Transformative Effects of Remote Working: Enhancing Happiness, Motivation, and Productivity at Nexus College

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TERG Working Paper Series
Paper

TRANSFORMATIVE ENTERPRISE RESEARCH GROUP-TERG
University of the West of Scotland, Paisley,
Scotland
October 2024

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TRANSFORMATIVE ENTERPRISE RESEARCH GROUP (TERG)

TERG is a network of researchers dedicated to entrepreneurship and enterprise education. The group's goal is twofold: to promote world-class research and to get relevant scholarly inputs into the hands of key decision-makers.

Executive Summary

This research explores the impact of remote working on happiness, motivation, and productivity within an organisation, using Nexus College as a case study. It aims to see if the positive effects of remote working at Nexus College match those found in a study by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) in April 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many organisations, including Nexus College, to quickly shift to remote working. An anonymous online survey of 118 staff members was conducted to gather data, which was compared to existing literature on the topic.

Key findings from the Nexus College survey show that 63% of respondents were happy working from home, an improvement from the 50% happiness rate in the IES study. Additionally, over 60% of staff felt as motivated working from home as they did in the office, and 87% were satisfied with their remote working conditions. The survey also found that 65% of female respondents, 61% of male respondents, and 33% of respondents of unspecified gender felt as productive working from home as in the office.

These findings highlight the ability of Nexus College staff to adapt and suggest the institution has supported its employees well during the transition to remote working. The results show the importance of employee well-being in creating a productive work environment, linking happiness to motivation and productivity. However, the research notes limitations such as a smaller sample size compared to the IES study and the use of a snapshot survey. Future research could include more participants and use a long-term study to better understand the effects of remote working across different educational institutions.

This study helps to understand how remote working affects employee well-being and organisational productivity, offering useful insights for further education colleges and similar institutions dealing with changes in work environments.

Introduction

This research study explores the impact of remote working on happiness, motivation, and productivity within an organisation. The literature on these topics was reviewed and compared with survey data collected from a further education institution, pseudonymously referred to as Nexus College.

The global Coronavirus pandemic prompted a nationwide lockdown in March 2020 (Dropkin, 2020), forcing many companies to adopt remote working to minimise non-essential travel and reduce face-to-face interaction (Buchanan, 2020). Nexus College wasn't exempt from these impacts as it can be considered a white-collar organisation (Caponecchia and Mayland, 2020), where office work was the norm (Yeung, 2020), which undertook a sudden shift to remote working which introduced significant changes (Jaiswal and Arun, 2020). The employees and employers had to navigate this unplanned transition (Buchanan, 2020) enveloped in uncertainty of the pandemic, Nexus had to develop new

norms while ensuring the emotional and physical wellbeing of their employees (Fukuti et al., 2020).

Lockdown conditions also affected personal lives, with home schooling, childcare, and social activities moving online (Kallitsoglou and Topalli, 2021). This unplanned shift to remote working raised challenges such as sharing technology and workspaces (Xiao et al., 2021), and managing dual roles as caregivers, teachers, and employees (Feng and Savani, 2020). Previously, remote working was a voluntary choice aligned with lifestyle preferences, but the pandemic forced many into these new arrangements (Kramer & Kramer, 2020).

Literature Review

A pre-pandemic poll by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) in April 2020 found that 50% of respondents were unhappy with their work/life balance, with 48% working longer and more irregular hours (Churchill, 2020). Additionally, only 30% found homeworking motivational, and 60% felt inactive. Similarly a CIPD study in April 2020 reported that 32% of workers struggled to fulfil non-work commitments due to job demands. These findings raise concerns about the negative impact of home working on work/life balance and employee wellbeing. This is significant for Nexus College, which prioritises employee health and wellbeing in line with their Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Policy (2020).

The IES study highlighted that motivation and productivity are significantly impacted by remote working, suggesting that self-motivation is crucial, especially for those who thrive on face-to-face interactions (Waizenegger et al., 2020). This research aims to determine if the issues identified by IES resonate with the staff at Nexus College and to provide recommendations based on the literature.

Happiness and Productivity

With the IES study highlighting that many employees were unhappy with their work-life balance, it is crucial to establish the link between happiness and productivity. Extensive research has shown a direct correlation between these two factors (Oswald et al., 2015). For organisations, understanding this relationship offers a strategic mechanism to enhance efficiencies and overall performance through the principles outlined in the Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson, 2004). This theory posits that positive emotions broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires, enhancing their cognitive resources and ultimately leading to increased productivity and well-being.

Beyond the experimental data provided by Oswald et al. (2015), other studies corroborate the positive links between happiness and productivity. Pryce-Jones (2010) found that happy workers are high performers, exhibiting greater resilience and collaboration skills, which contribute to a more effective work environment. Harter et al. (2003) linked employee well-being to improved company performance, suggesting that organisations with higher levels of employee satisfaction tend to achieve better business outcomes.

Bellet et al. (2024) highlighted that happiness, influenced by various factors, can lead to increased sales through enhanced productivity. Additionally, Bateman and Organ (1983) concluded that happier workers are more productive partly because they are less likely to be absent, ensuring consistent workforce availability and stability.Macleod and Clarke's (2011) report, "Engaging for Success," also emphasises the importance of employee engagement in driving productivity and performance. Their findings are supported by Gallup Inc.'s employee engagement assessment, which identifies a strong link between productivity and employee engagement (Sorenson, 2013). This assessment highlights that engaged employees are more committed to their work and the organisation, leading to higher performance levels.

Furthermore, Massoudi and Hamdi (2017) concluded that a satisfactory work environment significantly boosts productivity. Their findings echo Brill's (1990) theory that improvements in workplace design and environment can lead to a 5-10 percent increase in employee productivity. This suggests that creating a positive and supportive work environment is integral to enhancing employee satisfaction and performance.

The research consistently demonstrates a robust correlation between staff happiness and productivity. This underscores the importance of prioritising employee well-being as a strategic organisational objective. With this foundation established, it is essential to further explore the intricate relationship between motivation and productivity to understand how these factors interplay and contribute to overall organisational success.

Methodology

The data was collected via an anonymous survey using the Google Form platform, the recognised survey tool within the organisation (Glass, 2021), which ensures respondent anonymity.The survey primarily included quantitative questions using a Likert scale (1932), allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement with specific statements. This method provides numerical data, enabling precise statistical analysis and comparisons between groups (Sukamolson, 2007). Additionally, qualitative questions were included to allow open feedback, which was then coded using a deductive process (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) to identify potential trends (Flick, 2018).

To ensure comparability with the IES survey (2007), which is the basis of this research, the same survey method was used. The aim was to determine if the IES findings on negative opinions about remote working are reflected at Nexus College. A random sampling technique was used, sharing the survey with all staff members to capture a broad and representative sample, thus eliminating systematic bias (Edition and Moore, 2006).

As the study focuses on the impact of remote working on participants' feelings and behaviours, some questions asked participants to rate their experience of working from home compared to working in the office. This ensured the data collected was relevant to the research objectives.

The sample size for this research project was n=118, with comparisons made between gender and job type (academic or support).

Data Analysis

The Nexus College survey revealed several key insights into the impact of remote working on employee happiness, motivation, and productivity. According to the survey, 63% of respondents reported being happy working from home. This marks a notable improvement over the 50% who expressed happiness with remote working in the IES study conducted in April 2020. This increase suggests that, over time, employees at Nexus College have become more accustomed to and satisfied with the remote working arrangement.
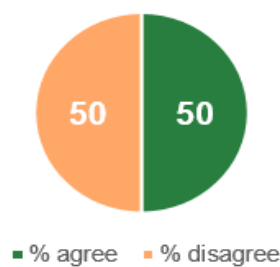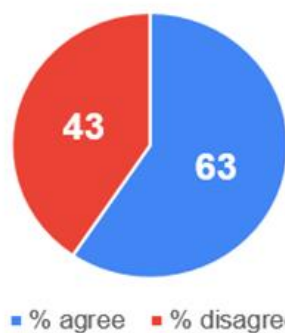

Figure 1- IES Happiness

Figure 2 - Happiness Nexus College

Additionally, the survey found that over 60% of staff at Nexus College felt as motivated working from home as they did when working in the office. This indicates that remote

working has not significantly hindered the motivational levels of most of the workforce. Furthermore, an impressive 87% of respondents expressed overall satisfaction with their remote working conditions, highlighting a strong positive response to the transition to home working.
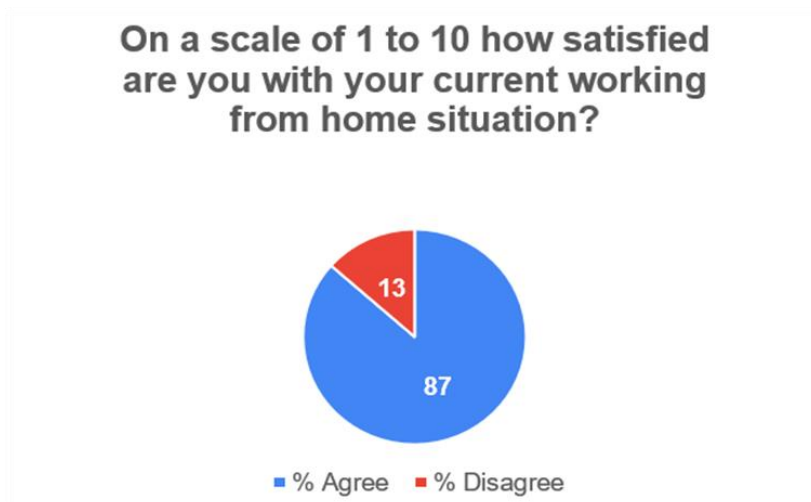

Figure 3- Nexus Satisfaction

Productivity levels also showed encouraging results. The survey indicated that 65% of female respondents, 61% of male respondents, and 33% of respondents of undefined sex felt as productive working from home as they did in the office. These findings suggest that most employees, regardless of gender, have managed to maintain their productivity levels while working remotely.
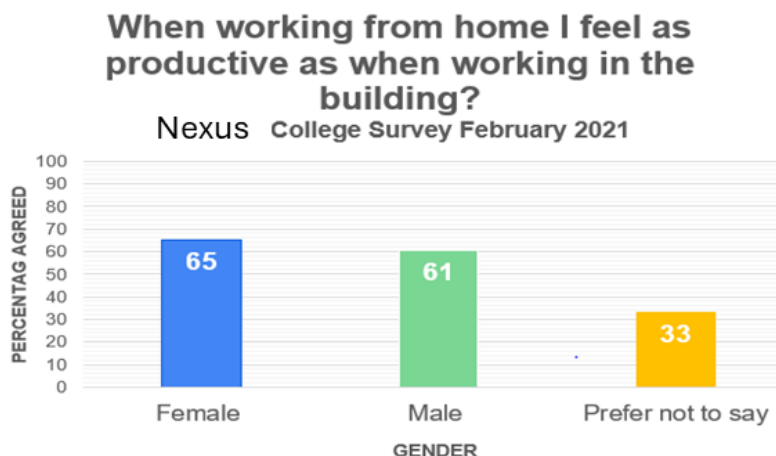

Figure 4- Nexus Productivity

Comparing these findings with the IES study underscores the adaptive capacity of the Nexus College staff. The improvement in happiness from 50% to 63% and the high levels of satisfaction (87%) reflect a successful adjustment to remote working over the course of the year. The data also indicates that remote working has not only preserved but, in many cases, enhanced motivation and productivity among the staff.

These positive outcomes suggest that Nexus College has effectively supported its employees during the transition to remote working, contributing to higher levels of happiness, maintained motivation, and sustained productivity. The increased happiness

among staff is particularly noteworthy, as it underscores the importance of employee well-being in fostering a productive work environment. Happy employees are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and committed to their work, leading to better overall performance.

Key Findings

The survey conducted at Nexus College provided several key insights into the impact of remote working on employee happiness, motivation, and productivity, reflecting both the short- and long-term effects of this transition. A significant finding was the increase in employee happiness, with 63% of respondents reporting satisfaction with remote working, an improvement from the 50% reported in the IES study conducted in April 2020. This suggests that, over time, Nexus College employees have adapted positively to the new working arrangement.

The data also revealed that 60% of staff felt equally motivated working from home compared to the office. This is a particularly encouraging result, as it indicates that the shift to remote working did not diminish motivational levels for the majority of employees. Additionally, 87% of respondents expressed overall satisfaction with their remote working conditions, reflecting a strong positive response to the changes introduced during the pandemic.In terms of productivity, 65% of female respondents, 61% of male respondents, and 33% of respondents of undefined sex reported feeling as productive working from home as they did in an office setting. This suggests that remote working has not significantly compromised productivity for most employees, with the majority maintaining or even exceeding pre-pandemic performance levels.

When compared to the findings of the IES study, these results demonstrate that Nexus College has effectively supported its employees during the transition to remote working. The improvement in happiness from 50% to 63%, along with the high levels of satisfaction and sustained productivity, points to a successful adaptation process. The positive correlation between happiness and productivity is consistent with existing literature, highlighting that employees who are satisfied with their working conditions are more likely to be engaged and motivated, which in turn boosts overall organisational performance.These findings emphasise the importance of employee well-being in the context of remote working, underscoring the need for organisations to continue supporting their staff in maintaining a healthy work-life balance while adapting to evolving work environments.

Limitations of the Research

The two main limitations are based around the sample size and the lack of longitudinal perspective. The IES study was conducted across multiple organisations, providing a broader range of responses and a larger potential population for investigation, something that Nexus College could not replicate. Future research could address this limitation by including other further education colleges in the same country to broaden the population.

A second key consideration is the difference in sample sizes between the two studies, with n=500 for the IES study compared to n=118 for the Nexus College study. Hopkins (2017) suggests that larger samples provide estimates closer to the true population value, raising questions about the comparability of the two studies due to the significant difference in population size. Expanding the population and increasing the sample size in future research could help determine whether the increase in happiness associated with home working is consistent across the further education sector or unique to Nexus College.

The second limiting factor for the research was the adoption of a snapshot survey approach. Snapshot surveys provide data at a single point in time, which may not accurately capture the dynamic and evolving nature of employee experiences and attitudes towards remote working. They fail to account for changes over time, such as how initial reactions to remote work may differ from long-term adjustments and impacts. This approach limits the ability to identify trends, causality, and the sustained effects of remote working on happiness, motivation, and productivity. Consequently, it may lead to incomplete or skewed insights, reducing the overall reliability and depth of the research findings.

Areas for further research

There are two clear areas for future research Longitudinal Study on the Impact of Remote Working on Employee Well-being and Productivity:

1. Longitudinal study to track changes in employee happiness, motivation, and productivity over an extended period of remote working. This would provide insights into the long-term effects of remote working on employee well-being and performance, helping to identify any evolving trends or challenges that may arise as remote working becomes more entrenched in organisational practices.

2. Comparative Study Across Different Educational Institutions. This study could explore whether the positive effects of remote working observed at Nexus College are replicated across different settings. By comparing various institutions, researchers could identify best practices and common challenges, offering a broader understanding of how remote working impacts the education sector and providing recommendations for optimising remote work arrangements in diverse educational environments.

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