected to provide in-depth insights into the effects associated with WFH arrangements. The analysis was based on ten semi-structured interviews with full-time employees working in Hong Kong in occupations within an office or other administrative setting. Each participant had engaged in remote work for at least one month, ensuring they had adequate exposure and experience with WFH arrangements to provide well-informed perspectives.

The participants represent a specific workforce segment, white-collar workers, who typically engage in office-based, administrative, managerial, or professional tasks [38]. This focus was intentional, as the nature of white-collar jobs is more suitable for remote work compared to blue-collar jobs. Furthermore, these white-collar employees with firsthand experience of remote work can provide current insights into the evolving nature of workplace dynamics. This is particularly crucial in Hong Kong's unique context, where studies on remote work dynamics are relatively rare.

A convenience sampling method was utilised to recruit participants for this study. Participants were initially recruited through the researcher's own professional networks and subsequently through a snowball sampling technique, whereby participants recommended potential colleagues. All interested participants were briefed on the study's objectives, their involvement, and the anticipated time commitment and assured that participation would be both voluntary and confidential. The participant group comprised ten white-collar workers: six males and four females, aged between twenty-five and forty years. Of these, five held middle management positions, while the others were in early career stages. They were predominantly worked in the educational, banking, and administration sectors (Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Occupational Sector
Leon	Male	30-40	Educational sector
Jasper	Male	40-50	Administration sector
Julian	Male	40-50	Banking sector
Dexter	Male	20-30	Administration sector
Eliot	Male	20-30	Administration sector
Max	Male	20-30	Administration sector
Aria	Female	40-50	Banking sector
Nora	Female	40-50	Banking sector
Mia	Female	40-50	Educational sector
Eliza	Female	30-40	Administration sector

B. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data collection method was semi-structured interviews, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and perceptions. This method is particularly appropriate for uncovering rich qualitative data. An interview guide was developed based on the study's objectives and research questions. The guide covered broad themes, including WFH experience, perceived benefits and challenges of WFH arrangements, job autonomy, supervisor and co-workers' support, performance feedback, job resources, learning and development, work engagement and in-role performance.

Each interview lasted thirty to forty-five minutes, and interviewees expressed enthusiasm about the topic and provided extensive details, sharing their experiences. The discussion encompassed both positive and negative aspects during the interviews, initiated by preliminary warm-up questions and further explored through subsequent probing. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and the data were then analysed using MAXQDA software. This qualitative data analysis tool facilitated the accurate coding of the interview transcripts, as well as identifying and categorising themes systematically in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. A dynamic, iterative process was utilised, intertwining data collection with data analysis. This approach facilitated the integration of emerging issues from one interview into subsequent ones. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the findings are not presented as representative of WFH arrangements across various types of organisations or sectors. This study indeed aims to enhance the understanding of the effects and contextual dynamics associated with remote working arrangements.

IV. FINDINGS

The participants in our study, who were previously accustomed to working in office settings, were mandated to transition to WFH due to social distancing measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to technological advances and post-pandemic, these participants continue to WFH for at least one day per week. Hence, their experiences provide invaluable insights into the dynamics of WFH arrangements, work engagement, and in-role performance. These insights are crucial for understanding the long-term impacts of remote work arrangements and for exploring strategies to enhance productivity and well-being. The findings are structured into three overarching themes: WFH, work engagement and in-role performance, highlighting the direct and mediated effects of remote working practices and the positive and negative contributing factors.

Adaptation and Experience of Work-From-Home Arrangements

Based on the findings, participants have shared their insights into the adaptation process to WFH arrangements across various organisations. The transition, while initially challenging for some, has been met with the adoption of new technologies and adjustment of working styles. Those participants accustomed to computer equipment with technical proficiency integrated more smoothly. Despite initial discomfort due to reliance on company systems and the need for physical paperwork, many reported a significant shift from in-person client meetings to phone and virtual appointments, highlighted by the following quotes:

- First, it can take time to adjust because even though you don't have to go back to the office, you still need to get ready early for work-from-home; for example, if you start to work at 9 a.m., you need to get ready around 8 a.m. When the working hours have ended, the staff may still continue to work because of the convenience of working from home, so we will lose our official working hours.
- At first, adjusting was difficult, but I gradually got used to it.
- It took about two months for me to get used to the WFH arrangement.
- I was ok adapting to the WFH arrangement. I think mostly because I began to purchase more and more work equipment at home gradually, and also, actually, most of the paperwork can be done at home. And we realised teaching

can be done at home, too, under WFH.

When asked on a scale of adaptation, employees rated their WFH experience between 7-8 out of 10, signifying a high level of adjustment. Indeed, the adaptation process to WFH arrangements has been met with a mixture of acceptance and tolerance, leading to a gradual integration of home-based work into the business operational framework. In general, employees have demonstrated resilience and adaptability, with the majority successfully transitioning to the new work norm.

- It is about the arrangement. Under what circumstances should we work from home? What are our job duties... We can take some devices back to our home afterwards so that some security policies are added.
- The company has instructed employees about off-hours when working from home. For example, the employee should be online on Teams so that colleagues can contact each other when they have to.

Analysing employee experiences with WFH arrangements over the past three years has provided valuable insights into the changing work dynamics. These employees engaged in WFH intermittently for durations ranging from two months to two years. To facilitate this transition, organisations implemented guidelines to ensure employees were available during standard work hours, with the presence of communication platforms such as Teams, leading to improved WFH experiences for many employees. In fact, essential to the WFH policies and guidelines were the provisions for necessary technology and the capability for remote monitoring of work progress.

Benefits and Challenges of WFH Arrangements

The transition to WFH has brought several notable benefits, primarily centred around the management of time and resources. One of the most frequently cited benefits is the significant reduction in time spent commuting, with some employees saving anywhere from 20 minutes to two hours daily. The flexible schedule allowed employees to allocate time to rest or personal activities. Also, apart from the financial savings from reduced travel expenses, the flexibility has enabled employees to enhance their work-life balance as they have more time exercising, pursuing hobbies, and spending quality time with family.

From a work performance perspective, participants' opinions on WFH vary. For those without major home distractions, employees found WFH led to better concentration and productivity. Some even commented that they can work in a manner that best suits their personal and professional needs.

- Yes... because there's less time spent travelling, and the lunch hour is more flexible. Also, there's more private time and fewer work meetings. Working from home using Teams makes the meetings more condensed and precise.
- I experienced better work-life balance because I could spare the commuting time to do my own stuff.
- This is neutral for me because we have more time together, there may be some conflict and distractions, especially from my children, and some disciplinary action will occur. Therefore, I stay neutral with it.

Despite the benefits, the review of employee feedback has highlighted several key challenges associated with WFH arrangements. Among these, communication barriers stand out, where face-to-face communication proves more efficient than online methods. Moreover, some employees faced poor network signals and restricted access to necessary software that hampered their workflow. Another major challenge is the blurring of boundaries between work and personal time, with many employees mentioning the need to remain available and responsive beyond standard office hours. Some also reported work-life integration challenges like increased household obligations, distractions and interruptions from household noises or personal errands.

- In fact, no matter how advanced the current technology is, it can only replace 80% of the effect. Even if you have a lot of technical support, such as Zoom or Teams meetings, with microphones and cameras turned on, except if you still cannot avoid poor signal reception or network freezes, these technical problems will not be mentioned for now. The most important thing is that you lack a lot of eye contact in face-to-face communication and the auxiliary language of body movements, so it is difficult to predict whether the other party agrees with your point of view. But facing the computer, it is always difficult for you to feel the atmosphere and the other party's emotions.
- I agree with the blurred work-life boundaries when WFH because working from home makes me feel like I need to be available 24 hours a day. It lacks the ritual of leaving the office at the end of the day compared to working in the office. In the office, the boundaries are clearer. In the past, I might not be able to carry out some tasks after work due to a lack of office equipment at home. Besides, working from home can also affect future work patterns. For example, under typhoon signal number 8, you may not have to work in the past, but you can work from home now. Whenever and wherever you can manage work, you need to work. As a result, there is even a lack of personal time off from work from home, and the line between work and life has blurred.

Given the mixed outcomes associated with WFH arrangements, it is imperative for organisations to implement viable strategies to address the challenges while amplifying the benefits.

Key Facets of WFH Arrangements

The following section focuses on five key facets that are explored to understand and optimise remote work arrangements. These include a) job autonomy, which examines the degree of control and flexibility employees have over their tasks and work schedules; b) job resources refers to the adequacy of tools and equipment provided to support employees during

WFH; c) learning and development considers the opportunities for growth and skill enhancement in a WFH setting; d) supervisor and co-worker support links to the quality of support and communication between leaders and team members; and e) performance feedback refers to the feedback that is given and received in remote contexts.

A. Job Autonomy

In terms of job autonomy, insights mentioned it was heavily influenced by individual roles and personal preferences. Employees generally maintained a consistent level of autonomy in both WFH and office environments. In physical presence in the office or WFH, employees reported a comparable sense of autonomy in managing tasks and making decisions. In fact, WFH is sometimes offset by the expectations for immediate responses, affecting perceived autonomy.

- I think my job type is already very strong in terms of autonomy...so even when we WFH, the level of autonomy has been maintained.
- Yes, there's flexibility in my work schedule. But when WFH, my computer is on anytime and I'd respond to emails immediately, so it's actually more work to do. In the office, I would only work during working hours. That's why I feel like I work longer hours when I'm at home.

Evidently, the perceptions of autonomy largely remained stable across different work settings, centering on meeting deadlines rather than the methods of task completion. Although employees value work flexibility in work hours that WFH provides, this flexibility might lead to longer working hours as the lines between work and personal life blur. While some employees felt that the lack of direct supervision and increased flexibility enhanced autonomy, others noted that tasks requiring collaboration or physical documents are more effectively handled in the office.

B. Job Resources

There is a clear consensus that organisations must equip their employees with the necessary resources and tools to work effectively from home. Employees have reported that the organisation has provided essential hardware, such as laptops and video cameras, while some peripherals, like photocopiers, are not standard issues for WFH due to occasional in-office work. Interestingly, several employees have transitioned from desktops to laptops, noting the portability and convenience. Also, some employees mentioned they preferred to use their own equipment, citing better performance or familiarity. In terms of software support, organisations have provided remote desktop applications and communication tools to employees in order to maintain productivity. Thus, both hardware and software have been instrumental in maintaining operational continuity. For specialised tasks such as teaching, additional resources like tablets and software with limited licenses have been provided due to cost considerations. As employees work from home, organisations ensure secure access to networks via VPN and other security systems to protect sensitive information.

- It's [the provision of supporting resources] better than nothing because the assistance provided by the company was really limited, and if you require client information, you have to ask colleagues from other departments, which is different from the usual process.
- The provision of hardware equipment is helpful and can effectively facilitate our communication online during WFH.
- It was more convenient [to use laptops]. The laptops are more portable, which makes it easier to attend meetings.

C. Learning and Development

Evidence concerning the transition to remote work has not significantly diminished access to training and growth opportunities. Employees have reported that the company's provision of online learning resources remained consistent, as organisations already had a robust online assistance system in place. Some organisations have changed the format of training sessions and transitioned from physical to online platforms such as Zoom, with the frequency and duration of workshops largely unaffected. Indeed, the convenience of online training has been highlighted as it eliminates the need to travel and allows for easier note-taking and scheduling. However, despite the convenience, some expressed concerns about the overall learning experience and effectiveness of online training sessions compared to in-person sessions, particularly in terms of networking and dynamic interaction.

- We have fixed training on the job, so it doesn't affect much, but the form is changed from physical to online Zoom and Webex during WFH. I think there is no difference in terms of frequency.
- [the learning and development opportunities at work under the WFH arrangement were] the same as usual.
- There were more opportunities because of the reliance on online meetings, but the effectiveness of the training is debatable. Although there will be communication between the training organisers and colleagues, I think the effectiveness will be limited. The effectiveness of the training depends on the content. If the event's nature is informational, it is possible to conduct it online. If the training is aimed at being interactive, online is not the most viable option.

D. Supervisor and Co-Worker Support

The analysis considered the level of support provided to employees by supervisors and co-workers during the transition to WFH arrangements. Many employees reported no significant difference in support levels compared to traditional office work, but supervisors and co-workers have used remote communication methods such as instant messaging, phone calls, and emails to provide the necessary support. While the medium of support has changed, consistency and quality have remained largely stable. However, a few employees have noted that certain aspects of support were less tangible when

working remotely. For instance, informal emotional support and the immediacy of technical assistance found in an office setting can be challenging to replicate in a remote setting. Some employees have also observed that the support from co-workers may seem less direct, but the overall flexibility and allowances for task completion have increased.

- More time is needed to communicate with colleagues. For example, we have fewer meetings, but we still need to maintain the working atmosphere and relationships with colleagues. I also likely have to spend more time supervising closely and working along with them.
- I think there is enough support from supervisors for some decision-making matters.
- Changes in the support by supervisors and subordinates will be more apparent in person.

E. Performance Feedback

The primary channels for performance feedback include emails and in-person meetings. Face-to-face feedback is favoured for its clarity and ability to address issues promptly. However, during WFH arrangements, feedback has largely shifted to digital formats like instant messaging and phone calls. Some employees noted that feedback sessions tended to be lengthier in a remote setting due to reduced regular communication. In terms of following the standard practices, such as annual performance evaluations and the delivery of feedback via email, remain consistent regardless of the work environment.

- When WFH, all feedback relies on instant messaging or phone calls for important stuff.
- The duration for feedback-giving meetings will become longer during WFH. Because communication has become less, some work matters have to be explained more clearly, resulting in longer time and more information to share.
- I think feedback is much better during f2f because you can anticipate and assess the performance in real-time, but if it is online, there is a barrier of the screen between the students and us, and we don't know how they are receiving it. So, it's difficult to teach. It is not just you speaking and speaking; you have to look at their faces to interact with them.

Work Engagement

Evidence concerning work engagement when comparing remote work to traditional office settings showed that some employees experienced increased engagement when WFH. This increase is attributed to the comfortable and relaxed ambience of employees' home environment. Employees working at home tend to have a higher concentration on tasks due to a reduction in immediate distractions, such as frequent phone calls and a shift in communication trends, opting for emails or scheduled calls. However, some cited greater engagement within an office context due to the structured environment, designated workstations, and the immediate availability of resources.

- I'm more engaged when WFH and usually more focused on my work.
- Because I feel more relaxed at home. Even though the office is equipped with computers, it doesn't feel as relaxing as being at home. When I work at home, I can relax and focus better on my work. Also, there are fewer phone calls now. People tend to email or wait until you're available before calling, which allows me to focus more on my work.

This study examines work engagement in WFH arrangements by focusing on six aspects: energy at work, job involvement, motivation to work, productivity at work, creativity at work, and work mode – WFH/office/hybrid. Analysing these aspects helps us better understand how remote working environments influence employee engagement and satisfaction.

A. Energy Level at Work

The findings revealed that some employees observed minimal differences in their energy levels between work environments, irrespective of location. Some noted a slight increase in energy while working from home. This was particularly true when tasks were straightforward and deadlines less pressing. However, other employees mentioned that the social dynamics of working with colleagues and the structured office atmosphere have heightened energy levels. Interestingly, energy levels were reported to fluctuate over time for some employees working from home. The novelty of WFH may wear off, give way to a decrease in sustained energy, and ultimately affect long-term motivation.

- If the task is simple and the schedule is not tight, working from home will improve one's working energy.
- When working from home, there are situations in the household that can interfere with my work, and there will always be more temptations, making it more difficult to concentrate. In the office, I can be more focused on my work and provide more close supervision, too. [Hence perceived higher energy level at work when in the office].
- Frankly speaking, my energy to work and work motivation was very high in the early days of working from home. I would even start working at 7 am and have a meeting around 8 am, so my schedule could be very tight. However, in the later stages, I found that I could not sustain myself, and my motivation level plummeted.

B. Job Involvement

The findings indicated a general consensus among staff that there was no significant change in job involvement when transitioning to WFH arrangements. Employees felt that their roles and responsibilities remained consistent, and they were able to maintain their usual level of participation in work tasks. A few employees felt that their job involvement had increased when WFH, as they could focus on their work and become more efficient.

- I think there's no difference in my job involvement either.
- I think working from home will allow you to concentrate more, and so you will be willing to participate in more work

tasks.

C. Motivation at Work

Several employees reported higher motivation in the office due to the dynamic and interactive atmosphere created by the presence of colleagues. The structured setting seemed to facilitate engagement and sustain their work momentum. For others, the comfort and personalisation of the home setting contributed positively to their work motivation.

- I am more motivated to work at the office because I am more engaged in my work in the atmosphere of my colleagues.
- The motivation when working from home will be higher.
- It's easier to handle office work by working with colleagues and asking questions face-to-face when you have a problem. However, when I was working from home, I had to hold meetings and spend a lot of time on roll calls. Therefore, the motivation seems to be lower.

D. Productivity at Work

According to the findings, employee productivity may vary between WFH and office environments. It indicated that productivity was influenced by multiple factors and varied across individuals and their roles within the organisation. Some employees felt they were more productive in the office; this collective atmosphere can enhance individual concentration and productivity. There were employees who commented no discernible differences in their productivity levels when comparing WFH to office work, managing a consistent output level regardless of location.

- Work from office will be a bit higher.
- No difference in my productivity when working from home or office.
- I think overall, productivity is being maintained. Although there is less equipment at home, travel time is reduced. So, I think overall, my productivity is still the same.

E. Creativity at Work

The findings indicated that the change in environment brought about by WFH did not affect creative output, and individual experiences varied. Others reported a boost in creativity when WFH, attributing this to a quieter, more solitary environment that may foster deeper focus and idea generation. Conversely, more direct communication and the opportunity to collaborate spontaneously with colleagues spurred creativity in the office setting.

- There is no big difference. The working environment has not affected my creativity.
- I think working from home will be a bit better since the environment is quieter and alone.
- My creativity would be better when I work in an office, as I can communicate with others in the office.

F. Work Mode – Office/WFH/Hybrid

Regarding work location, whether it be in-office, remote, or a hybrid model, the insights revealed that preferences were influenced by the nature of tasks, personal work style, and perceived benefits of each setting. For routine and individual tasks, WFH was favourable, while tasks requiring collaboration or those with tight deadlines were more efficiently tackled within the office setting. For those in decision-making roles, location flexibility was viable, and performance remained consistent. A common sentiment among employees was the appreciation for a hybrid model. They recognised the work-life balance benefits of WFH while valuing the concentration and facilities provided by an office environment.

- I would prefer a mix of physical and online work. There is a difference between the two. The biggest advantage of working from home is the work-life balance. Working in an office is good for administrative work because the working environment makes me more concentrated and has better facilities.
- Both are okay, and each has its own advantages. Generally, if some tasks require cooperation with colleagues or if an event pack is on a tighter schedule, the office will be more efficient. But it would be better to work from home if there were just some simpler and regular tasks.

In-Role Performance

When considering in-role performance, it focuses on how well employees fulfil their job responsibilities and expectations within remote settings. Participants in the study have provided valuable insights into the impact of WFH arrangements on in-role performance. Although work environments influenced work habits and efficiency, the consensus indicated that they did not dictate the success of task completion. In fact, business outcomes have been largely attributed to the broader social and economic environments rather than the work arrangement itself. Notably, employees with a higher degree of autonomy reported that their performance remained unchanged regardless of location, underscoring individual adaptability. Indeed, the effectiveness of WFH appeared to vary depending on the job nature and the extent of face-to-face interaction required.

- Business results are not directly related to the form of work but to the general social environment.
- I think there is really no difference in my situation in terms of which working arrangement allows me to work more efficiently to achieve business objectives. As mentioned earlier, I have a relatively high degree of autonomy about my task orientation, so it depends a lot on my arrangement and the cooperation of my team. Therefore, my performance does not depend much on whether I work from home.
- On the whole, working from home is better and more relaxed in terms of the psychological well-being of employees. Also, the demand for work completion is usually lower. However, from the perspective of the organisation, the degree of work completion will be jeopardised.

Work Engagement and In-Role Performance

The relationship between work engagement and in-role performance is pivotal, with both factors significantly influencing organisational productivity and employee satisfaction. Engaged employees tend to have a direct and positive impact on their in-role performance, but factors affecting this relationship will include emotional backing and recognition from the employer. Although some employees have reported reduced work efficiency and experienced more complex work processes due to remote working conditions, they still fulfilled their task obligations. Hence, variations in work engagement levels did not translate to a decline in final work output.

When asked participants explicitly, they claimed improved in-role performance while working from home due to increased energy, motivation, and creativity that enhanced their engagement with work tasks. Many also pointed out that external factors like social and economic impacts and market conditions significantly impact performance more than the work location. The findings indicated that work engagement levels may fluctuate with the shift to remote work, it was definitely not the sole determinant of performance outcomes.

- The changes in my work engagement level did make me perform better when WFH [Higher energy level, motivation, creativity experienced at home].
- The changes in work engagement level are not that big. I think there is also not a big difference in working time and the effort we put in.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Work-From-Home Arrangements

Although a substantial body of evidence indicated numerous benefits associated with WFH arrangements, there were still mixed outcomes, so it is imperative for organisations to implement useful strategies to address the challenges while amplifying the benefits. Indeed, organisations must tackle various challenges like communication barriers, technological limitations, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and social isolation that surfaces with remote work. In addressing the communication barriers and technological limitations, organisations should invest in better technology and provide training for effective online communication. Moreover, employees should be compensated for upgrading their home office setup or being provided with the necessary equipment and software. In relation to blurred boundaries and social isolation, organisations can establish clear WFH policies to define clear work hours and expectations regarding availability. To counteract social isolation, organisations should encourage frequent team meetings to maintain team cohesion and mitigate feelings of disconnection.

The transition to WFH arrangements has evident a notable integration of remote work into existing operational frameworks in many organisations. Employees working from home have demonstrated resilience and adaptability. This adaptation process required a critical need for organisational support to facilitate a smooth transition while maintaining job autonomy across both traditional and remote settings. In general, autonomy in the remote work context remains positive, contingent upon effective task completion.

Interestingly, the method of support and feedback from supervisors and peers has shifted towards greater reliance on digital tools, and employees were provided with sufficient support and feedback. Organisations continue to invest in and recognise the effectiveness of digital communication tools while acknowledging that some employees prefer in-person interactions and feedback. Indeed, the shift to remote working is one way to navigate the future of work as organisations and their employees are becoming more adaptable and resilient, and fully leverage the benefits of remote work arrangements.

Work Engagement

In future workplace configurations, work engagement will emphasise tailoring work arrangements to individual preferences and job specifications to enhance employee productivity, satisfaction, well-being, and performance. Mixed outcomes were found in terms of variability in energy levels and focus among employees based on their work environment, with some preferring traditional office settings and some preferring to work from home to avoid distractions.

There is no universal solution for employee motivation, as it is influenced by various factors inherent to each work environment. Thus, motivation should be fostered by organisational policies that consider individual roles and personal preferences. For instance, creativity is identified as highly personal, and effective creative processes should be either remotely or on-site. Data analysis also confirmed that productivity levels can be sustained or even enhanced under WFH conditions, depending on the job nature and employee adaptability. This finding indeed challenged the notion that traditional office environments are usually more productive. Rather, embracing flexibility in the work modes is essential for creating an engaging and productive work environment based on job functions and individual needs. These findings provide a good foundation for future strategies in managing work engagement.

In-role Performance

As discussed, the transition to remote work has resulted in varied employee engagement levels and performance impacts spanning neutral to positive and negative outcomes. These findings underscore the need for organisations to adopt a refined

approach to managing remote work. Effective management strategies should accommodate diverse employee needs as well as uphold high-performance standards across different work settings.

Although WFH arrangements may change employees' approaches to their roles, this does not undermine their capacity to complete tasks and meet business objectives. Performance in a WFH context is a complex interplay of role-specific requirements, individual adaptability, and the unique advantages and challenges of each work setting. It is imperative for organisations to focus on creating supportive frameworks that facilitate adaptation to remote work while overcoming potential drawbacks. These supports include ensuring clear communication of expectations, providing adequate resources, and leveraging technology to bridge any gaps that might hinder performance. Organisations should implement flexible yet structured policies in order to recognise the individuality of employee needs and align these needs with organisational goals. This balance is pivotal for maintaining productivity and engagement in a remote work setting, ultimately contributing to organisations' resilience and success.

In anticipation of future workplace trends, it is believed that WFH arrangements will become the new work norm to a certain extent. These modalities will foster many organisational benefits, including enhanced employee engagement and improved in-role performance. Undoubtedly, the impacts of remote working are multifaceted. It is also noteworthy that WFH can improve work-life balance for many employees. The control over one's schedule to fit work into one's life rather than structuring one's life around work can lead to increased job satisfaction and overall well-being.

The research unveiled that employees in Hong Kong generally appreciate the work-from-home (WFH) setup for enhancing their work-life balance, with many experiencing an uptick in job satisfaction that potentially leads to better retention rates. While a portion of the workforce reported increased productivity and engagement due to the autonomy offered by WFH, others experienced mixed effects on their in-role performance, suggesting that WFH benefits may vary based on individual circumstances and job roles. Looking forward, these findings suggest that organisations might adopt more flexible work policies, recognising the value employees place on the balance between personal and professional life. However, tailoring WFH arrangements to fit different roles, along with investing in better communication tools and training, could be key to overcoming the challenges identified. As businesses strive to adapt to new work paradigms, these insights could shape more resilient and responsive workplace strategies that both support employee preferences and maintain operational effectiveness.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to JD-R theory by understanding employee engagement and performance due to the balance between job demands and resources. In the context of WFH, job demands include factors like blurred work-life boundaries and increased isolation, while resources encompass a personalised work environment and flexible work hours. In order to implement effective WFH arrangements, organisations should always understand how these adjusted demands and resources impact engagement and performance. For instance, organisations can invest in ergonomic furniture and equipment to help employees prevent physical strain while working from home. This fosters a sense of being valued and boosts employee engagement. Engaged employees are more likely to invest discretionary effort into their work, leading to higher performance levels.

Furthermore, this study contributes to Self-Determination Theory as WFH inherently affects the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation. Remote work can impact feelings of relatedness and competence due to possible communication lapses and reduced face-to-face interactions. However, the autonomy given to manage one's work schedule and environment can enhance motivation and engagement, potentially leading to better in-role performance. Based on this theoretical lens, organisations should develop strategies that support these psychological needs in remote settings.

Managerial and Business Implications

As organisations continue to navigate the complexities of WFH arrangements, managers should better understand the unique constraints and advantages of WFH setups, such as providing adequate technological tools that facilitate remote collaboration and adjusting workloads. In terms of relatedness in SDT, it is appropriate for managers to create frequent virtual team interactions that foster a sense of belonging and support mental health [39].

It is widely recognised that organisations ought to cultivate a culture that supports flexible work arrangements like strategic flexibility in work schedules, communication norms, and performance metrics. Traditional performance management systems may not be directly applicable to remote work contexts, and thus, performance metrics should focus on outcomes and deliverables rather than processes. Researchers [40] advise organisations to provide regular feedback and virtual check-ins to maintain alignment and motivation.

Limitations

This study examines the relationships between WFH arrangements, work engagement, and in-role performance and contributes to bridging the research gap, especially in the Asian context. However, it is important to acknowledge that the dynamics of these relationships are continually evolving. Additionally, this study is not without its limitations that warrant careful consideration. First, there are many factors that affect the effectiveness of WFH arrangements, such as home office setup, family dynamics and personal health [41]. These factors can significantly affect both work engagement and

performance but are often not thoroughly controlled, and future research should consider these variations in their analyses. Second, many studies on WFH are cross-sectional and may not reflect long-term effects. Indeed, longitudinal research is necessary to understand how WFH affects the long-term impact of employee engagement and performance. Third, the role of technology in mediating or moderating the relationships between WFH arrangements, work engagement, and in-role performance is complex and unclear, so there is a need for more comprehensive exploration.

Future studies should try to address these limitations in the WFH context to provide a better understanding of the impact of WFH on employee engagement and in-role performance. Future research directions can include but are not limited to, conducting comparative analyses of WFH's impact across different cultural contexts, the long-term effects of sustained WFH on employee engagement and organisational commitment, and examining the role of technology in mediating the relationship between remote work and employee performance.

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