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The Future of Work and Teleworking: A Conceptual Study of Employee Preferences, Managerial Strategies, and RTO Mandates

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This conceptual paper examines how personality, mediated by cognitive processes as described by Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), influences employees' attitudes toward teleworking. Research suggests that superior outcomes and attitudes associate with teleworking, but such research is one-dimensional because nomological relationships that associate attitudes and teleworking do not include cognitive components that research has long demonstrated predict attitudes. The current study constructs a richer, more predictive model that uses the TPB to explore, in greater depth, how employees' attitudes associate with teleworking from home versus working in an office. The study uses a five-factor model to assess how individuals view teleworking based on traits that best classify personalities, offering managers greater understanding of the forces that shape employees' work preferences.

During the past few years, the world experienced a technological revolution, including smartphones, video cameras, broadband access, broadband connectivity, and increased power and reliability, packed into portable devices. These technological improvements, coupled with Covid-19 as a catalyst, ignited a disruption to the stability of a variety of dimensions of daily life that, up to that point, exhibited relatively stable evolutionary growth. MacRae and Sawatzky (2020) point out that remote work has a long history where various forces have each had important roles in the acceptance of using home as an individual's workplace. Prior to the industrial revolution, working from home was much more the rule rather than the exception. Since the industrial revolution, more recent shocks to the norm of working from an office have included the OPEC oil embargo in 1971, the ever-increasing commute times that have resulted from an increased commuter population and, of course, the mandated work from home policies necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Examples of such rapid changes include online shopping patterns (e.g., contactless grocery shopping) and remote schooling. Teleworking options, such as flexible schedules, are the preferred option for many employees, connecting directly to improvements to productivity, work engagement, and job satisfaction. Pratt (2003) asserts that teleworking is part of an overall evolution in our conceptualization of how we work and a movement towards a more flexible workforce. Thrust into a new world order, with no safe options, employees and organizations had little choice but to pivot quickly from entrenched ways of doing business and professional interactions to realizing the ease with which the logistics of scheduling meetings over videoconferencing apps, such as Zoom, GoToMeeting, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams, could be accomplished. Consequently, stereotypes that associated with "fringe" employees who worked from home evaporated, since those who stereotyped them were forced to work in the very modality against which they held biases. Not only did employees manage to maintain minimal functionality during this period, a combination of government restrictions, formidable health threats, and newly discovered technology used to facilitate workplace operations worked so well that employees are now finding that going back to the office does not represent either the need or attraction that it had even two years prior.

Dingel and Neiman (2020) report that 37% of jobs in the United States can be done from home. Teleworking is growing rapidly, and demographic, social, and technological trends suggest that working remotely from home will continue to grow. Bick et al. (2020) found that only 8.2% of employees worked from home during February 2020, but that figure grew to 35.2% in May 2020. An added attraction of teleworking, from an employer's perspective, is that of the estimated 60 million hours saved by eliminating commuting, 35% were spent by employees in time directly involved in job-related effort, and the attraction of flexible schedules is shifting the concept of preferred options for many employees, influencing productivity,

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work engagement, and job satisfaction, as Barrero et al. (2020) report. Barrero et al. also found that post-pandemic estimates of employees working from home have risen 23% during the past year, and that high rates of quitting and job openings during recent months partially reflect a re-sorting of workers regarding newly salient job attributes, especially the scope for remote work. Pawel et al. (2022) argue that teleworking is here to stay, and that productivity enhancements from teleworking will grow as employers and employees realize the gains that teleworking represents.

Personality and its Relationship to this Study

Researchers have long predicted decision-making and preferences since well before Wicker's (1969) meta-analysis, which marked a modest yet influential milestone in shaping parameters that influence decisions. The study underscores the relevance of individual differences in shaping attitudes, which, in turn, predict decisions and behaviors, though with unexceptional power. A major advance in the study of decision-making processes came from Barrick and Mount's (1991) development of a five-factor model of personality dimensions. Volumes of research have been published on decision-making and preferences using this five-factor model, but studies that relate most closely to the current study are Clark et al. (2012) and Gainey and Clenney (2006), which examine the role personality plays in people's attitudes toward teleworking. Extant research expands knowledge that explores employees' preferences, but it does not consider that decision-making is not a function of attitudes alone (Ajzen, 2011).

Ajzen (1991) introduced the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Bosnjak et al., 2020; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Underpinning this model is that the most important determinant of behavior is intention to perform that behavior, with three variables included as determinants—attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes represent an individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a behavior or preferences for a behavior alternative. Subjective norms reflect perceptions of the intensity of social approval or disapproval for performing the behavior, and perceived behavioral control represents the degree of control that the individual perceives over behavioral performance among internal and external obstacles. The TBP suggests that decisions to engage in a behavior, such as gambling or stopping gambling, can be predicted by intentions to engage in that behavior. "Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, so that they may exhibit the behavior. As a general rule, the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its performance" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). The TPB thus assists with prediction of whether people intend to (or not) engage in any focal behavior.

Attitudes are part of what makes individuals behave and react differently; they represent the entirety of a person's knowledge, experiences, and prejudices—both positive and negative—during thought processes when considering a behavior. Subjective norms consider how people view the ideas of others regarding a behavior, not necessarily what others think, but perceptions of others' attitudes. Perceived behavioral control is the extent to which a person believes he/she can control his/her behavior, which depends on internal factors, such as the individual's ability and determination, and external factors, such as the support and resources available for the individual to access. TPB suggests that perceptions of behavioral control have two effects. First, it affects intentions to behave in some way—the more control people perceive they have over a behavior, the stronger the intentions to engage in that behavior. Second, it affects behaviors directly; when people perceive high degrees of control, they try harder and longer to succeed (McCrae & Sawatzky, 2021). The present view of perceived behavioral control, however, aligns most closely with Bandura's (1977, 1982) concept of perceived self-efficacy, which concerns judgements of how well a person can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations (Bandura, 1982). In short, three variables are needed to know when individuals intend to do something—whether the person is in favor of doing it (i.e., attitude), how much the person feels social pressure to do it (i.e., subjective norms), and whether the person feels in control of the action in question (i.e., perceived behavior control; Ajzen, 1991).

Ajzen (2011) argues that studies that do not include conscientiousness as a causal force during decision-making merely establish simplistic associations between attitudes and decisions/preferences. Recent meta-analyses that assess the TPB evidence its predictive power of behavioral outcomes across a broad range of contexts (Afshar-Jalili & Ghaleh, 2020; Nardi et al., 2019). In an analysis of over 200 studies, McEachan et al. (2011) corroborate the TPB's ability to predict individual behavioral outcomes, and McEachan et al. (2019) found that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control accounted for 44% of the variance in intentions to act. Thus, we argue that the TPB provides a unique view into workers' intentions to telework.

Research Propositions

Clark et al. (2012) provide a framework for examining the relationship between personality traits and attitudes toward teleworking. According to J. H. Pratt (1984) and M. G. Pratt (2001), the framework theoretically grounds the Big Five personality constructs (Barrick & Mount, 2001) with attitudes toward teleworking. Clark et al. (2012) acknowledge that the study of teleworking is nascent, underscoring projections of the preponderance of teleworking and predicting that it will shape the dynamics of future workplaces. Bakaç et al. (2021) use personality traits such as conscientiousness and extraversion to examine attitudinal measures that associate with employees' jobs, such as work engagement, perceived productivity,

and job satisfaction. The study includes a measure of teleworking preference, but it consisted of only one item and used a nominal scale of zero (i.e., prefer working on-site) or 1 (i.e., prefer working from home).

Although Bakaç's (2021) research is illustrative, assessing attitudes in a variety of domains has been explored using the TPB (Bosnjak et al., 2020). Examples include Morris et al. (2005), who demonstrate mediation by attitudes, intentions, and social norms in relation to technology adoption, Parker et al. (1992), who explore intentions to commit driving violations, Pourmand et al. (2020), who assess patients' attitudes toward self-managing health conditions in an educational context, and Vladova et al. (2021), who use a variant of attitudes toward technology-driven learning (Venkatesh et al., 2012) to assess satisfaction with use of learning technologies. The contribution of the current study lies in acknowledging the influence of personality traits on attitudes toward teleworking, and in including the TPB to propose a more integrated approach to understanding correlates that shape employees' willingness to work from home or willingness to work in an office.

Personality and Teleworking

Personality plays a role in organizational behavior because the way that people think, feel, and behave affects many aspects of the workplace. People's personalities influence their behavior in groups, their attitudes, and the way they make decisions (Mount et al., 1998). Research that demonstrates the importance of personality in teleworking preferences and work-related outcomes is not new. Clark et al. (2012) found that personality has significant relationships with employees' attitudes toward teleworking. For example, individuals high in agreeableness are characterized as cooperative, amicable, helpful, honest, decent, and trustworthy (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1991). Also, Clark et al. (2012) found that employees who score higher in the agreeableness scale correlated with relatively positive attitudes toward telecommunicating. These researchers rationalized these findings by arguing that individuals high in agreeableness possess many of the qualities needed for a successful telecommuting experience and thus would have more favorable attitudes toward telecommuting.

Traditional work contexts are characterized by social interactions with a large number of people (Bakaç et al., 2021). People who are sociable, assertive, talkative, and active are high in extraversion, as Barrick and Mount (1991) articulate, and they prefer environments that are highly stimulating (Eysenck, 1967). Thus, extraverted people are expected to be influenced negatively by teleworking from home. However, extraverts might use teleworking strategically to design off-site environments that allow them to spend more time with family and friends. Traditional work contexts provide an atmosphere of social interactions with many people, making it easy to find someone with whom to socialize. Thus we propose:

P1. Extraverts have lower positive attitudes toward teleworking.

Teleworkers must establish a work routine, work independently, and be ambitious, well-organized, and self-disciplined, and they must manage time well (Bakaç et al., 2021). Therefore, we expect an individual's degree of conscientiousness to relate positively to attitudes toward teleworking. Of the Big Five factors, conscientiousness has been found to be the best predictor of job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Conscientious individuals avoid the inefficiencies associated with engaging in activities that have little bearing on a job's primary objectives (e.g., office chatting; Haddon & Lewis, 1994; Iscan & Naktiyok, 2005). Therefore:

P2. Conscientious people consider teleworking to be more beneficial than working in person.

Since teleworking reshapes traditional workplace dynamics, factors that influence an individual's adherence to teleworking social norms emerge as a relationship of interest. One such factor that would reasonably influence an individual's acceptance and engagement in teleworking is the personality trait of agreeableness. A dimension of the Five Factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992), agreeableness encompasses characteristics such as cooperativeness, empathy, and a proclivity for maintaining harmonious social interactions (Goldberg, 1990). Empirical evidence suggests that agreeable individuals adapt their behaviors according to social expectations, demonstrating greater propensities for conformity (Ashton, 1998). Consequently, this disposition influences an individual's response to teleworking norms within their respective work environments.

Gavoille and Hazans (2022) found a positive correlation between agreeableness and a preference for adhering to teleworking social norms. Using a sample of 1700 remote workers, their study suggests that individuals with higher degrees of agreeableness have stronger inclinations toward conforming to teleworking guidelines that their employers set. This association can be attributed to the agreeable individual's need to maintain positive social relationships and cooperative work environments (Chapman et al., 2011). Teleworking relies heavily on effective communication, cooperation, and team collaboration through virtual channels, and thus agreeable employees are more likely to embrace such norms because they contribute to overall social harmony.

Clark et al. (2012) assessed the influence of agreeableness on teleworking behaviors using a sample of 333 individuals, with findings suggesting that individuals who score higher in agreeableness demonstrate a greater willingness to follow teleworking guidelines that public health authorities issue and organizational policies demand. Strong adherence to teleworking norms reflects a concern for the wellbeing of colleagues, clients, and society. These results underscore the critical role that agreeableness plays in shaping individuals' responses to emergent teleworking norms, particularly during crises, when collective social responsibility is emphasized.

Given the evidence discussed above, it is reasonable to propose that agreeableness influences an individual's social norms related to teleworking. Individuals high in

agreeableness demonstrate greater conformity to teleworking guidelines, embracing the cooperative and harmonious nature of remote work. Both Johnson and Wang (2019) and Smith and Lee (2020) offer robust evidence that supports this proposition, suggesting that better understanding of agreeableness informs teleworking policy design and management strategies in modern work environments. Therefore:

P3. Agreeableness predicts the social norms that shape people's intentions to telework.

Judge and Cable (1997) found that neuroticism relates negatively with attraction to innovative, rewards-based cultures. Clark et al. (2012) argue that those high in neuroticism experience difficulties with managing boundaries or reducing willingness to consider an innovative work structure. Moreover, neurotic individuals tend to perceive their level of control over events and circumstances as lower compared to individuals with lower neuroticism (Watson & Hubbard, 1996). Emotional stability is the opposite of neuroticism, the latter of which associates with insecurity, fear, instability, and emotionality (Goldberg, 1990), and it also describes being anxious, worried, and depressed (McCrae & Costa, 2003). Teleworking often involves increased autonomy and reduced supervision, creating an environment where individuals must rely on self-motivation and self-discipline to complete their work (Golden & Gajendran, 2019). Neurotic individuals, due to their heightened emotional reactivity, may find it more challenging to manage their emotions and maintain focus while working remotely. In contrast, emotional stability relates positively with teleworking attitudes. Behavioral control is crucial for successful teleworking, as it influences task completion, meeting deadlines, and maintaining work-life boundaries (Golden & Gajendran, 2019). Reduced behavioral control among neurotic individuals in teleworking scenarios may lead to lower work performance, increased work stress, and a greater likelihood of experiencing work-life conflicts (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Therefore:

P4. Neurotic individuals have less behavioral control regarding their engagement in teleworking activities.

A person high in openness seeks variety and intellectual stimulation, is creative, and grasps new ideas well (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 2003), and has more favorable attitudes toward learning (Barrick & Mount, 1991). For many organizations and individuals, teleworking requires adapting to a new work environment and new communication methods (Gainey & Clenney, 2006). People who are open to new experiences seek variety and intellectual stimulation, are creative and grasp new ideas well (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 2003). They may also have more favorable attitudes toward learning (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Kennedy and Funk (2016) report that those who are high in openness are more likely to embrace novel ideas and adopt new technologies. Thus:

P5. A positive relationship exists between peoples' openness and intentions to telework.

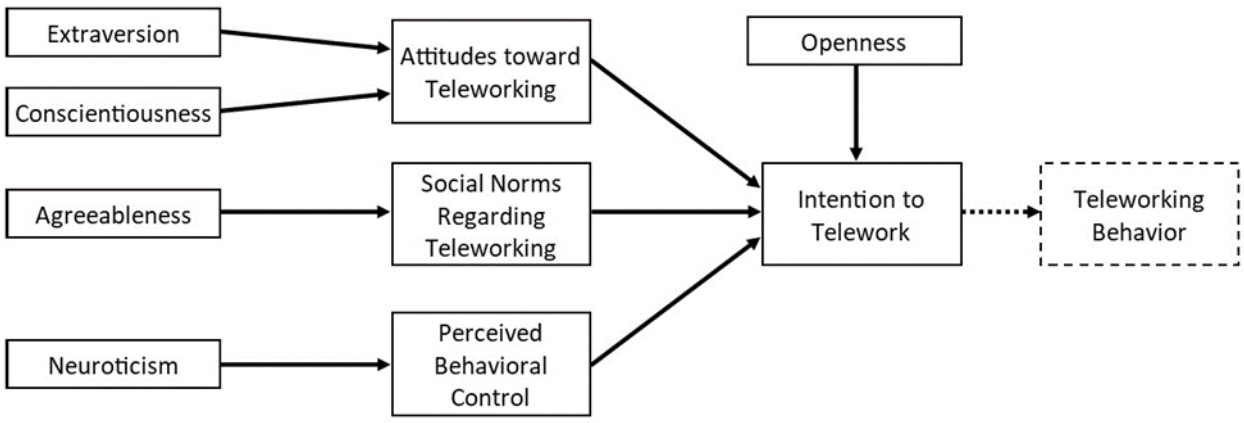
The five propositions discussed above, and their relationships with the TPB, are illustrated in the Figure.

Discussion

The propositions introduced in this paper relate personality traits to the TPB regarding employees' intentions and willingness to telework. Covid-19 certainly brought the issue of forced teleworking to many labor markets worldwide, and as the effects of the pandemic began to subside, several questions remained. One is whether companies would continue to allow employees to work from home, and whether employees would be given a choice now that teleworking is no longer necessary. Another question is whether companies have learned that allowing, or requiring, work from home is strategically sound as a means to cut costs, perhaps to remove from the office employees who do not require much supervision, or who have demonstrated superior ability to work outside of the office, succeeding, and possibly thriving, in a home office. Such employees are likely to share several traits with entrepreneurs, especially being disciplined, proactive, and

Figure

A Model of Personality Traits, The Theory of Planned Behavior, and Intention to Telework



open-minded to new ideas and ways of getting tasks done.

Extraversion presents a problem when it comes to teleworking; those who crave and thus seek highly stimulating, sociable environments become bored and anxious when forced to work alone, and they would likely fulfill their need for socialization by turning to phone calls, texting, and social media. Knowing that teleworking disrupts their ability to socialize while working, extraverts would avoid teleworking, and knowing that such extraverts focus less on work to socialize by any means possible, managers should avoid sending extraverts home to work. In contrast, conscientious people seek routine and independence to avoid disappointing people, and thus they find working alone at home comforting, since they naturally enjoy the freedom to both work the way that best fits them and in ways that allow them to satisfy their need for routine. One caveat to conscientious people working from home is when conscientiousness is extreme; unfettered by supervision, such employees begin showing signs of perfectionism or becoming a workaholic. This paper does not address such extreme personality traits directly, but the authors recognize that the dangers exist. Thus, employees' attitudes toward teleworking might be influenced by extraversion and conscientiousness before teleworking begins, but success at teleworking depends on the type and frequency of supervision that teleworking employees receive. For example, including teleworking extraverts in regular online and occasional face-to-face meetings and company events might satisfy their need for socialization. Similarly, checking in on conscientious employees' work and ensuring that they understand that they are performing well might avoid spirals into perfectionism and workaholic traits.

Existing research indicates that social norms have a significant impact on individuals' attitudes and subsequent engagement in behaviors. However, these norms are not always beneficial for employees, and they are not solely influenced by the employee's interaction with the workplace. In this paper, we focus on social norms derived from employees' supervisors for two reasons.

First, social norms related to employees' intentions or willingness to telework can also stem from spouses or life partners. For instance, if an employee is offered the opportunity to work from home, their decision may be influenced by their spouse or partner who already works remotely. This situation can either strengthen the relationship between the couple or create difficulties if they lack space for separate home offices or find constant cohabitation to be challenging.

Second, it is appropriate to concentrate on employer-related social norms within the employee-employer relationship due to the concept that distance can enhance the relationship for some couples. In cases where both spouses work from home, negative intentions towards teleworking may emerge. This can be attributed to the belief that work provides an opportunity for spouses and partners to have personal space and engage in fulfilling activities outside of marriage or the relationship (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Therefore, the direct association between personality traits and social norms is likely influenced by various factors, not all of which are accounted for in the proposed research model. Another factor in this discussion is that agreeable people tend to put their own needs aside, thus putting others' needs first. They find it enjoyable to help others and make things easier for them. Therefore, when supervisors want an agreeable employee to telework, the employee is more likely to say yes to accommodate the supervisor's wishes.

Perceived behavioral control is a particularly salient issue regarding teleworking because employees' beliefs that they could succeed as a teleworker likely vary across several factors, including experience with teleworking, having access to the right technology, being efficacious about using such technology, and, as we argue, personality traits. One proposition in this paper suggests that neuroticism associates negatively with perceived behavioral control. Among several components of the personality trait, two aspects of neuroticism are propensity for anxiety and self-doubt. Anxious people worry about the future, especially regarding their ability to deal with change, and whether former states can be recaptured once a change has occurred. Such people also commonly doubt whether they can handle change, and they ponder deeply, and even obsess over, missed opportunities. Teleworking represents a significant change to not only how tasks are completed, but how they are judged and rewarded. Employees with neurotic tendencies worry greatly about what changes, both obvious and hidden, switching to teleworking represent to them. Some might even project that the company, or at least their bosses, are trying to get rid of them, perhaps as a cost-cutting measure or because a boss or coworker does not like them. Clear communication is wise in the case of a worrisome employee, and treating teleworking as temporary, with the option to return to the office if it does not work out, might reduce an anxious employee's apprehension with switching to teleworking.

Other than treating social norms as deriving from only bosses, we expect the TPB to operate as it was originally conceptualized, applied to employees' willingness to telework. We propose, however, that attitudes toward teleworking, social norms regarding teleworking, and perceived behavioral control over teleworking mediate personality traits and intentions to telework (see the Figure). We recognize that intention to telework and its antecedents are likely influenced by the timing of when employees are asked about such willingness. For example, suppose that employees are told that the company must either downsize (i.e., lay off employees) or switch a large portion of its workforce to teleworking. Regardless of employees' personality traits, or their attitudes, social norms, or perceived behavioral control regarding teleworking, most employees would likely report being amenable to the switch, if only to save their jobs in the short-term. Such timing of data collection should be considered during research. As another example, suppose that employees, after having teleworked for some time and disliked it,

are asked about their attitudes about teleworking. They might report liking it, fearing that the company is looking for layoffs and is not interested in returning employees to the office. Again, such timing is critical to results.

Unlike the other personality traits in the propositions, openness is not proposed to be mediated on the path to intention to telework. We theorize that being open to experiences is independent of context or timing, and thus such openness influences intentions to telework directly. One advantage to this proposition is that openness is the personality trait closest to such intentions, and thus managers can use this personality trait to gauge teleworking intentions best. A second advantage is that openness also predicts willingness to return to the office. Those open to experience are flexible and better able to buy in to a manager's vision regarding the best way to accomplish tasks and contribute to the organization. People who are open are natural scientists, willing to try new things without prejudging either inputs or outcomes; they are willing to experiment and be a part of the experiment to achieve the greatest consequence for themselves and the company. They are also much less discouraged by failure, instead willing to try again to get a better result. Managers who recognize openness in their employees have found those who are more likely to be willing to transition to teleworking, and to transition back if the experiment fails to produce positive outcomes.

One proposition we do not include in this paper is whether intention to telework predicts teleworking behaviors or actual transitions to teleworking. The reason is because most employees are not given a choice of whether to telework; they are told that they must and are rarely involved in that decision. Thus, it makes little sense to predict teleworking behaviors from intentions to do so when whether to telework is not offered to employees. Experimental research might be able to link intentions to real behaviors in a few contexts, but most field research on this topic would instead assess perceptions of job satisfaction or willingness to engage in citizenship behaviors, for example, as consequences of transitioning to teleworking. Our propositions are restricted to intentions before any such transitions occur, and since employees typically are not given a choice of whether to telework, we offer no propositions regarding actual behaviors.

Regarding the current state of remote work, according to CNBC (2021), some companies are ordering employees back to the office, reversing the flexibility offered for more than two years of allowing them to work from home during the pandemic. Some companies are continuing to offer flexibility regarding where people work, but others have experienced resistance from employees who are pushing back on return-to-office (RTO) mandates. Robinson (2023) reports that since summer 2022, many companies have become firmer on mandatory RTO policies, and the proportion of roles specifying that they are office-based has risen to a 19-month high of 4.2%. The proportion of vacancies labeled as "remote" has also reduced to a 10-month low of 13.8%.

Forcing employees to RTO without considering their individual circumstances and preferences can have several unintended consequences. Employees who have become accustomed to remote work often appreciate the autonomy, flexibility, and reduced commuting time associated with it (Nösel, 2020). According to a McKinsey survey of 1,602 employees, 1 in 3 workers back in the workplace reported that the RTO shift impacted their mental health negatively, and workers who experienced declines to their mental health are five times more likely to report taking on reduced responsibility at work (McKinsey & Company, 2020). In a study of 2,050 employees, Owl Labs (2021) reports that as of September 2021, 39% of employers required employees to be full-time in the office, and 28% of employees indicated that they prefer it. Data driven decisions can result in the best outcomes and Tsipursky (2023, April 18) discusses the challenges companies face when measuring the effectiveness of their return-to-office mandates. The article states that most companies do not know how to measure metrics related to employee outcomes in the face of RTOs such as well-being, creativity, and intent to leave the company.

Some justifications that employers report are primary drivers of RTO mandates are flawed (Calvet, 2023). A nine-month Stanford University study of 16,000 workers found that working from home increased business productivity by 13%, in comparison to previous years' profits (Knilans, 2022). A recent study conducted by Apollo Technical (2023) found that, on average, those who work from home spend 10 minutes fewer per day being unproductive, work one more day each week, and are 47% more productive. In a 2021 survey of employees, Owl Labs (2021) found that 55% of respondents reported that they worked more hours remotely than they did when in the office, and 83% indicated that their productivity was equal to or better than it was in the office. Reasons commonly cited for these phenomena include elimination of commuting, the ability to customize the workplace setting, and work schedule autonomy.

Another flawed justification to mandate RTO is enhanced worker collaboration in an office setting. Calvet (2023) conversely argues that technology has long made worker collaboration easier, since useful work in a team environment can be conducted by any number of dispersed individuals. A primary antecedent to worker collaboration is the idea that physical presence in the workplace is not prerequisite for effective collaboration among co-workers (Fayard, et al. 2021) but instead an element common to effective teamwork is to have clear goals and objectives, create effective communication channels, support one another, and maintain transparency (Indeed, 2023).

A third flawed justification is that there is no substitute for an office presence when establishing a strong workplace culture. However, such cultures can be maintained and strengthened through virtual events and other remote work practices. Virtual-team bonding, such as online classes, virtual pub crawls, and tiny campfires, help cowork-

ers unwind and build meaningful bonds while having fun remotely (Paris, 2022). Virtual social events are also becoming an integral part of remote work. Employee engagement and mental wellbeing are top priorities in high-performance organizations.

Some employers are instituting RTO mandates for several seemingly good reasons, but there are disadvantages to doing so. Tsipursky (2023, March 9) lists primary areas of concern when mandating RTOs, including employee resistance, worker attrition, job withdrawal, and declines to diversity. One of the most common reasons for RTOs are claims of improved productivity, but extant research refutes it. Bloom et al. (2015) conducted a study at CTrip, a 16,000-employee, NASDAQ-listed Chinese travel agency, finding that employees who worked from home were 13% more productive than those who worked in the office. EmailAnalytics (2023) assessed employee self-reports, finding that 77% of employees who work from home felt more productive and more efficient for doing so. The Great Place To Work's (2021) study of more than 800,000 employees at Fortune 500 companies found that most people reported stable or even increased productivity after employees started working from home. Bailey and Kurland (2002) conclude that commutes and office distractions influence work-life balance negatively, resulting in increased stress and reduced productivity. Choudhury et al. (2020) also found greater productivity among remote workers, in comparison to those working in traditional offices. By compelling employees to RTO, employers risk disrupting productive work patterns and influencing overall output. Robinson (2023) reports that remote workers are less likely to take sick days or time off for personal reasons because their schedules are more flexible and can accommodate such time.

Organizational researchers have raised concerns regarding RTO mandates, arguing that they affect organizations' diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) deleteriously. Employers are mandating RTO after more than two years of allowing employees to work from home during the pandemic. However, employees argue that RTO policies encourage inequities within the broader workforce if they are not constructed and applied thoughtfully and uniformly (Abril, 2022). They evidence this claim by citing in-office policies that favor some employees over others, creating what they deem to be unnecessary hardships and greater risks for some groups. Remote work provides an opportunity for individuals with varying needs, such as disabilities and caregiving responsibilities, to participate fully in the workforce. Schur et al. (2020) suggest that telework mitigates some access barriers, particularly among individuals who experience challenges related to transportation and caregiving. It allows some individuals to access higher paying, more satisfying jobs, thereby contributing to greater equality in employment. RTO presents challenges to these individuals and perpetuates barriers to their engagement and advancement. DEI should consider the flexibility and accessibility that remote work provides (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). A CNBC (2021) report suggests that remote work enhances DEI by providing opportunities to individuals who would otherwise experience barriers in traditional offices (see also Haas, 2022). McKinsey and Company (2021) corroborate this finding, suggesting that remote work increases diversity by expanding the talent pool beyond traditional geographic limitations. To foster a diverse, inclusive workplace, employers should consider the potential negative effects of forcing employees back to the office.

Other traditional measures of organizational interest have also been shown to be at-risk from RTOs. Gibson et al. (2023) argues that requiring employees to RTO against their preferences leads to decreased morale and job satisfaction. Employees grow accustomed to remote work and might have consequently established a better work-life balance, and being forced to give up this flexibility and RTO can lead to dissatisfaction and demotivation. RTO mandates contradict Golden and Veiga's (2008) findings that suggest that when employees feel that their employers care about their work-life balance and value their needs, employees commit more to the organization. Imposing an RTO policy without considering employee preferences undermines such commitment, or development of it.

Work-life balance has long been a topic in organizational research. Robinson (2023) argues that remote work provides better work-life balance, allowing employees to spend more time with their families and pursue hobbies and interests outside of work. Owl Labs (2019) reflects this balance, finding that remote workers are 22% more likely to be happy with their jobs than non-remote workers are. From an employee's perspective, better work-life balance leads to increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, and improved mental health (World Economic Forum, 2020). Gajendran and Harrison's (2007) meta-analysis evidences that remote work saves employees time and money on commuting, which further improves quality of life.

Conclusion

Covid-19, and the prospect of future pandemics and similar shocks to economies, has prompted much research into how companies can continue to operate under such conditions. During the pandemic, companies were forced to get creative about how to accomplish tasks while adhering to government rules on social distancing, quarantining, and use of safety devices (e.g., masks). During the process, organizational survival depended on rapidly developed and implemented teleworking policies, while ensuring adoption of remote work on a global scale (Dingel & Neiman, 2020). As the pandemic waned, the realization that companies were not only surviving disruptions, but experiencing benefits from it, coupled with positive employee feedback and productivity outcomes, led to a shift in attitudes toward remote work as a viable long-term option (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). As more research on teleworking appears in the literature, consensus will develop regarding not whether to issue blanket RTO mandates, but how opportunities inherent in managing a

blended work modality can be leveraged, and for which employees teleworking is appropriate. Teleworking became a viable option that even a few decades ago would not have worked, given a lack of universally available high-speed internet and other technologies that make teleworking possible. Among companies that leverage the advantages of a hybrid workforce, employers can design RTO plans that foster the positive influences of on-site work and support employees who are more likely to experience its negative effects. Returning to on-site work might drive engagement and effectiveness for some employees, while hindering them for others. Employers should thus design strategies that account for the needs of diverse workforces.

We propose that employees' personalities predict components that themselves predict intentions and willingness to telework. The propositions in this paper can guide managers who are looking for employees most amenable to telework, offering them the best chances to contribute to the organization and taking advantage of workforce diversity and employee accessibility that remote work represents. The propositions also provide a framework for conducting research on transitioning to teleworking, with minor changes needed to account for the timing, contexts, and people involved in such transitions.

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