

Re-thinking the workplace

The future of Homeworking

Dan Lucy



ies

institute for
employment
studies

A blue graphic element consisting of a curved line that starts from the bottom left, curves upwards and to the right, and ends in a right-pointing arrowhead.

Agenda

- Context: Homeworking prior to Covid-19
- What has happened to homeworking since Covid-19?
- What does the future for homeworking look like post Covid-19?
- What are some of the potential implications for HR/OD?
- Q & A

Context: Homeworking prior to Covid-19

- Homeworking had seen a gradual rise, but was still a relatively minor share of employment
- Homeworking tended to be preserve of relatively powerful groups e.g highly skilled, professional occupations
- Evidence suggested that homeworking beneficial where agreed between employer/employee (Kelliher and Andersen, 2010)
- Research has demonstrated that homeworking can raise productivity, increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover levels where:
 - Right equipment is provided
 - Workers adequately trained/experienced (Bloom et al, 2015)
- Benefits of homeworking in terms of employee wellbeing tended to decline over time (Golden and Veiga, 2005)

What has happened to homeworking since Covid-19?

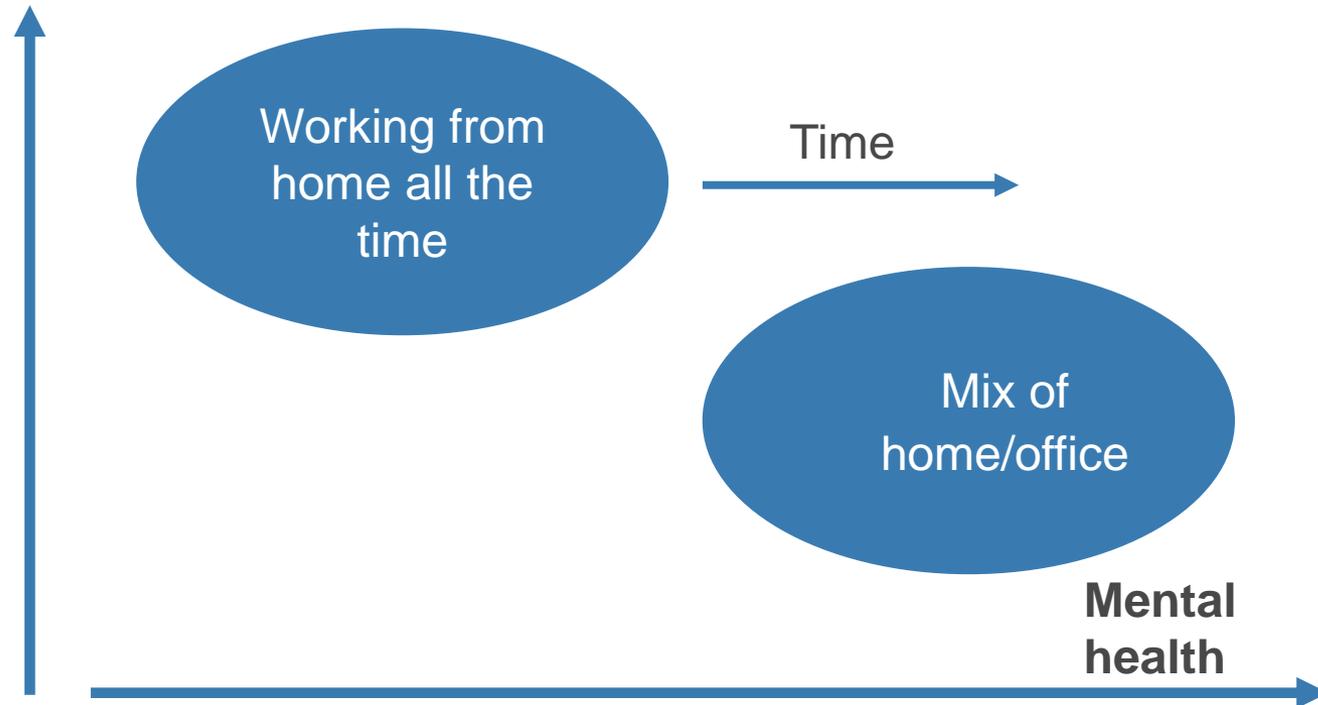
- Steep and dramatic rise, including lots of new homeworkers (esp. the young), in first lockdown
- Very few homeworkers returned to office when restrictions were eased in Summer
- Homeworkers typically similar profile as prior to COVID-19, with some notable exceptions e.g. secretarial/administrative roles

Felstead, A and Reuschke, D (2020) 'Homeworking in the UK: before and during the 2020 lockdown', WISERD Report, Cardiff: Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research. Available for download from: <https://wiserd.ac.uk/publications/homeworking-ukand-during-2020-lockdown>

Impact of homeworking during Covid-19

Intensity of working from home associated with increased likelihood that employees would report a positive change in productivity

Productivity



D Lucy based on Felstead et al (2020)

Impact of homeworking during Covid-19: Productivity

- Increases due to:
 - Working longer hours
 - Doing more work per hour
- Decreases due to:
 - Less work to do (3 in 10)
 - Domestic commitments (one quarter)
 - Other reasons including social/psychological (less frequent interaction with colleagues; issues with motivation/commitment) (one fifth)

Felstead, A and Reuschke, D (2020) 'Homeworking in the UK: before and during the 2020 lockdown', WISERD Report, Cardiff: Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research. Available for download from: <https://wiserd.ac.uk/publications/homeworking-ukand-during-2020-lockdown>

Impact of homeworking during Covid-19: Health and Wellbeing

- IES research in 1st lockdown found:
 - Significant decline in musculoskeletal health
 - Majority report losing sleep due to worry and fatigue
 - One in two reporting working long/irregular hours and two-fifths high workloads
 - Decline in protective health behaviours
 - Mental health worse amongst: young; new to homeworking; those working longer than contracted hours; caring for elderly relatives; renting; and having less frequent contact with manager

Bevan S, Mason B, Bajorek Z (2020) 'Homeworker wellbeing survey: Interim Results April 2020' Institute for Employment Studies.

Impact of homeworking during Covid-19: Job quality

- People who worked at home all of the time:
 - Less likely to feel they are doing a useful job;
 - More likely to feel isolated;
 - More likely to report high volumes of work demand
 - More likely to report working in their 'free time'

Eurofound (2020), Living, working and COVID-19, COVID-19 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

What is the future of homeworking?

- Employee expectations have changed:
 - Nine out of ten want to continue working from home in some capacity post-restrictions
 - One in two want to work from home often or all of the time post-restrictions
 - One in two new homeworkers would like to continue working from home in some capacity when restrictions ease (Felstead et al, 2020)
 - Across Europe, three quarters of employees would like to work from home at least occasionally
 - Preference is for homeworking several times per week/very few want to exclusively homework (Eurofound, 2020)

What is the future of homeworking?

- Employer expectations are changing
 - Three quarters expect to keep increased homeworking after Covid-19
 - One in two plan to reduce office space (IOD, 2020)
- Employees who have experienced increased productivity at home more likely to want to work from home than those who have felt less productive (Felstead et al, 2020)

A word from the sceptics

- Mass shifts to homeworking have been tried and abandoned in the past for 2 reasons:
 - Work/business is a social phenomenon
 - Digital/virtual tools cannot replicate the benefits of face-to-face interaction

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201023-coronavirus-how-will-the-pandemic-change-the-way-we-work> accessed on 25th November 2020

Challenges for HR/OD of increased homeworking

- Org design/SWP
 - Balancing employer and employee needs for flexibility
 - In what circumstances to allow exclusive homeworking? And how to support this?
 - Avoiding perceptions of a two-tier workforce
- L & D/Health and wellbeing
 - Equipping employees/managers to manage wellbeing alongside productivity, including the increased risks of presenteeism when working remotely (in a recession)
- Talent management/careers
 - How will people be supported to develop, esp. the young new to the workplace?
- Leadership/management
 - Will there now be an even greater emphasis on the emotional and interpersonal capabilities as opposed to the technical in leadership/management?

References

- <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201023-coronavirus-how-will-the-pandemic-change-the-way-we-work> accessed on 25th November 2020
- Bevan S, Mason B, Bajorek Z (2020) 'Homeworker wellbeing survey: Interim Results April 2020' Institute for Employment Studies.
- Bloom, N, Liang, J and Roberts, J and Ying, Z J (2015), 'Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(1): 165-218.
- CIPD (2020a) 'Home working is set to more than double compared to pre-pandemic levels once crisis is over', CIPD Press Release, <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/homeworking-increases> (accessed 17 August 2020).
- Eurofound (2020), *Living, working and COVID-19, COVID-19 series*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.
- Felstead, A and Reuschke, D (2020) 'Homeworking in the UK: before and during the 2020 lockdown', WISERD Report, Cardiff: Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research. Available for download from: <https://wiserd.ac.uk/publications/homeworking-ukand-during-2020-lockdown>
- Golden, T D and Veiga, J F (2005) 'The impact of extent of telecommuting on job satisfaction: resolving inconsistent findings', *Journal of Management*, 31(2): 301-318.
- Kelliher, C and Anderson, D (2011) 'Doing more with less? Flexible working practices and the intensification of work', *Human Relations*, 63(1): 83-106.
- <https://www.iod.com/news/news/articles/Home-working-here-to-stay-new-IoD-figures-suggest> accessed on 25th November 2020

Thank you

Dan.lucy@employment-studies.co.uk

www.employment-studies.co.uk



@EmploymtStudies