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03 How do we continue after the Covid-19 pandemic? Work from home as the new normal and the future of work

¿Cómo continuar después de la pandemia? La nueva normalidad del trabajo desde casa y el futuro del trabajo.

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La Revista de Casos de Estudio en HR Analytics

Journal of HR Analytics Case Studies

La ***Revista de Casos de Estudio en HR Analytics*** nace con la misión de facilitar el intercambio de conocimiento especializado entre profesionales y académicos en el ámbito de la **analítica de Recursos Humanos**, con el objetivo de mejorar la **efectividad de las organizaciones.** La entidad responsable de esta revista es la **Asociación para el Desarrollo de la Ingeniería del Conocimiento** (ADIC), siendo esta publicación on-line editada por el **Instituto de Ingeniería del Conocimiento** (IIC) con una periodicidad de un número anual.

Objetivo

La revista tiene como **objetivo** principal ser un vehículo para la reflexión y la difusión de las **buenas prácticas, últimos avances ylíneas de investigación** en el ámbito de la analítica aplicada para la toma de decisiones sobre la gestión del capital humano en las organizaciones.

La revista tiene un **carácter científico** y una **vocación divulgativa**, por ello propone artículos fundamentalmente de **carácter aplicado**. Con ellos se pretende que los profesionales de las organizaciones accedan a un conocimiento relevante acerca de cómo otras organizaciones desarrollan HRA. Y, también, acercar a los académicos el conocimiento respecto de cómo se desarrolla HRA en la práctica.

Alcance

El **enfoque de la Revista**, que pretende ser **multidisciplinar**, da cabida (entre otros) a manuscritos que: reflejen **casos prácticos** de aplicación del HRA en las organizaciones; que analicen, comparen y relacionen la utilidad de diferentes **técnicas y/o herramientas** para el abordaje de diferentes objetivos analíticos; que planteen y valoren la efectividad de diferentes **metodologías de trabajo** para el desarrollo de proyectos HRA; que ayuden a entender el **mapa de ruta** por el que transitar desde los niveles básicos del HRA hasta los niveles de excelencia; y que en general ayuden a entender cómo **mejorar la efectividad organizacional** a partir de la analítica de datos referidos a la fuerza de trabajo.

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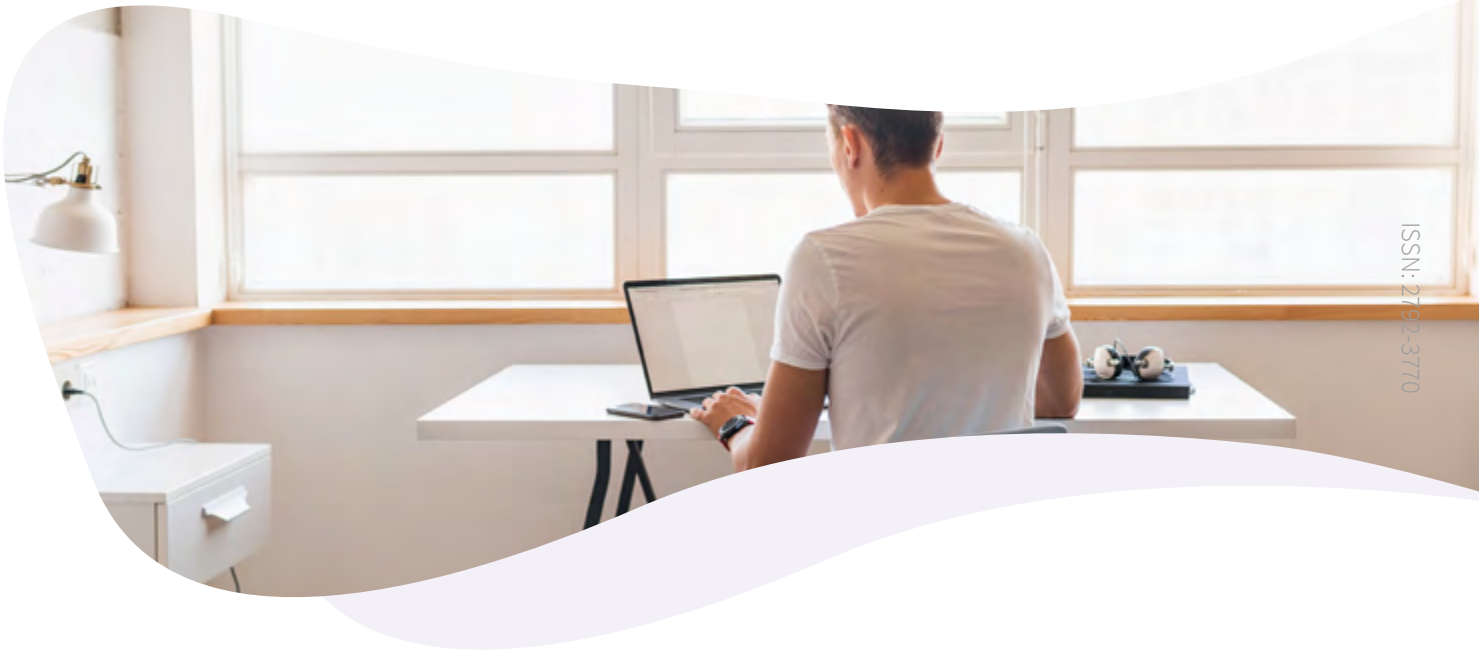

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¿Cómo continuar después de la pandemia? La nueva normalidad del trabajo desde casa y el futuro del trabajo.

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic is changing people's lives all over the globe. The social, political, and economic envi-ronments are shaken to their roots. In no small measure, the world of labor experienced an unexpected and forced shift towards remote work. Founded on the extensive experiment of externally induced remote work, this paper analyzes the impact of remote work on satisfaction and self-perceived productivity. It is shown that both, employees and employers benefit from the implementation of remote work. As work from home also bears risks, the traditional office space remains important. From an employee perspective, the optimal division between office and remote work consists of a balance of the two work arrangements. The analysis of individu-als' unique compilations of demographics and circumstances uncovers changing preferences when working from home. The paper places special emphasis on the additional impacting factor of national culture. De-pending on the specification of different cultural dimensions, individuals are prone to experience higher or lower levels of satisfaction and productivity when working remotely. Individualism, low uncertainty avoidance and low power distance are found to positively impact the popularity of remote work. As on average the future frequency of work from home is shown to be remarkably higher compared to pre pandemic times, employers are required to address this topic. By evaluating their employees' specifications, formal policies can be aligned to prevalent circumstances and the specific workforce in order to mitigate potential remote work disad-vantages.

Keywords:
Work from home, Satisfaction, Productivity, Cultural diversity, Cultural dimensions, Covid-19

Resumen

La pandemia del Covid-19 está cambiando la vida de las personas en todo el mundo. Los ambientes sociales, políticos y económicos han sido sacudidos hasta sus raíces. En gran medida, el mundo laboral ha experimen-tado un cambio inesperado y forzado hacia el trabajo en remoto. Basado en el extenso experimento del traba-jo remoto inducido externamente, este trabajo analiza el impacto del teletrabajo en la satisfacción y la produ-tividad autopercibida. Se muestra que tanto los empleados como los empleadores se benefician de la imple-mentación del teletrabajo. Como el trabajo desde casa también conlleva riesgos, el espacio de oficina tradi-cional sigue siendo importante. Desde la perspectiva de los empleados, la división óptima entre la oficina y el trabajo en remoto consiste en un equilibrio entre ambos. Nuestro análisis revela preferencias cambiantes en los trabajadores cuando se trabaja desde casa. El artículo pone especial énfasis en el impacto adicional que tienen los aspectos culturales. Dependiendo de las características culturales de los países, las personas son propensas a experimentar niveles más altos o más bajos de satisfacción y productividad cuando trabajan de forma remota. Las culturas caracterizadas por el individualismo, la baja evitación de la incertidumbre y la baja distancia del poder tienen un impacto positivo en la popularidad del trabajo remoto. Dado que, en promedio, se muestra que la frecuencia futura del trabajo desde el hogar será notablemente más alta en comparación con los tiempos anteriores a la pandemia, los empleadores deben abordar este tema. Al evaluar las carac-terísticas de sus empleados, las políticas formales pueden alinearse con las circunstancias predominantes y la fuerza laboral específica para mitigar las posibles desventajas del trabajo remoto. En resumen, en este manu-scrito, tratamos de explorar cómo vamos a continuar trabajando desde casa en el futuro, y si existe una cor-relación entre la satisfacción y la productividad del trabajo desde casa con la cultura nacional de los empleados. El análisis desarrollado para este artículo muestra una clara tendencia hacia una mayor frecuen-cia de trabajo remoto en comparación con los tiempos anteriores a Covid-19. Sin embargo, existe el deseo de dividir el tiempo de trabajo entre la modalidad on line y la presencial de modo que puedan desarrollarse modelos flexibles de trabajo híbrido.

Palabras clave:
Trabajo desde Casa, WFH, Satisfacción, Productividad, Diversidad Cultural, Dimensiones Culturales, Covid-19

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1. Introduction

As an alternative to the traditional office space, the option to permanently or partly work from home (WFH)[11] is a continuously increasing (Bloom et al., 2015; Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Moore, 2006; Potter, 2003) and currently widely adopted organizational work structure. While in the past some major companies, such as Yahoo and Hewlett-Packard in 2013 (Cain Miller & Rampell, 2013; Suddath, 2013; Yarow, 2013), or IMB in 2017 (Kinsey Goman, 2017), still intentionally decided against the WFH alternative, it has become more of a necessity in 2020.

In the current situation of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic the labor market is certainly characterized by a large takeover of the WFH structure (ILO, 2020).

Already prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, remote work was a key topic of academic research. In several studies, scholars prove WFH to be highly advantageous through examining and confirming its positive impact on productivity (Baker et al., 2007; Bloom, 2014), employee well-being (Bloom, 2014; Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Hill et al., 2003; Kelly et al., 2014; Moore, 2006), and job satisfaction (Andrade & Westover, 2019; Bloom et al., 2015; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Morganson et al., 2010) among others. There are, however, prevailing drawbacks (Baker et al., 2007; Puranam & Minervini, 2020) which also need to be assessed in order to fully understand the impact of remote work. Depending on the employees' demographics and circumstances, the intensity and direction of the WFH consequences change (Bloom, 2014; Moore, 2006). Thus, with knowledge of both the positive and the negative aspects of WFH as well as their trig-gers, a company can build up an optimal structure and support system for its specific workforce. This paper presents findings of an analysis made within a financial services company[22] regarding the employees' satis-faction and productivity when working from home. Results set the baseline for creating WFH policies intending to benefit from WFH advantages while keeping its disadvantages to a minimum level. Based on findings, the guiding research question 'How can we achieve suitable work arrangements that maximize productivity and satisfaction?' is aimed to be answered by comparative study of four different cultures.

Despite the governmental resolutions of many countries to ease the first lockdown restrictions at the begin-ning of summer 2020, corporate statements indicated a trend of continuing working from home in the future (e.g., Google, Twitter, Facebook, TCS) at a significantly higher percentage than before the pandemic (Fung, 2020; Prabhhjote, 2020; Rütti, 2020; Vega, 2020). Especially for these companies, it is highly relevant to have an appropriate WFH strategy in place to be prepared for the future of work.

1 WFH is often also referred to as remote working, teleworking, or telecommuting (see 2.1.1).

2 For confidentiality reasons the name of the company will not be named.

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2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Work from Home

2.1.1. Definition of Work from Home

WFH, as one form of flexible work arrangements (Pérez Pérez et al., 2003; Stavrou, 2005), technically describes employees completing work-related tasks from their home. However, for examining the optimization of future work arrangements, WFH is used as a synonym to telework, telecommuting, remote work, mobile telework, or virtual work[3].

Until today literature has not agreed on one unique definition of WFH (Nakrošienė et al., 2019; Sullivan, 2003). Hence, the classification of WFH is based on four mutual elements. The first element of locational independence is described by Pérez Pérez et al. (2003). They conceptualize remote work, beyond an office at home, as the option to work from anywhere at any time. Secondly, in addition to the spatial independence WFH can be adopted full- or part-time depending on underlying agreements (Madsen, 2003). The third element for categorizing WFH is also premised on the timing. Finally, the last and most relevant distinctive element is information and communication technology (ICT) which needs to be in place. ICT is the ultimate enabler of WFH (Baruch, 2001; Madsen, 2003; Nakrošienė et al., 2019; Nilles, 1997).

Summarized WFH is defined by work done anywhere other than at the traditional office location using ICT.

2.1.2. Consequences of Work from Home

2.1.2.1 Advantages of Work from Home

Previous studies have demonstrated a variety of positive impacts of WFH as significant. They show beneficial implications of WFH on the individual level, at the corporate level as well as on society.

From an employee perspective WFH increases their satisfaction (Bloom, 2014; Bloom et al., 2015; Morgan, 2004; Appelbaum & Kamal, 2000) by temporal flexibility (Morgan, 2004), autonomy (Hill et al., 2003; Morgan, 2004), eliminated commuting time (Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996; Morgan, 2004; Puranam & Minervini, 2020), reduced work-family conflicts (Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Hill et al., 2003; Madsen, 2003; Morgan, 2004) as well as stress levels (Mann et al., 2000; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Vesala & Tuomivaara, 2015), and improved work-life bal-ance (WLB) (Hill et al., 2003, 2010; Maruyama et al., 2009; Puranam & Minervini, 2020).

3 The definition of the different terms can partially differ (e.g., Nilles, 1997) but are regularly used interchangeably.

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From an employer perspective, the increase in organizational performance through WFH (Baker et al., 2007; Bloom et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2003; Morgan, 2004; Puranam & Minervini, 2020; Stavrou, 2005) is a persuasive argument for implementing a WFH strategy. Performance-enhancing elements are the employees' increased productivity (Bloom, 2014; Golden & Veiga, 2008; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Nakrošienė et al., 2019) and mo-tivation (Andrade & Westover, 2019; Hill et al., 2003; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), lowered absenteeism rates (Bloom, 2014; Stavrou, 2005), increased organizational commitment (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Kelliher & An-derson, 2010), and reduced attrition rates (Bloom, 2014; Bloom et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2003). Furthermore, the recruiting and retention of talents by accessing a worldwide talent pool (Morgan, 2004), diversity (Baker et al., 2007; Bloom, 2014; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Morgan, 2004) driving innovation, and employer branding are other competitive factors endorsing WFH from a corporate perspective.

2.1.2.2 Disadvantages of Work from Home

When considering WFH strategies, it is important to have a holistic understanding of their potential impacts. Academic literature demonstrates a variety of drawbacks which potentially occur when implementing office-alternative work strategies.

The increased freedom based on the flexibility to work anywhere and at any time regularly causes blurred boundaries between work and leisure time impeding a proficient WLB (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Huang, 2020; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Moore, 2006). Moreover, a disadvantage is working longer hours (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Gschwind & Vargas, 2019; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Mann et al., 2000; Moore, 2006) leading to overworking (Messenger, 2019; Moore, 2006) and family struggles (Crosbie & Moore, 2004), reduced operational quality (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003), or lower productivity (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Other major disadvantages are the lack of face-to-face interaction (Puranam & Minervini, 2020), loneliness (Bloom et al., 2015; Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Mann et al., 2000; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Wilson & Greenhill, 2004), and, in the worst case, mental sicknesses (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). Compared to on-site counterparts, WFH employees may not be equally considered for promotions (Bloom et al., 2015; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012).

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2.1.2.3 Prerequisites and Influencing Factors

When considering the implementation of a remote work strategy, the core requirement for its success lays in having an appropriate infrastructure in place (Harvard Business Review, 2020). The second prerequisite is ac-ceptance and trust (Baker et al., 2007; Dose & Klimoski, 1995; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Nakrošienė et al., 2019) which must be reached among employees and their managers as especially line managers disapproves of re-mote work arrangements (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Bloom, 2014; Kelly et al., 2014; Peters & Den Dulk, 2003; Pu-ranam & Minervini, 2020). The third prerequisite for remote work success consists of the right equipment and furniture as well as suitable personal circumstances:

An appropriate workspace at home has a positive influence (Nakrošienė et al., 2019), whereas the age (Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Hill et al., 2010; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012; Moore, 2006) and the number (Nakrošienė et al., 2019) of dependent children at home show a negative impact. The age of the employee itself is yet another impacting factor, while arguments take both directions (Nakrošienė et al., 2019 vs. Bloom, 2014; Lister & Harnish, 2019). Further positively impacting factors are both ends of the income scale (Bloom, 2014), prior WFH experience (Mann et al., 2000; Puranam & Minervini, 2020). Regarding the intensity of WFH, Golden & Veiga (2005) and Bloom (2014) present an inverted U-shaped curve promoting a moderate level as most effective.

2.2. Cultural Differences

Cultural knowledge is perceived as a contributor to organizational success, especially in the digital age (Huang, 2020). Hence, it is crucial to be aware of cultural differences. Academic literature suggests culture as an additional factor to have an impact on the WFH success (Ashforth et al., 2000; Bloom, 2014). When analyzing the impact of WFH on job satisfaction, Andrade & Westover (2019) discover significant influences depending on the culture people are living in. Moreover, national culture appears to have an impact on the WFH permission. Academic research has discovered its influence on the willingness of managers to allow their employees to work outside the office space (Peters & Den Dulk, 2003). To explore the impact of various cultural regions on WFH, Hofstede's (2001; 2010) cultural model builds the foundation.

2.2.1. Hofstede's Cultural Model

2.2.1.1 Overview

Until today, Hofstede's dimensions of national culture represent the most widely applied baseline for exploring cross-cultural occurrences in management research (Ashforth et al., 2000; Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018; Cum-mins, 2018). The cornerstone of Hofstede's cultural model is based on the construct of mental programming (Hofstede, 2001).

Hofstede (1980) defines culture as follows:

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> […] culture is the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another. Culture, in this sense, is a system of collectively held values. Culture is to a human collectivity what personality is to an individual. […] Culture could be defined as the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment. (p. 24)

There is, however, not one commonly agreed definition of culture (Jahoda, 2012). Already Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) listed over 160 attempts to define culture. Albeit the definitions' inconsistency (Jahoda, 2012), collectivity is the one element in common. Keeping the much more detailed paradigm in mind, culture, for the purpose of this analysis, is a social construct describing something shared by one subgroup that differentiates members thereof from others. Through people's behavior, culture becomes visible (Hofstede, 1980) and thereby allows for assessing cross-cultural differences. Hofstede's cultural assessment bases on six dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity (Hofstede, 1980), long-term vs. short-term orientation (Hofstede, 2001), and indulgence vs. restraint (Hofstede et al., 2010).

2.2.1.2 Cultural Dimensions

The first dimension, power distance (PD), describes the way of handling inequality prevalent in every society. It is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 61). Small PD countries show a preference for low dependency on superiors and intellectual exchange instead of just accepting already made decisions. In contrast, obedience with superior decisions and expectations of professionals to make top-down decisions show cultures which constitute large PD regions (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Closely linked to the degree of PD is collectivism vs. individualism (IDV). People living in more individualistic cultures tend to look after themselves or care about their close family. The stronger the family bond between individuals, the more collectivistic a culture is. Collectivism implies strong in-group thinking, where birth determines lifelong loyalty within the extended family. Having such a strong in-group spirit entails the neglection of the out-group, whereas individualistic cultures value similar treatment for everyone (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Not to be confused with IDV is the third dimension of masculinity vs. femininity (MAS). While IDV is based on social strings, the differentiation in the MAS dimension is made depending on ego vs. relationships and differentiated in terms of the distinction of social and emotional gender roles. Masculine cultures separate gender roles into men being considered as "assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 140). No such distinction is drawn in feminine cultures. There, both genders usually live by feminine ambitions (Hofstede et al., 2010).

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How cultures react to uncertainty can be measured with Hofstede's (1980) fourth cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance (UA). It is defined as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 191). Being uncertain about the future can be expressed by feeling stressed at work, the preferences for respecting rules, or for a long-term career. For reassurance, cultures with a high UA index try to reach more predictability through regulations. Cultures scoring lower in UA are more relaxed when being confronted with uncertain situations (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Different to the UA dimension, which as a more Western dimension, serves the purpose of differing the importance of truth, the fifth dimension of long-term vs. short-term orientation is a more Eastern dimension with virtue as its key element. According to Hofstede et al.'s (2010) definition, long-term oriented cultures place their focus on future rewards, which can be achieved through perseverance and thrift. At the other end of the continuum is short-term orientation, which highlights the past and present. The latter cultures base their behavior on tradition, not losing your "face", as well as on fulfilling social responsibilities (Hofstede et al., 2010).

For a complete measurement of national cultures, the sixth dimension of indulgence vs. restraint was added. Hofstede et al. (2010) define indulgence as "a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun" (p. 281). They refer to the opposite end of indulgence as restraint implying the need for social norms and prohibitions, not to enjoy gratification without any restrictions (Hofstede et al., 2010).

2.3. Outline of the Relevant Regions

In collaboration with peers, Hofstede developed scores for 76 cultures to rank them in each of the six dimensions. Figure 1 illustrates the scores for each of Hofstede et al.'s (2010) dimensions for the four relevant countries. These calculated scores shall not be interpreted in absolute terms but need to be taken as relative comparisons (Hofstede et al., 2010).

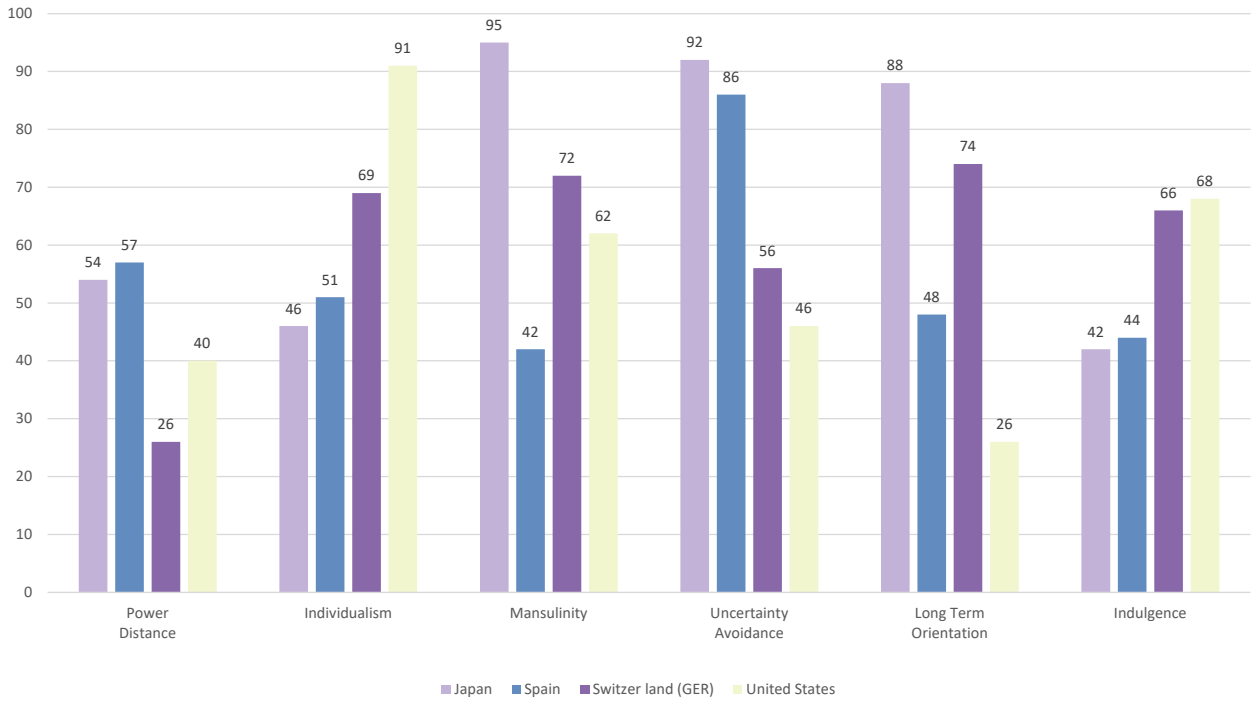

Figure 1: Comparison of Cultural Dimensions (illustration based on Hofstede et al. (2010))

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2.3.1. Switzerland

The most outstanding dimension for Switzerland compared to the other four regions is PD. There is a strong dissimilarity of PD across the country's internal language barrier (Hofstede et al., 2010). The German-speaking part of Switzerland, in accordance with its German-speaking neighboring countries, displays a low PD culture (26). With an IDV score of 69, the Swiss culture is rather individualistic. Ranked as number six of all countries in the dimension of MAS (72), Switzerland is one of the most masculine cultures in the world, characterized by their driving factors of competition and success (Hofstede et al., 2010). The score for UA (56) ranges slightly above the worldwide average. Still, compared to the other three cultures of the analysis, the Swiss culture scores low on UA. Finally, they show a rather rare pattern of long-term orientation (74) in combination with high indulgence (66) (Hofstede et al., 2010).

2.3.2. Spain

Even though the Spanish culture's score in the dimension of PD (57) is not outstandingly large, their score is the highest of all four regions. Accordingly, the Spanish culture is located at the opposite end of the scale compared to the Swiss culture. Their score in the dimension of IDV (51) is on a worldwide comparison in the middle of the continuum. There is, however, a weak tendency towards collectivism when comparing the four sampled regions. With a score of 42, the Spanish culture is rather feminine. Worth highlighting for the Spain is their nationals high score in the dimension of UA (86). They show quite a strong anxiety towards ambiguity. For long-term vs. short-term orientation (48) as well as for indulgence vs. restraint (44) Spain is located in the mid-field of all examined cultures.

2.3.3. United States of America

The USA is the most individualistic culture (91), not only among the four cultures being analyzed but even number one in the worldwide comparison. Their culture is moderately low regarding PD (40). Furthermore, the USA shows a very masculine culture (62). On average, Americans are not scared of uncertainty (46) compared to the other three cultures. Descriptive for their culture is their short-term orientation (26). Americans score high on indulgence. With a score of 68, they enjoy their life the most of all in this study-relevant cultures.

2.3.4. Japan

Remarkable for the Japanese culture is their rather low level of PD (54) compared to all other Asian countries. When setting their PD score in relation to the score of the three other analyzed cultures, their PD is still relatively large. On a worldwide comparison, the Japanese culture is in the mid-field for the dimension of IDV (46). With a distinct view on the four regions, their collectivistic culture becomes apparent. Opposite to the American and Swiss culture, Japan can be specified as a high-context culture (Hall, 1976) again indicating their collectivistic background. The Japanese culture is specific due to its characteristic scores in the MAS and UA dimension. Their culture is extremely masculine (95). In contrast to all other nationalities worldwide, Japan further scores particularly high regarding UA (92). Additionally, the Japanese culture is strongly long-term oriented (88) and tends towards the restraint side of the continuum (42).

2.4. Research Framework and Hypotheses

Considering previous trend analyses, growth in the adaption of remote work is undeniable. For optimizing future work arrangements, the goal is to align with work preferences. To integrate the employer's and employees' perspectives, employee satisfaction and productivity are chosen as indicators to find differences in partialities

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when working from home. By examining these two variables as well as their impacting factors, the analysis targets to improve the individuals' level of satisfaction and the corporation's performance. The aim is to develop supporting mechanisms for both parties to optimally benefit from the implementation of remote work and answer the question 'How can we achieve suitable work arrangements that maximize productivity and satisfaction?'.

One of the impacting factors is expected to be a person's national culture. To uncover the cultural impact on the advantageousness of employees working remotely, the two dependent variables – satisfaction and productivity – are contrasted between the four cultures. For the cultural comparison, three dimensions of Hofstede et al.'s (2010) cultural model are chosen – IDV, UA, and PD.

The first dimension of Hofstede's cultural model, which is assumed to have an impact on remote work, is IDV. Findings by Hill et al. (2010)436 provide support for the hypothesis that IDV influences the employees' satisfaction when working from home. Their results state a beneficial impact of WFH on WLB, whereas WLB is proposed to positively influence employee satisfaction. For collectivistic cultures, the correlation between WFH and WLB is, however, found to apply only to a minor degree. Because nationals from collectivistic cultures show loyalty to the in-group by being present for long hours (Hofstede et al., 2010), WFH does not suit their work ethics. Hill et al. (2010)436 propose that collectivistic cultures value WFH less due to the reduction of group ethics and face-to-face interaction, which are two characteristics highlighting the importance of the in-group dynamics in those cultures.

> H1a: Individualistic cultures show a higher level of employee satisfaction when working remotely than collectivistic cultures.

The in-group element is also shown to be influential in personnel selection and appraisals. Hofstede et al. (2010) show that individualistic cultures mainly recruit and reward based on performance. When outputs are the driving factor for compensation and development appraisals, productivity is key for an employee to prove target alignment. Collectivistic cultures, in turn, show compassion with the in-group through availability. By being present, employees in collectivistic cultures nurse their in-group relations, which is of high relevance for promotions. To remain visible, those employees need to invest time in relationship building. Accordingly, productivity in these cultures does not necessarily increase when working from home. Furthermore, as shown by Hofstede et al. (2010), the use of ICT differs depending on a country's cultural position on the continuum of the IDV dimension. Compared to collectivistic cultures, individualistic cultures show a higher frequency of using ICT (Hofstede et al., 2010). Evidence, therefore, can already be drawn from the development of these products. ICTs were initially established in individualistic cultures (Hofstede et al., 2010). More experience with ICT implies improved conditions for employees when working remotely, as these tools are considered prerequisites to optimally perform from home. Mutual work is especially facilitated in the virtual space. A higher usage further implicates ease of handling ICT, thus indicating productivity improvements. Finally, as collectivistic cultures communicate on a high-context level, their collaboration is additionally limited in the virtual space.

> H1b: Individualistic cultures are more productive when working remotely than collectivistic cultures.

The second dimension of interest is UA. Managers and employees of high UA cultures are supposed to be reticent about remote work, while lower UA cultures are expected strongly value the flexibility remote work offers. In 2003, Peters & Den Dulk proposed that high UA lowers the acceptance

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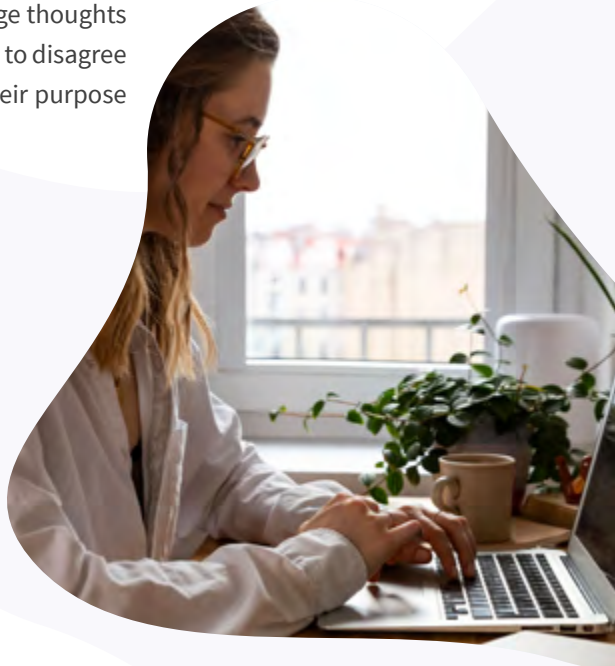
of managers to allow their employees to work from home. From an employee perspective, the security from structures and rules is what makes people in high UA cultures feel comfortable (Hofstede et al., 2010). As the implementation of WFH, a 'new' and more flexible way of working, would increase the degree of uncertainty, high UA cultures are proposed to be reluctant to take over remote work structures. The initial change is suggested to increase these employees' level of stress. Moreover, Hofstede et al. (2010) found UA to negatively correlate with health and happiness. Thus, not feeling comfortable when being exposed to uncertainty is suggested to decrease an employee's satisfaction.

H2a: Low UA cultures show a higher level of employee satisfaction when working remotely than high UA cultures.

One of the findings in Hofstede et al.'s (2010) examination shows an influence of UA on shopping behavior, indicating that people in high UA cultures tend to avoid buying recently introduced products. Translated to the work context, relevant products for WFH are the latest inventions of ICTs. A backlog in implementing the most recent ICTs means that work cannot be performed as efficiently as it could be if these tools were actively used.

H2b: Low UA cultures are more productive when working remotely than high UA cultures.

Finally, the dimension of PD is suggested to impact WFH. Due to interrelationships with other dimensions, PD was chosen to be dealt with last. One connection can be identified between PD and IDV. Apart from a few exceptions (e.g., France, Belgium), PD noticeably correlates negatively with IDV (Hofstede et al., 2010). Small PD cultures often live by the individualistic idea of treating every person similarly, while large PD cultures are usually more collectivistic, highly favoring in-group to out-group connections. This supposes PD to invert the hypotheses H1a regarding IDV. Moreover, a major element of large PD cultures is the subservience to organizationally higher ranked people (Hofstede et al., 2010). As low PD cultures teach to challenge thoughts and encourage discussions, employees from these cultures are more likely to disagree with their managers' decisions. They decide for themselves what suits their purpose



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best. Independent of managerial preferences, which are on average restrictive with permitting WFH, employees of low PD cultures will strive to maximize their aspirations. In the case of having the option to work remotely available, employees who choose to work from home are expected to increase their satisfaction. In contrast, larger PD cultures are suggested to struggle more with their decision to work remotely if others decide against it. Those deciding to work remotely against their manager's preference feel less satisfied working from home as negative repercussions can be expected.

> H3a: Low PD cultures show a higher level of employee satisfaction when working remotely than large PD cultures.

For the same reason as explained above, the connection between PD and IDV implies a reversal of hypothesis H1b. Additionally, remote work is suggested to reduce the distance between hierarchical layers. Employees in lower PD cultures thrive in lean hierarchical settings as this enables collaboration at eye level. Large PD cultures are not expected to be capable of working in this kind of corporate structure. The latter culture is more used to act upon decisions (Hofstede et al., 2010). Accordingly, productivity is suggested to increase in low PD cultures when employees work from home. Large PD cultures are suggested not to realize the benefits of a lean organizational structure induced by remote work.

> H3b: Low PD cultures are more productive when working remotely than large PD cultures.

3. Methodology

For gathering WFH data, a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative data analysis is chosen In favor of brevity this scientific paper only includes the quantitative analysis for this publication.[4] The quantitative analysis is based on the collection of primary survey data.

3.1. Population

Out of the 123 respondents, 119 were retained as those were nationals of the relevant countries. With a sample of 25 Swiss, 23 Spanish, 27 Americans, and 44 Japanese nationals, the minimal criterion set in Hofstede et al.'s (2008) value survey module of at least 20 participants per region is met.

3.2. Measures

In the first part of the online questionnaire, the work distribution between remote and office work was surveyed with regards to conditions prior to the pandemic and preferences for remote work in the future ('Not at all', '1-20%', '21-40%', '41-60%', '61-80%', 81-90%', 'Full-time'). The percentage format was used to avoid biased results in the case of part-time workers. The measurement of the preferred future remote work distribution was then based on two dependent variables: employee satisfaction and self-perceived

4 If interesting for the reader the author gladly provides the qualitative analysis.

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productivity[5]. The two variables were questioned directly. Each variable was asked by setting remote work in relation to working at the office.

In the second part, employees were asked to mention the advantages and disadvantages of WFH that they perceived as most relevant. Additionally, several independent variables were queried and correlated with the two dependent variables to find the strongest impacting factors explaining general tendencies towards or against remote work. The questionnaire further allowed to control for several demographic factors which, based on the literature review, are expected to impact an employee's preference to work remotely (see. 2.1.2.3). To measure the influence of the demographic factors, the last set of questions revealed the respondent's gender ('Man', 'Woman', 'Prefer not to say'), age (split into generational ranges), and number of children (including their ages). In addition to demographic factors, respondents answered a question about the time of their commute (in minutes) from home to work. Employees showed their level of responsibility towards other employees by answering the question 'Are you a People Manager?' ('Yes', 'No') and were asked about the availability of a dedicated workspace at their home. In the next step, variables irrelevant for the analysis got excluded.

Lastly, employees were differentiated by their cultural background. Three types of examinations were conducted within this field. The first part of the analysis takes Hofstede's cultural classification as given and contrasts answers regarding satisfaction and productivity by nationality, aiming to find differences between the national cultures. The second evaluation is referred to as the individual configuration of cultural dimensions (ICCD) analysis. Thereby, Hofstede et al.'s (2010) research is reviewed by solely analyzing the direct impact of the relevant cultural dimensions. At the center of the second examination are cultural questions based on Hofstede et al.'s (2008) research survey. The grouping was conducted according to the employees' answers to the cultural questions, which indicated their tendency in each of the three cultural dimensions. Each question was related to one specific cultural dimension. IDV was measured with the question "How important is it for you to have regular face-to-face interactions?", PD with "How important is it for you to be consulted by your manager when deciding about a remote work strategy?" and UA with "How important is it for you to have rules and structures set by the company?". Both poles were then correlated with satisfaction and productivity. In the third examination, the two open-ended questions surveying an individual's challenges and advantages when working from home were utilized. Answers were coded into different dummy variables depending on the variable being mentioned or not. The frequencies of the terms mentioned were split by the sample size of the respective nationality to find differences regarding the importance of impacting factors by nationality.

3.3. Procedure

The survey[6] was randomly distributed to employees of the four different locations. The questionnaire was split into three parts. Beginning with a set of closed-ended questions, respondents were then asked to answer two open-ended questions, followed by a number of employee-specific and demographic questions.

To uncover a suitable work strategy for the future regarding the implementation of remote work, preferences, satisfaction levels, and the employees' productivity are analyzed. Important to highlight again is the modest impact of the quantitative analysis. Results thereof are used to recognize future remote work tendencies. Hence, those findings need to be considered with caution. The focus on the qualitative data yields validity of future work indications.

For determining general and national tendencies, correlations and Kruskal-Wallis tests are executed using SPSS.

5 For the entire course of the analysis and the results, productivity corresponds to self-perceived productivity, as this is how it was measured.

6 Quantitative Questionnaire (on request)

4. Results

4.1. Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages and disadvantages mentioned by the respondents support the understanding of the reasons for and against remote work (an overview of the most mentioned advantages and disadvantages is displayed in figure 2). The most common advantage of remote work is the elimination of time spent commuting and the accompanying increase in their leisure time. The most frequently stated disadvantage when working from home is the issue of long working hours. Also, many employees indicate their lack of social and professional networking opportunities when not being on-site. A lot of respondents further miss regular face-to-face interactions amongst many other restrictions.

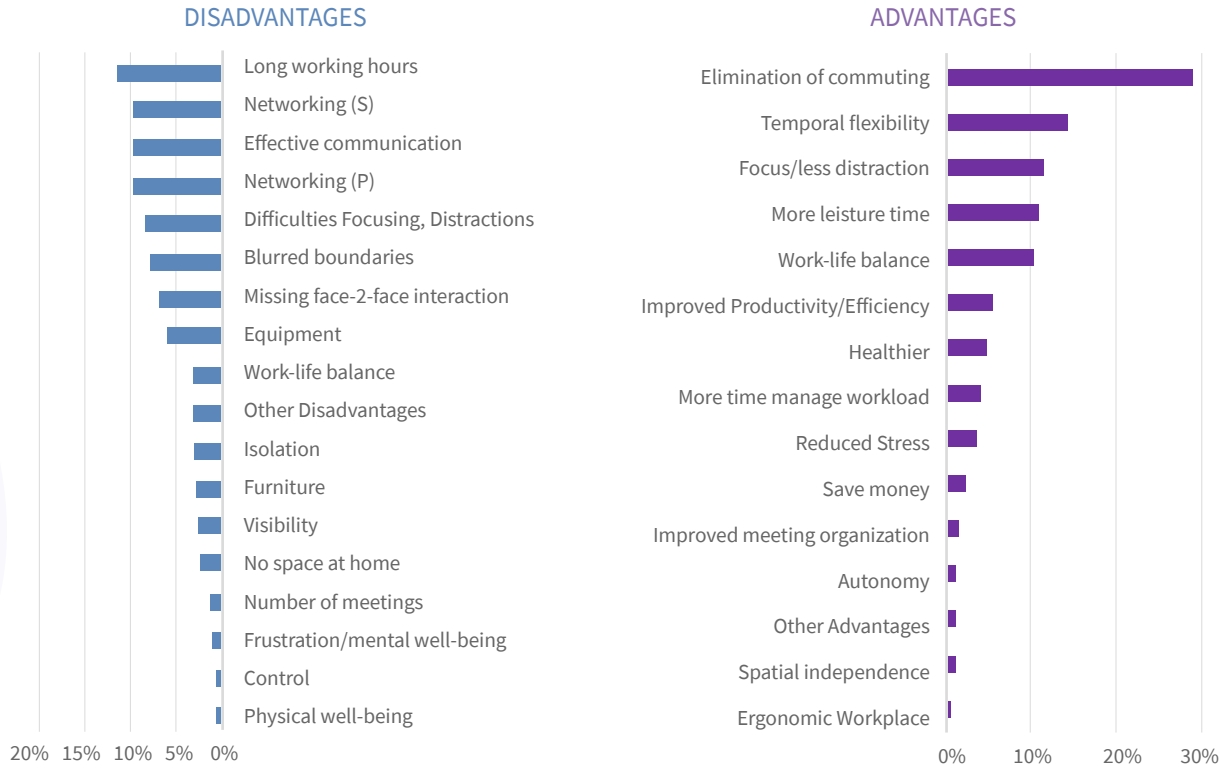

Figure 2: Advantages & Disadvantages of Remote Work

4.2. Preferences and Impacting Factors

The distribution of how often people were working remotely before Covid-19 hit shows that most employees (78%) did not work from home at all or only 1-20% per week. The part of the distribution demonstrating the percentage of people who would choose to work from home less than 20% in the future reduces to 7%. More than half of the sample (51%) would like to work remotely between 41 – 80% per week (a visual representation of the remote work distribution prior to Covid-19 and for the future is displayed in figure 3).

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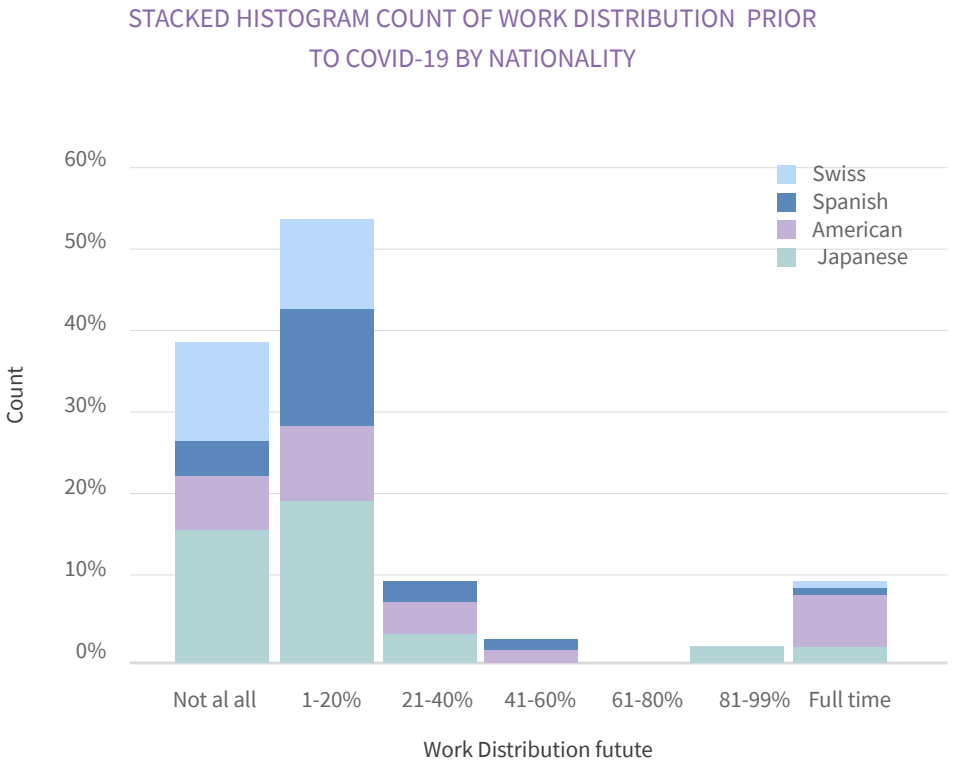

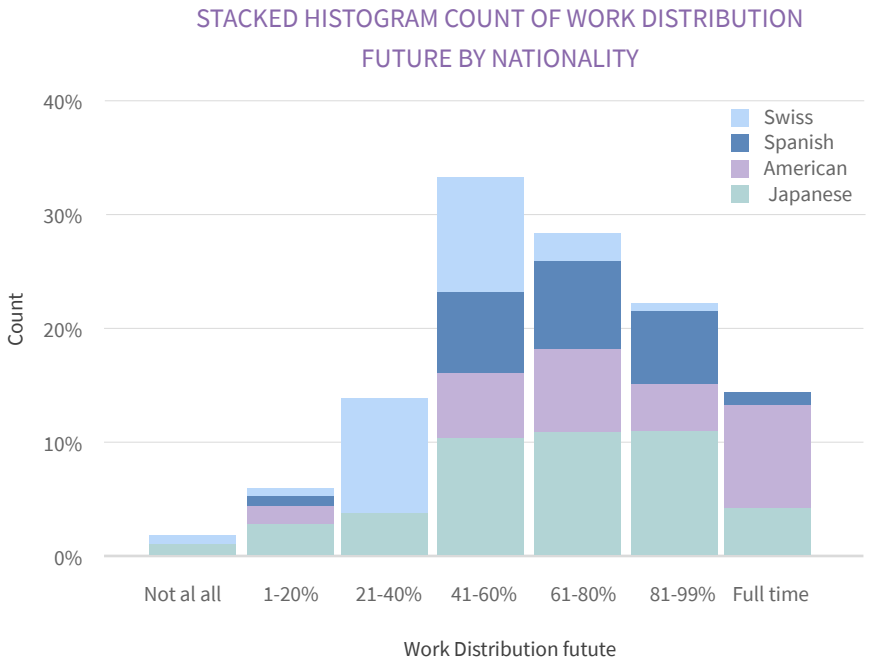

Figure 3: Remote Work Preferences Before and After Covid-19

The analysis on an individual basis shows that 85% of all respondents aspire to work from home to a higher degree compared to before the pandemic. Only 4% of all respondents wish to return to the office more days than prior to the pandemic.

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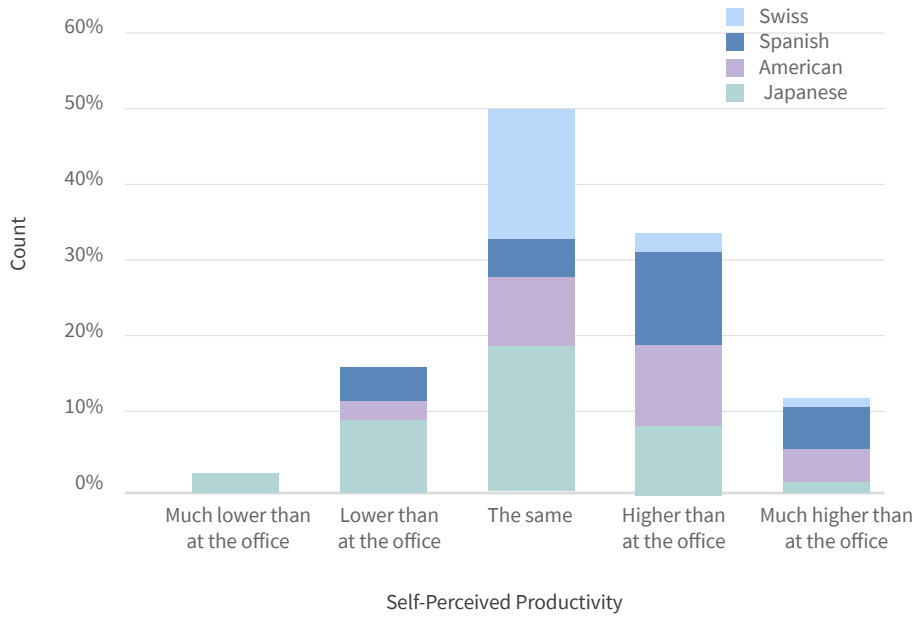
Interestingly, this second group of employees only consists of people who used to work more than 80% of their time remotely. Yet none of them want to return to the office full-time.

For a thorough understanding of the preferences to work from home in the future, the analysis is based on two dependent variables – satisfaction and productivity – which both strongly correlate with the future of work distribution ($rS = .448^{**}$, $p < .001$; and $rS = .549^{**}$, $p < .001$) respectively.

Overall, the levels of satisfaction and productivity vary from much less satisfied or productive to much more satisfied or productive when working from home compared to working at the office. Most employees do not feel a difference in either of the dependent variables when working from home or at the office. More specifically, 34% feel equally satisfied and 43% equally productive at both work locations. Remarkably, both variables show a higher percentage of people tending towards the remote work side of the scale. 45% of all employees feel (much) more satisfied compared to 21% who feel (much) less satisfied when working from home (Figure 4). With a positive mean of .38, employees feel, on average, slightly more satisfied when working from home (SD = 1.041). Regarding productivity, 40% are (much) more productive compared to 17% who feel (much) less productive working from home (Figure 4). The positive mean of productivity ($\mu = .32$) again shows a tendency towards higher productivity when working remotely with a standard deviation of .938.

STACKED HISTOGRAM COUNT OF SELF-PERCEIVED PRODUCTIVITY BY NATIONALITY



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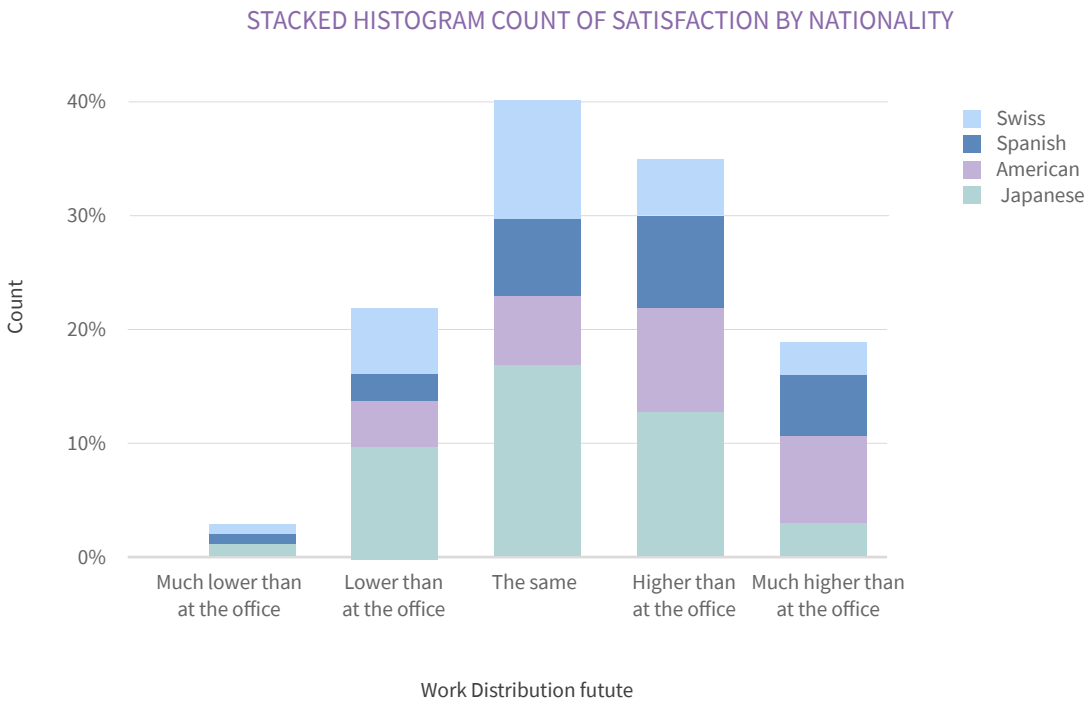

Figure 4: Distribution of Satisfaction & Productivity

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		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Satisfaction	,643**	,102	,104	,192*	,405**	,382**	,097	,102
2	Self-perceived Productivity		,199	-,008	,212*	,231*	,390**	,114	,184*
3	Gender			,197*	,133	-,097	,046	-,095	,150
4	Generation				,168	-,112	-,074	,337**	-,120
5	Cummuting Time					,070	,172	,145	-0,67
6	WLB						,265**	,139	,049
7	Visibility							,119	,037
8	Children (uner 8)								-,102
9	Dedicated Workspace								

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed);
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed);

Table 1: Correlations related with satisfaction and productivity

Variables correlating with satisfaction when working remotely are the commuting time (rS = .192*, p = .000), the employee's work-life balance (rS = .405**, p = .037), and the visibility in terms of an employee still feeling recognized when working remotely (rS = .382**, p = .000) (see Table 1). Even though there is no correlation when controlling for employees having children in general, having children age eight or younger (rS = .186*, p = .043) positively correlates with satisfaction (see Table 1).

The variable children under eight does not correlate with productivity. In contrast, all other satisfaction-impacting variables correlate with productivity (see Table 1). The employee's work-life balance when working from home (rS = .231*, p = .021) correlates, however, on a lower level. Commuting time (rS = .212*, p = .021) and visibility (rS = .390**,

p = .000) have a slightly stronger correlation with productivity than with satisfaction. The demographic variable gender (rS = .199*, p = .030) has additional impact on productivity. Moreover, a specifically dedicated space to work at home (rS = .184*, p = .045) positively impacts productivity (see Table 1). Finally, a strong correlation between satisfaction and productivity (rS = .643**, p = .000) was identified (see Table 1). The employee's age has no significant impact on either of the dependent variables (see Table 1).

4.3. Cultural Differences

Tests to analyze national peculiarities when working from home show significant differences between the four analyzed cultures for both dependent variables (figure 5 provides an overview of the levels of satisfaction and figure 6 of the levels of productivity per nationality). Confirmation of the availability of significant differences stems from the asymptotic significance level of the Kruskal-Wallis tests which is .033* (p < .05) for satisfaction and .000** (p < .05) for productivity.

For satisfaction, subsequent post hoc tests (Dunn-Bonferroni tests) show that only Japanese and Americans differ significantly (z = 2.412, p = .095), however, only on a 90%-confidence level. The effect strength r with .270 is, according to Cohen (1992), a weak effect. Still, it can be assumed that Americans are, on average, more satisfied when working from home compared to Japanese nationals.

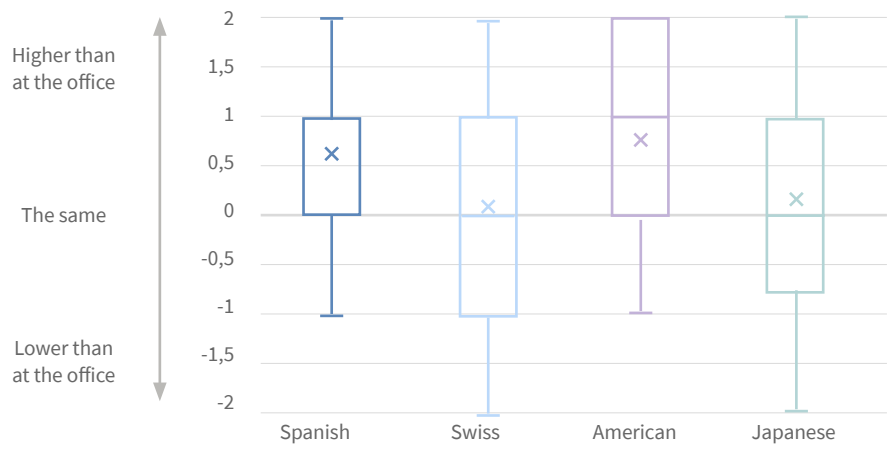

Figure 5: Cultural Comparison or Remote Work Satisfaction

For productivity, the subsequent post hoc tests (Dunn-Bonferroni tests) display more and stronger disparities between the different nationalities. There are significant differences between Japanese and Americans (z = 2.832*, p = .028) with a strong effect (r = .575), Japanese and Spanish (z = 4.629**, p = .000) again with a strong effect (r = .566), and Swiss and Spanish (z = -3.986**, p = .000) with a medium effect (r = .409). Consequently, Americans and Spanish feel significantly more productive when working from home compared to Japanese employees. Spanish employees feel significantly more productive working from home compared to Swiss employees.

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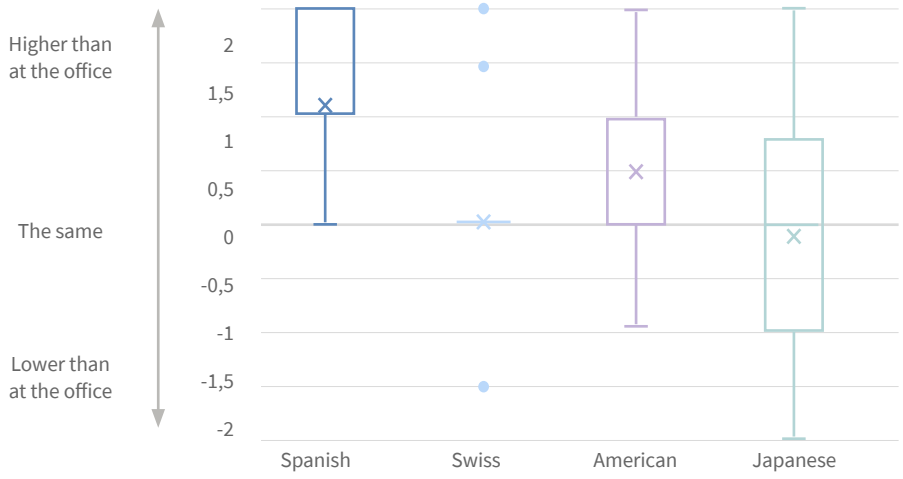

Figure 6: Cultural Comparison of Remote Work Productivity

When exclusively comparing cultural dimensions using the ICCD analysis, each dependent variable displays significant correlations with two out of the three analyzed independent variables – IDV, UA, PD. Satisfaction positively correlates with IDV (rS = .411**, p = .000) on a medium level and negatively with PD (rS = -.192*, p = .036) on a weak level (see Table 3). Productivity also correlates positively with IDV (rS = .222*, p = .015) on a medium level and negatively with UA (rS = -.188*, p = .040) on a weak level (see Table 3).

		2	3	4	5
1	Satisfaction	,643**	,411**	,165	,192*
2	Self-perceived Productivity		,222*	-,188*	,125
3	Individualism			-265**	,059
4	Uncertainty Avoidance				-188*
5	Power Distance				

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed);
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Correlations of cultural dimensions with satisfaction and productivity

The third analysis contributes with results about culturally differing advantages and disadvantages of remote work (see Figure 2). The total sample weighted per nationality (see Appendix) shows the high value for remote workers to eliminate the commuting time. This is the number one advantage across all nationalities. Ranked second is temporal flexibility. Apart from the Japanese employees, every

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other analyzed culture agrees with this priority. Japanese employees, however, particularly value the increase in leisure time when working from home. The third most mentioned advantage is the ability to focus and have fewer distractions when working remotely. Differently, Spanish employees, for whom the enhanced focus when working from home is of lower importance, highly value the improved work-life balance. The type and order of disadvantages, on the other hand, vary considerably depending on the nationality. The American employees name difficulties focusing, long working hours, and blurred boundaries as their main disadvantages. Their Spanish counterparts agree with the latter two challenges, long working hours and blurred boundaries, and highlight the missing face-to-face interaction in second place. As for Swiss employees, the lack of networking opportunities has the highest negative impact when working from home. Japanese mainly struggle to communicate effectively, as 36% of all respondents mentioned this issue.

4.4. Interim Results

As figure 3 unambiguously demonstrates, peoples' preferences on WFH have shifted. In the future, a large majority of employees want to work from home more frequently compared to the past. This shift can be verified with another survey, also conducted within the financial services company, based on a much larger sample size (n = 3,140). A decrease of 71% of people desiring to work from home less than 20% and only 12% of employees showing a preference for full-time remote work indicate the negligible importance of single work arrangements. Exclusively looking at employees' preferences, a balanced mixture of remote and office work is requested.

The employees' level of satisfaction and their self-perceived productivity support a better understanding of the optimal future work distribution. On average, both the means for satisfaction ($\mu = .38$) and productivity ($\mu = .32$) are positive, indicating a slight improvement overall when working remotely. The relatively high standard deviations (SD = 1.041, SD = .938), however, indicate that the improvement is not applicable for each individual. Again, findings justify the retention of both work arrangements to leverage attentiveness of individual needs.

Impacts on the two dependent variables provide further insights. The strongest correlation is detectable between the level of satisfaction and WLB. Thus, if an employee finds the right balance between professional and personal life, a higher level of satisfaction can be reached when working remotely. The satisfaction level also increases with the confidence of being visible even when working from home. Employees who have long ways to commute are more satisfied when working remotely compared to people who live close to their office location. Additionally, employees who have young children at home are, on average, more satisfied working from home. Visibility, WLB, and commuting time also positively impact productivity. Even though rather weak, the correlation between gender and productivity indicates that female employees feel, on average, more productive working remotely than their male counterparts. Moreover, having a dedicated workspace at home shows a weak but positive impact on productivity. Finally, more satisfied employees are indicated to be more productive when working from home. Contradictory to results found in prior research, age does not have a significant impact on satisfaction either on productivity. Furthermore, the number of children does not impact the productivity of a remote working parent.

Depending on the national culture, preferences vary (see Figure 7). The large study-external dataset (n = 3,140), which solely reveals prior and future work arrangement preferences, confirms significant differences depending on an employee's nationality (Table 2). The present study provides deeper insights by comparing cultures concerning their satisfaction and productivity. For satisfaction, only two national cultures differ significantly – American and

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Japanese. Thus, these two cultures build the baseline for interpretation purposes. Americans are the most satisfied, whereas Japanese are the least satisfied when working remotely. Regarding IDV, Hofstede et al.'s (2010) research positioned the USA as the most individualistic culture while the Japanese are more collectivistic. Accordingly, the significant difference between Japan and America shows that more individualistic cultures are more satisfied when working remotely compared to more collectivistic cultures. This proposition is supported by the nationality-independent analysis of ICCD (H1a supported). The same comparison can be made for the dimension of UA. Japan, being the one culture trying to avoid uncertainty the most, is located on the opposite end of the continuum from the USA. Employees who are not strong at coping with uncertainty thus feel less satisfied working from home compared to cultures that can better manage uncertainty. As the ICCD analysis does not show a significant correlation between UA and satisfaction, there is not enough foundation to support H2a. The third analyzed cultural dimension is PD. Based on Hofstede et al.'s (2010) findings, Japanese employees are a larger PD nationality compared to Americans. Thus, by comparing those two cultures, lower PD indicates higher satisfaction when working remotely. The ICCD analysis supports this finding (H3a supported).

Comparing national cultures regarding productivity leads to more diverse results. When working remotely, findings show that the Japanese culture performs significantly lower than the American and Spanish culture. Additionally, the Swiss culture performs significantly lower than the Spanish culture. For interpretation purposes, only the strongest diversities of Hofstede et al.'s (2010) findings are used within each cultural dimension. For IDV and UA, the two most different cultures are the Japanese and the American. Regarding PD, the Spanish and Swiss cultures are positioned at the opposite ends of the scale. The comparison of Japanese nationals with Americans indicates that collectivism impedes productivity when working from home. Also, the ICCD analysis supports the hypothesis that individualistic cultures feel more productive when working from home (H1b supported). Additionally, hypothesis H1b can be supported by the disadvantage of effective communication, which was mentioned in the Japanese group on a much higher frequency. The lack of effective communication when working virtually indicates the highly negative impact of high-context communication on remote productivity. Comparing the same cultures regarding UA indicates that higher uncertainty hinders productivity at home. The significant correlation between UA and productivity in the ICCD analysis supports the hypothesis that people who are better at coping with uncertainty feel more productive working remotely (H2b supported). As the Swiss nationals' level of PD is much lower than the Spanish, a comparison of those two cultures indicates that larger PD cultures feel more productive at home. This result opposes hypothesis H3b. With the finding from the ICCD analysis that there is no significant correlation between productivity and PD in the individual cultural dimension analysis, H3b can be rejected. It is assumed that PD does not have an impact on productivity.

Figure 7: Impacts of Cultural Dimensions on Remote Work Preferences

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5. Practical Implications – Optimizing the Remote Work Structure

To answer the question 'How can we achieve suitable work arrangements that maximize productivity and satisfaction?' several impacting factors need to be taken into consideration. As this question impacts the employee as well as the employer, both perspectives are relevant to aim for an optimal solution. As a part of the corporate strategic planning, it remains the company's choice to offer or decline their employees to work remotely. Still, as shown in the analysis, this decision heavily impacts the individual. Because the constellations of individuals working for a corporation differ, not one simple action plan can be presented. It is rather about understanding the people's circumstances and the situational needs to find an expedient remote work strategy. Nevertheless, general tendencies can be identified.

5.1. Corporate Support System to Maximize the Benefits of Remote Work

5.1.1. Three Pillars for a New Work Arrangement Strategy

The implementation of remote work balances on three vital pillars: the corporate determination, the existence of a seamless infrastructure, and the employee conjecture (see 5.2). Only if all three prerequisites back the decision of implementing WFH, it has the potential to be successful.

In the first pillar, it is up to the employer to decide if a remote work strategy is suitable and intended for the specific workforce. When deciding on remote work, a strategic foundation can support its implementation. One element thereof is the type of performance evaluation. As shown in the qualitative analysis, employees highlight the issue of people taking advantage of where new opportunities emerge. Strategic changes denote an opportunity to counteract this issue, which occurs when working remotely. One solution outlined by several interviewees is to change the performance appraisal strategy so that it is based on deliverables. By focusing on strategic goals, the employer is found to enhance individual productivity. Combining the strategic change with the individual decision of where to work by offering both work arrangements prompts low-performing employees to return to the office. This is specifically positive as it incentivizes free riders to return to the office. The presence of less productive people on-site in combination with a smaller number of people commuting to the office allows for adjusted supervision and improved support. People feeling more productive working from home are shown in the qualitative analysis to make their decision accordingly. High-performing remote workers confirm the meaningfulness of WFH and thus endorse a corporate culture of enhanced flexibility.

The implementation of remote work comes along with new corporate responsibilities to ensure consideration of employee's preferences and risks when working from home. To secure compliance, the fundamental decision in favor or against remote work, as well as sub-principles thereof, should be specified in a formal policy. Thus, policies are found in the qualitative interviews as a second element necessary to be included in the remote work strategy. Remote work policies need to be aligned with the relevant workforce and therefore require regular updates to ensure accordance with the employed workers at a time.

Flexibility is one key element shown in the qualitative analysis for the success of remote work and thus should be considered as a third element of the remote work strategy. Flexibility is a prerequisite for an employee to benefit from many advantages of remote work. Lack of communication and uncertainty about this topic are found to limit employees in their flexibility as they are insecure about potential discrepancies from corporate expectations. Thus, transparency in the form of a sub-principle on flexibility can improve remote work. A formulation that does not

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overly restrict flexibility needs to be chosen. By stating the permission of temporal and spatial flexibility, employees will customize their way of working, leading to enhanced satisfaction and productivity. For collaboration to guarantee time overlaps, one option is the specification of core hours as proposed in a qualitative interview.

The fourth element of the corporate WFH strategy is built on training. All implemented changes and guidelines must be internalized and executed by each line manager. Certainly, managers and employees must stand behind the idea of flexibility. The qualitative analysis revealed that experiences during the pandemic situation increased acceptance on the managerial level as it demonstrated how proficient remote work can be. Line managers should receive customized training to be aware of difficulties and deal accordingly. It is perceived as satisfying by the interviewees to have supportive managers when working from home. Furthermore, managerial efforts are necessary for securing team cohesion, especially when working remotely. Upskilling, however, is not only required on the managerial level but must also be ensured for remote workers. To ensure career progression, employees should receive their training virtually.

The second pillar for remote work success is built on the corporate infrastructure, which needs to allow for working remotely. The qualitative analysis demonstrates the necessity to provide a minimum package of a server, VPN, and a device for ensuring that employees can work efficiently from home. Additionally, the company can support employees working from home with a pecuniary contribution, which enhances the interviewee's level of satisfaction. Facultative compensations include supporting the acquisition of the remote office setup or participating in electric costs. The qualitative analysis shows the request of employees to receive further financial support for the purchase of additional equipment, which can increase employee satisfaction and productivity. Having the right equipment is key, especially if there is a necessity for an employee without a dedicated workspace to work remotely.

The third pillar for a successful remote work strategy is built on the employees who must sense the corporate acceptance. Therefore, the qualitative analysis showed a clear communication to be essential. With the employer's blessing, employees freely decide if they want to use this opportunity or if they feel more comfortable working full-time in the office space. The company should offer a trial period for inexperienced employees as the qualitative analysis shows that the experience of WFH strongly impacts remote work preferences. By personally experiencing WFH, employees better recognize their own ideal way of working. External forces such as the Covid-19 pandemic are found in the qualitative analysis to facilitate the venture of WFH.

5.1.2. Unambiguous Communication Across All Levels

The corporate strategy needs to be accompanied by unambiguous communication. Clear statements of expectations and liberties are essential with the implementation of remote work. With explicit communication, a high level of employee satisfaction can be achieved. In turn, as the qualitative analysis shows, the inconsistent execution demotivates employees and thereby reduces their willingness to perform. Hence, when deciding to offer remote work, this option should be granted to each employee. If circumstances do not allow for effective remote work, employees often choose to work at the office. For cases when remote work does not fit the purpose, an employer should formally reserve the right to deviate from generally valid allowances. Unsuitable circumstances are found in the qualitative interviews to include jobs not possible to be executed from home, a workspace not suitable for performing the job, or the intentional abuse of the offered freedom.

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Communication is not only key at the corporate level but also between individuals. As interpersonal exchanges diminish with the distribution of work locations, employers should focus on setting an explicit digital strategy. Digital tools are shown in the qualitative analysis to have the potential to enhance individual and collaborative performance. The availability, use, and training of specified communication tools can improve the communication flow between individuals working for the same corporation. Interviewees highlight that the flow of information does not stop at the end of the day, especially for a global corporation operating across different time zones. Accordingly, interviews highlight virtual work as an enabler of high-level agility. Again, WFH experience is found to be essential as interviewees mention its positive impact when working digitally. They state its potential to increase cross-border collaboration and corporate performance overall.

5.1.3. Obsolescence or Necessity of the Traditional Office Space?

Most notably, the quantitative and qualitative analyses compare work settings during different periods and thereby indicate a significant increase in the preference to work remotely. All interviewees in the qualitative analysis revealed a desire to increase their work time spent at home compared to pre-pandemic times. Also, when expanding the perspective on both analyses, the clear trend towards more remote work persists. The intensive period of working from home has made remote work an integral and indispensable part of the employees' way of working. However, not one interviewee could imagine working full-time from home. As already shown in the quantitative findings, the office space maintains its value. Especially collaborative work requires a mutual location. Focused work, on the other hand, is often experienced by the interviewees to be performed more efficiently when being at home. They reason that open-plan office arrangements can be an issue, as they are not conducive for working undisturbed. The increased ability to focus is conditioned by the setup of the workspace at home. When having the two work arrangements available and a quiet place to work at home, both analyses find that a division of tasks into the two work arrangements is optimal. Accordingly, this division confirms the necessity of having an office space available and further induces a new concept of office utilization. Moreover, the fact that disadvantages prevail for some employees when working from home stresses the importance of retaining an office space. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is employee protection, which is one element that was addressed by the interviewees. Employees suffering when working from home show the necessity of having the option of access to an office space. Summarized results of both analyses emphasize that a twin-track strategy to have the choice between the two work arrangements is desirable. Furthermore, committing to remain with remote work when having the possibility to return to the office is satisfactory to all employees, those wishing to continue working from home and those wanting to return to the office. Hence, clear corporate commitments on the future of work arrangements can enhance employees' prospects.

Furthermore, the company faces the decision of the office design. The required space and its purpose must be evaluated. If many employees decide to work remotely on a regular basis, the office space can be specifically designed to support collaborative work, such as the exchange and gathering of ideas. Having the office structured as an innovation hub could, in turn, disrupt the concentration of individual on-site assignments. Qualitative data reveals the respondents' preference to complete repetitive or highly complex tasks requiring uninterrupted time to focus from home. As a number of interviewees and survey respondents expressed their desire to return to the office on a full-time basis, focus areas will be required. Moreover, the term office space does not necessarily limit the location to one place. The company can contemplate renting collaboration spaces in different areas, which

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mainly contribute to decreasing commuting times. This is conceivable as an addition to the main office location or even as a substitute thereof. Both analyses highlight the importance of reduced commuting time. The quantitative analysis further shows a positive impact of long commuting times on an employee's satisfaction when working from home. Therefore, distributed locations are expected to contribute to the employees' level of satisfaction when coming to the office. The level of satisfaction is assumed to further increase if employees have the possibility to meet different people when coming to the office. This enables counteracting the disadvantage of reduced networking opportunities, which was emphasized in both analyses to be a key challenge when working from home. Overall, the corporation has a powerful instrument to enhance their employees' satisfaction by demonstrating their willingness towards arranging access to a variety of potential remote locations.

5.1.4. Remote Work – Enabler or Troublemaker?

Advantages of remote work can be recognized in many areas. In general, having the option to work remotely is widely appreciated. Firstly, the vast majority of interviewees agree that remote work positively impacts their level of satisfaction. Secondly, also the quantitative analysis confirms, on average, a positive influence of WFH on satisfaction. Survey respondents and interview partners mentioned reduced commuting time, the positive influence on their health and family life, and an improved WLB as factors contributing to a higher level of satisfaction when working from home. Taking personal time to regenerate subsequently leads to increased productivity during the times when one chooses to work. Additionally, the concept of reciprocity evokes satisfied employees' decision to work at their most productive times, resulting in enhanced productivity. Based on the same concept, the satisfaction of receiving such flexibility is shown to encourage employees to improve their productivity by increasing their effort in return. Thus, remote work is additionally perceived as a productivity-enhancing work arrangement. Even though that might not always be the case, most employees are at least equally productive when comparing their productivity at home and at the office. Participants of both analyses, on average, feel more efficient when working remotely. Both variables, satisfaction and productivity, support an adaption of remote work as its implementation is expected to enhance corporate performance.

Nevertheless, the advantages of remote work are only sustainable if potential disadvantages are closely monitored and dealt with in the best possible way. Issues remote employees encounter include, among others, long working hours, blurred boundaries, social isolation, and the lack of networking opportunities. Negative influences are perceived differently depending on the individual. As it certainly depends on the individual whether the employees themselves and the corporation benefit from remote work, the work arrangements must be customized according to each specific compilation of employees.

5.2. Impacts of Personal Circumstances on Benefits of Remote Work

Opposing outcomes depending on the individual can be explained by different conditions employees face when working from home. The qualitative and quantitative analyses reveal several factors that need to be considered on an individual level when implementing a WFH strategy. Depending on a person's living situation, the respective team compilation, and the individual preferences, the implementation of a remote work strategy varies.

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5.2.1. Living Condition

One key aspect for successfully working remotely, already touched upon in section 5.1.3, is the employee's possibility to have a dedicated workspace at home. The quantitative analysis highlights a significant impact of the private workspace on productivity. This is further endorsed in the qualitative study with an expansion to satisfaction. The possibility to work undisturbed promotes efficiency. When having their own workspace, interviewees encounter less stress factors and are therefore more satisfied. Not only the availability but also the setup of the workspace is found to be relevant in the qualitative interviews. Ergonomic furniture and electronic gadgets can improve the employees' level of satisfaction and productivity. Accordingly, people with a dedicated workspace, additional gadgets, and suitable furniture often prefer to work remotely. Out of the qualitative findings, it can be assumed that they are more satisfied working remotely. Qualitative findings support the quantitative result of employees being more productive at home if they have a dedicated workspace. Instead, the ones who work in a common area are more often prone to opt for the traditional office space.

Another influential factor is whether employees have children or not. As found significant in the quantitative analysis, having young children at home positively impacts the satisfaction of a working parent. The qualitative analysis supports this finding. Interviewees highlight that getting overwhelmed with children at home not to be an issue if care support is organized. Parents need to think about childcare solutions regardless of whether they work at home or from the office. Moreover, the qualitative analysis reveals an impact on employees with the responsibility for elderly dependents. Working remotely is found to increase the satisfaction of employees caring for family members as they can achieve their professional goals while fulfilling their personal duties. Thereby, the flexibility of time and venue is essential. The flexibility of the work location is a prerequisite if elderly dependents do not share a house with the employee. Additionally, adapting one's work time to care for dependents is a necessary condition to benefit from being at home with them. Any kind of limitation to flexibility can significantly reduce the benefit of remote work. Compared to the prior explained situations, people who live alone and work from home do not risk encountering external disruptions. However, they are prone to social isolation. The lack of regular social exchanges is shown in both analyses to affect their level of satisfaction. The analyses show that people living alone often prefer to go to the office on a higher frequency compared to employees living with their family members. The latter are more satisfied with the option to regularly work from home.

5.2.2. Team Compilation

A further significant impact is the team compilation. Remote workers who live in another state, country, or even continent than the rest of their team enjoy that their team members can also work remotely. Their fear of missing out reduces as communication is entirely moved to online discussions. Additionally, the previous online experience, which turns employees into seasoned remote workers, can increase the productivity of the entire team. While regionally based teams tend to thrive at a common office space, worldwide distributed teams do not have this possibility as they are, by default, not at the same location. The latter teams are dependent on virtual collaboration at any time. Their online cooperation is facilitated by each team member making the experience of remote work. The underlying reason is found in the qualitative analysis, as results show that learning how to proficiently collaborate online is facilitated by the experience of remote work.

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5.2.3. Personal Preference

Remote work further depends on personal preferences. Thereby, the individuals' personality is shown in the qualitative analysis to be one impacting factor. While some employees are prone to work long hours and need the office space to know when their workday has ended, others do not risk overworking. An introverted employee, who does not communicate without being promoted, can negatively influence corporate performance as there is a risk that these employees will be perceived as unavailable. Visibility at home is shown in the quantitative analysis to have an influence on satisfaction and productivity. Managers who pay attention to all team members, independently of their work location, are found to lead employees who are more satisfied and productive when working remotely. Furthermore, networking opportunities are limited from home and change depending on a person's character. Communicating broadly and openly in the virtual space is found to increase one's network. According to qualitative findings, this is expected to cause problems for introverted people. At the office, introverted people have fewer opportunities to hide behind the screen, therefore extending their personal network without too much effort. Hence, on-site work has the potential to increase equality for promotions and training for introverted employees as they are more visible.

The age of employees and their length of service at the relevant firm are two other factors found in the qualitative analysis to have an impact. Age could not be confirmed as such in the quantitative study. Relevant, however, is the finding of the qualitative interviews, which show a positive impact of age on remote work satisfaction. In general, younger employees are observed to miss going to the office and suffer more when working from home than their older colleagues. The older employees mainly emphasize the importance of their existing networks, which enable them to continue working productively at home. Accordingly, a positive correlation between the length of service and remote work productivity was uncovered in the qualitative analysis. Again, the lack of networking and the need for regular face-to-face exchange demonstrate the new joiners' need to be on-site. Finally, a person's gender is revealed in the quantitative analysis to only have a weak influence. This impact is considered of negligible importance. Gender differences could not be found in the qualitative interviews.

5.3. Cultural Impacts on the Benefits of Remote Work

While each individual has a unique compilation of attributes, people of the same nationality appear to encounter similar virtues and issues when working from home. Quantitative results prove, in line with Hofstede et al.'s (2010) findings, that significant differences between cultures exist. Accordingly, it is indispensable for a global corporation to act independently in each region. Findings show that not all cultures are equally satisfied and productive when working remotely. From the analysis of quantitative data, it can be assumed that Americans are more satisfied than Japanese nationals when working from home. Regarding performance differences, the same analysis shows Japanese to feel less productive when working from home compared to American and Spanish employees. Spanish feel more productive working remotely

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than Swiss nationals. As further highlighted in the quantitative analysis, the two dependent variables, satisfaction and productivity, help predict future remote work preferences. Accordingly, American and Spanish employees highly value remote work. Swiss and Japanese employees are not reluctant to remote work but prefer to work from home less frequently than the former two cultures.

The interpretation of cultural dimensions (see 4.4) shows the cultures' influence depending on their position on the continuum of the respective dimension on satisfaction and productivity (see Figure 7). The qualitative analysis digs deeper. While it is unfeasible to directly recognize modest cultural differences in levels of satisfaction and productivity in the qualitative interviews, they open up insights into the underlying reasons why employees in specific cultures are more or less satisfied or productive. Reasons that are anticipated in the quantitative analysis reach foundation in the qualitative interviews. On the basis of the pronounced dimensions of each culture, a signature composition is identified. Overall, the large acceptance and popularity of remote work by Americans can be linked to their WFH supportive combination of being an individualistic culture while scoring rather low on PD and UA (see Figure 8). By exclusively considering the four analyzed cultures, the Japanese culture is the exact opposite to the American. The Japanese hesitancy to work remotely can be explained based on the cultural compilation of being the most UA culture in combination with the characteristics of collectivism and large PD (see Figure 8). Justification for the cultural impacts can be reached through the following reasons.

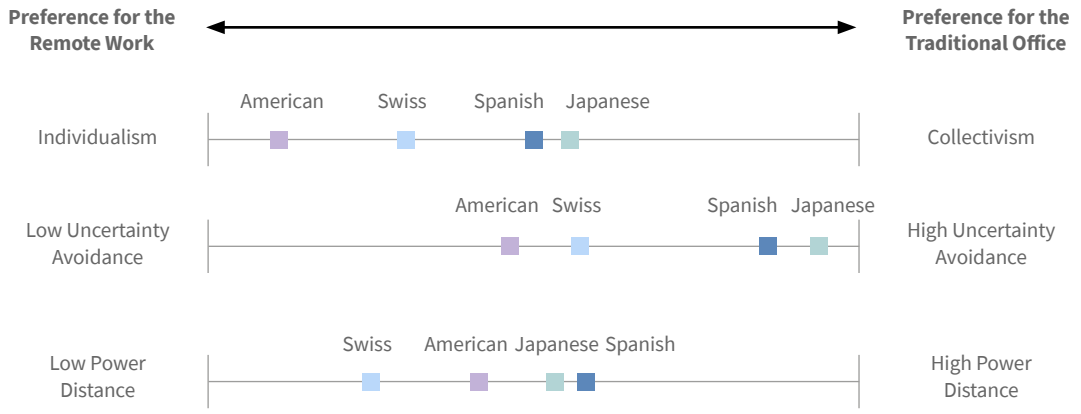

Figure 8: The Nations' Classifications by Cultural Dimensions (based on Hofstede et al. (2010)) and their Influence on WFH Preferences

5.3.1. The Impact of Individualism

Hypothesis 1a and 1b are supported by the quantitative analysis, which shows that individualistic cultures are more satisfied and more productive working from home compared to collectivistic cultures. IDV characterizing the American culture is especially visible in the qualitative analysis as interviewees mention their regular, efficient, and experienced use of ICT. With the use of online tools, American employees emphasize a positive impact of remote work on efficiency. On the other hand, the Japanese, being a collectivistic culture, show a lack of technical knowledge. As ICT is defined as the ultimate enabler of remote work, the Japanese's limited productivity can be explained. Additional difficulties arise based on their high-context collaboration, which is determined by the Japanese's

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collectivistic culture. Hampered communication is found to further negatively impact their productivity. The lack of understandable communication also affects the Japanese level of satisfaction, as highlighted in both the qualitative and quantitative analysis. One more reason for lower productivity at home is again based on collectivism. It is this culture's way of assessing employees that does not support a productivity-enhancing climate. Japanese do not ponder the relevance of their outputs. In their culture, loyalty is expressed through presenteeism. In contrast, their individualistic counterparts (e.g., Americans and Swiss) emphasize the importance of deliverables, strengthened by the shift towards more remote work. Finally, as it is often relationships that suffer when working from home, collectivism hampers remote work satisfaction. This can be observed when comparing the Spanish with the American or Swiss culture. The former scores higher on collectivism. The qualitative analysis of the Spanish employees shows that a reduction of work-related interaction has a negative influence on their level of satisfaction.

5.3.2. The Impact of Uncertainty Avoidance

Hypothesis 2a was rejected in the quantitative analysis. The analysis of the qualitative interviews did not reveal opposite findings. Hypothesis 2b is supported by the quantitative analysis, which shows that lower UA cultures are more productive working remotely compared to higher UA cultures. In contrast to the American ease in dealing with uncertainty, the Spanish and Japanese are both high UA cultures. The qualitative analysis demonstrates that UA is one reason for the initially prevailing culture of presenteeism in the latter two cultures. The hypothesis stating that high UA cultures are more reluctant to adopt new ways of working was confirmed in the qualitative analysis. Japanese and Spanish employees required the external force of the pandemic to take the plunge and experience remote work. On average, the quantitative analysis found that Spanish employees have made the biggest shift from working mostly at the office to strongly valuing WFH. Interviews showed that the forced WFH experience was key for such an extreme conversion. A trend that is also visible for Japanese employees, however, on a lower level. The Japanese high UA culture further guides their unwillingness to use the video function during virtual meetings, which hinders them to optimally perform when working remotely. Moreover, a connection is noticeable between UA and not trusting employees. In the qualitative analysis, control is found to be especially relevant in the Japanese culture as this is expected to be one way to increase the level of certainty. Too strong restrictions are, however, shown to hinder productivity at home. Similarly to control, there is a connection between UA and the depth of rules regulating remote work in specific regions. Switzerland is stipulated in the qualitative analysis to have the weakest WFH restrictions of all regions. Their UA score is lower than that of the Spanish and Japanese, who have formulated much stricter rules. Spanish employees are shown to be restricted in the hours working remotely per week, and Japanese are not allowed to work remotely anywhere else other than their home. When comparing American and Swiss respondents, with the Swiss nationals being worse at coping with uncertainty, it is those interviewees who highlight the importance of adapting and aligning their current rules to the new way of working. Accordingly, an increase of rules and regulations can be observed, the higher a nationality's aversion against uncertainty is. Thus, this must be considered when implementing remote work in the specific cultural regions.

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5.3.3. The Impact of Power Distance

Hypothesis 3a is supported by the quantitative analysis, which shows that lower PD cultures are more satisfied working remotely compared to larger PD cultures. The qualitative analysis emphasizes the positive impact of low PD when looking at American and Swiss employees. Employees of both cultures reinforce their level of satisfaction through reduced distances between formal hierarchy levels as well as the declined bureaucracy brought about by WFH. Swiss and American employees are not as constrained, from a hierarchical point of view, when it comes to working remotely, since managers in lower PD cultures often place their focus on deliverables. Interviews with employees of those two cultures revealed that, without the managerial support, employees from lower PD cultures choose to work remotely if they feel more productive at home. Larger PD cultures (e.g., Japan) are, on the contrary, found to feel insecure when deciding against their managers opinion. As the Japanese culture is shown to rather focus on office work and managers are shown to encourage this type of work arrangement, employees feel less satisfied when working remotely. Additionally, their respect for superiors hinders them from asking questions, which further hampers their satisfaction at home. On the other hand, a consensus of opinions is found to boost motivation, also in low PD cultures. The evaluation of the Swiss interviews shows that shared opinions of the managers and their subordinates on remote work positively impact the employees' satisfaction. Hypothesis 3b was rejected in the quantitative analysis. Neither the analysis of the qualitative interviews uncovered opposite findings.

6. Conclusion

The digitalization of the economy is heading towards a structural change which, inter alia, affects the way of working. Enabled by the invention of ICT, work can be performed independently of the traditional office space. With the occurrence of the pandemic crisis remote work became a necessity. The proportion of employees working from home has risen drastically. Thus, a large number of people personally experienced the remote way of working. An experience that, on average, led to an increased popularity of remote work in the future compared to preferences prior to the pandemic. Learnings from the WFH experience are used to improve pre-pandemic work conditions.

Opinions divert when it comes to WFH. On average, results show enhanced satisfaction as well as increased productivity when employees work from home. However, remote work triggers a paradox of representing a work improving strategy for some while simultaneously causing issues to others. Career stagnation, training exclusion, overworking, and blurred boundaries are some of the disadvantages uncovered by the analysis, which an employer needs to be aware of. Corporate restrictions, individual circumstances and cultural backgrounds make some employees prefer to work from home and others favor to commute to an office space. Thus, the remote work strategy always needs to be aligned with the specific workforce. The large majority desires a combination of both work arrangements. Accordingly, a twin-track strategy of concurrent use of both work arrangements is expected to increase the level of employee satisfaction. Having the possibility to flexibly choose the workspace and timing further increases satisfaction and productivity as the workspace and time can be aligned to the type of work prevalent on a specific day. Furthermore, employees benefit from reduced commuting time or an im-proved WLB, among others. To ensure a successful WFH strategy, a corporation must capture its decision and sub-principles thereof in corporate policies. Those need to be in accordance with the currently employed workforce and consistently implemented. Therefore, clear communication is essential. Ensuring equal treatment across all hierarchical layers positively influences the employees' satisfaction directly and the employees' productivity indirectly.

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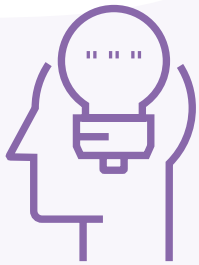

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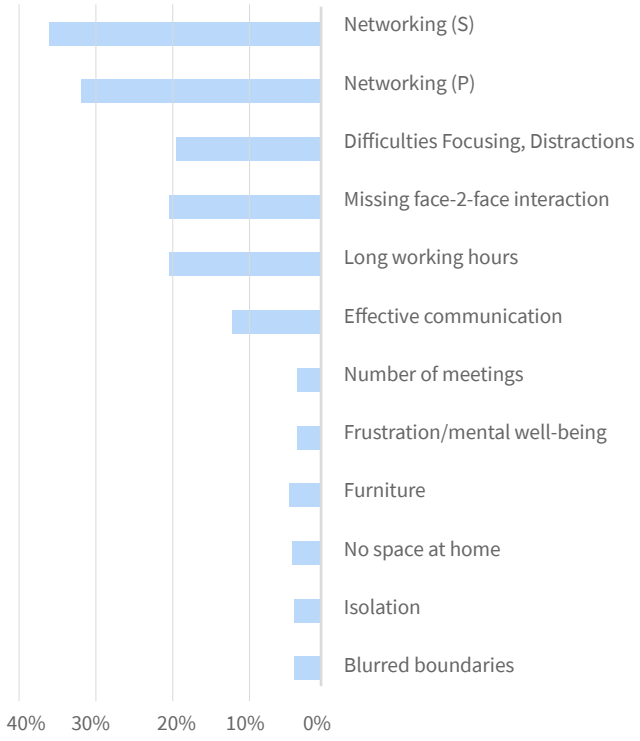
8. Appendix

Major Advantages & Main Challenges by Nationality

DISADVANTAGES SWISS



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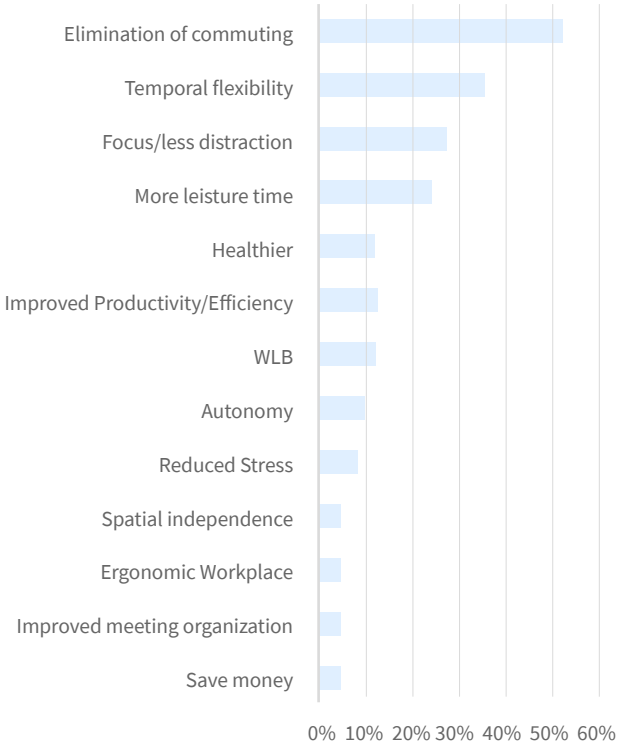

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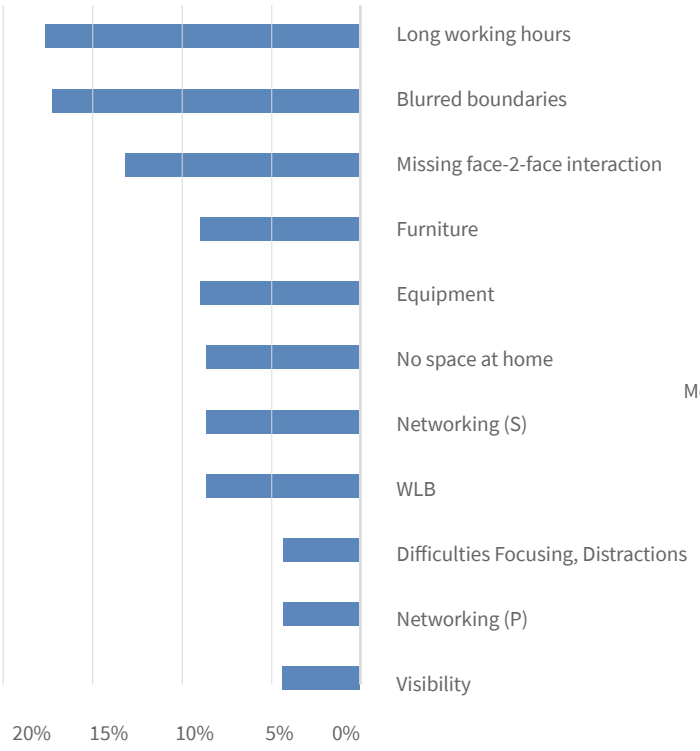

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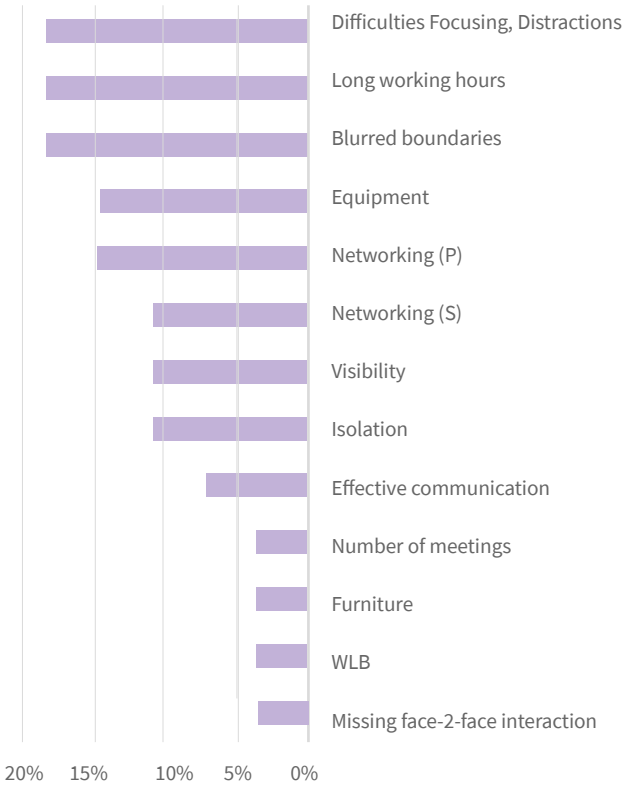

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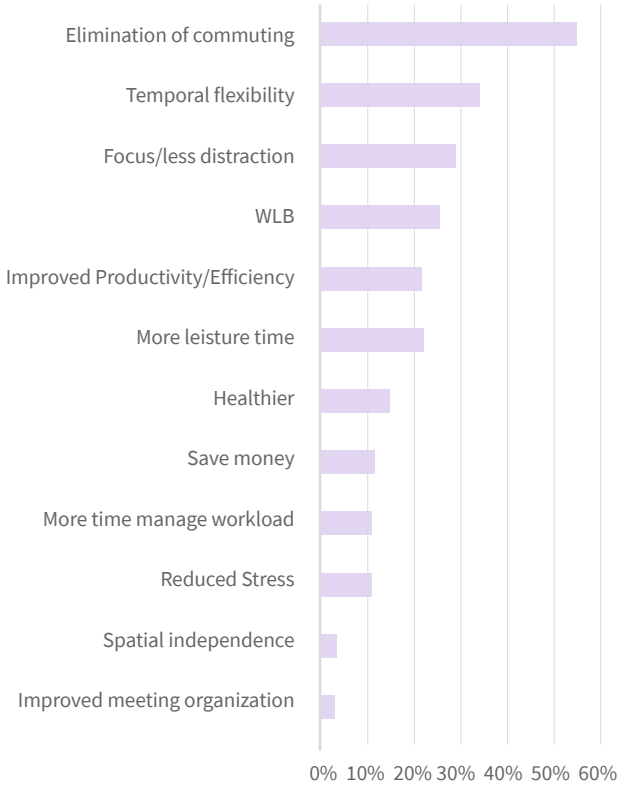

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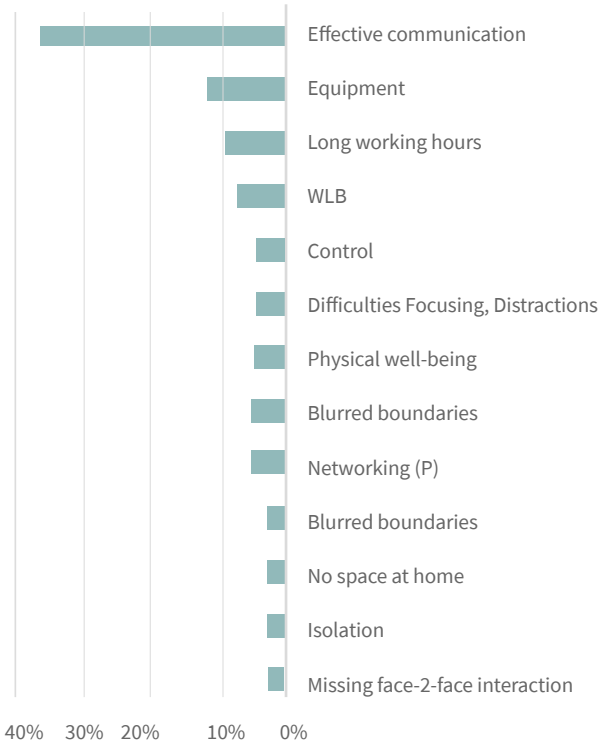

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