

The Relationship between Work-from-Home (WFH) and Employee Performance in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic sped up the move to remote work, leading organisations to introduce work-from-home (WFH) policies. While prior research has examined WFH's effects on work-life balance, burnout, and job satisfaction, limited studies have explored its direct impact on employee performance, particularly in the Kurdistan region. This study investigates the relationship between WFH practices and employee performance among Asiacell staff in Sulaymaniyah, a company that has maintained long-term remote work arrangements post-pandemic. Using a quantitative survey approach, data were collected from 152 employees to assess their perceptions of WFH and its effects on performance. Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between WFH and employee performance, suggesting that remote work arrangements can significantly enhance performance when supported by organisational resources, flexible policies, and effective communication. The findings highlight the importance of strategic implementation and continuous evaluation of WFH practices to maximise employee performance and organisational outcomes.

Keywords: Work-from-Home (WFH), Employee Performance, Remote Work

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the global shift to remote work (Anakpo et al., 2023). Western companies rapidly implemented work-from-home (WFH) policies across industries (Gibbs et al., 2022), with major firms like Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and Twitter adopting them. Interestingly, Twitter made it permanent. In Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, governments mandated abrupt WFH shifts, even though many workers preferred office settings. These developments spurred extensive research into WFH's effects on employee performance, including productivity, job satisfaction, and organisational outcomes (Abiddin et al., 2022).

Similarly, firms in the Kurdistan region adopted WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic. It persists in telecom and technology sectors for roles such as call centers, IT, and back-office tasks, enabled by technologies that reduce commutes and enhance output. By embracing flexible work models, organisations can tap into a wider talent pool, potentially reducing recruitment costs and fostering a more diverse workforce (Sharip et al., 2023). Some companies achieve greater operational efficiency without bearing transportation costs or maintaining expensive office spaces near the workplace.

Some organisations have retained it post-pandemic for non-physical roles, citing enhanced performance and return on investment. This shift represents a significant transformation in human resource management strategies, moving beyond traditional paradigms to embrace more flexible and distributed work arrangements (Mohamed et al., 2024). A critical question is WFH's true impact on performance. Few studies directly compare home and office settings, with prior research focusing more on work-life balance, burnout, and satisfaction.

This study investigates whether WFH arrangements improve employee performance in a specific organisational context, focusing on a firm with longstanding remote work policies. Specifically, it examines the relationship between WFH practices and employee performance among Asiacell staff in Sulaymaniyah. The respondents were selected due to the company's persistent WFH implementation.

Literature Review

This section reviews empirical studies and theoretical frameworks concerning the study's core variables: work-from-home and employee performance. The discussion of these findings aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and culminates in the conceptual framework presented at the conclusion of this section.

Work from Home (WFH)

The WFH, also known as telecommuting or teleworking, is often used interchangeably with remote work. While subtle distinctions exist among these terms, remote work generally refers to employees performing their duties outside the traditional office environment, typically via digital technologies when physical presence is unnecessary (Anakpo et al., 2023). WFH operates on a similar principle, allowing employees to work from their home without requiring on-site attendance. The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly accelerated the adoption of remote work arrangements worldwide, compelling many individuals and organisations to transition abruptly to virtual operations without prior preparation (Abiddin et al., 2022).

Initial data indicated that over half of Europe's workforce engaged in remote work amid the crisis, compared to just 12% beforehand; post-pandemic, substantial portions of workers and firms have opted to retain WFH (Gibbs et al., 2022). Existing literature underscores telecommuting's potential to enhance the work environment, providing a foundation for hypotheses in this study. Scholars have demonstrated that teleworking fosters greater flexibility, allowing employees to schedule tasks and personalize their workspaces according to individual preferences and needs (Mohamed et al., 2024). Moreover, research suggests that WFH can enhance employee efficiency by conserving time, money, and energy otherwise spent on commuting.

The flexibility afforded by WFH can lead to increased autonomy, which is often associated with higher job satisfaction and improved performance metrics (Jayanandana & Jayathilaka, 2023). For instance, reduced commute times resulting from WFH enhance employee independence and motivation, thereby boosting productivity and lowering turnover rates (Mohamed et al., 2024; Sharip et al., 2023). This stems from remote workers experiencing reduced stress levels, lower turnover intentions, and heightened task satisfaction (Anakpo et al., 2023). Furthermore, the absence of daily commutes often translates into more available time for personal activities, contributing to a better work-life balance, which in turn can positively influence an employee's overall well-being and performance (Tudu & Singh, 2022).

However, while some studies highlight the positive aspects of WFH, others present an opposite view, indicating potential negative impacts on employee performance and well-being, such as decreased team cohesion and challenges in maintaining work-life boundaries (Ekasari et al., 2022). For example, scholars argue that professional isolation and difficulties in career development are among the disadvantages of extensive WFH arrangements, which can undermine the benefits of increased autonomy (Mohamed et al., 2024; Salju et al., 2023). Hence, further research on the effects of WFH on employee performance is needed.

Employee Performance

Employee performance is a multidimensional concept that distinguishes between task and contextual performance. Task performance refers to an individual's proficiency in carrying out job-specific duties directly related to organisational goals (Tudu & Singh, 2022). In contrast, contextual performance encompasses behaviors that support the organisational, social, and psychological environment in which task performance occurs, such as cooperation and initiative (Mohamed et al., 2024). Components of contextual performance for permanent employees include dependability, considerate behavior, and preparation. Together, these dimensions offer a holistic view of an employee's contribution to the organisation, extending beyond mere task completion.

Later, researchers such as Sinclair and Tucker (2006), as well as Griffin et al. (2007), developed the notion of adaptive performance. This concept emphasises an employee's ability to respond effectively to changing work demands and environments, a crucial skill in today's dynamic business landscape. Accordingly, counterproductive performance has garnered significant attention in recent decades, focusing on behaviors that intentionally harm organisational well-being. This expanded perspective acknowledges that employee contributions extend beyond core tasks to include adaptive responses to change and the avoidance of detrimental actions. Thus, contemporary understandings of employee performance recognise its multi-dimensional nature, encompassing task proficiency, contextual contributions, adaptability, and the absence of counterproductive behaviors.

Relationship between WFH Practices and Employee Performance

There is growing empirical evidence demonstrating the influence of work from home (WFH) on employee performance. Survey findings indicate that approximately 30% of employees perceive themselves as substantially more productive when working from home, compared with 45% who report higher productivity in traditional office settings. Notably, remote workers have been found to exhibit productivity levels that are 13% higher than those of office-based employees (O'Hara, 2014). Interestingly, organisational leaders who were

initially skeptical about remote working arrangements have reported unexpected positive outcomes, as documented by Stallard and Stallard (2020). One contributing factor is the ability of remote employees to customise their work environments according to personal preferences. Such autonomy in workspace design is often associated with greater job satisfaction and lower stress levels, thereby creating conditions conducive to sustained high performance (Barros et al., 2021).

Evidence from a meta-analysis of 130 studies further supports this relationship, revealing a small yet statistically significant positive association between WFH and productivity (Jayanandana & Jayathilaka, 2023). Although the magnitude of the effect is modest, the findings suggest that WFH can generate favourable performance outcomes. In particular, voluntary WFH arrangements appear more effective in promoting employee well-being and performance, largely due to enhanced flexibility and a higher degree of perceived autonomy (Saridakis et al., 2023). Additionally, effective utilisation of information and communication technologies, combined with a well-structured home office environment, has been shown to positively influence teleworkers' job performance (Saridakis et al., 2023).

WFH arrangements have also been linked to increased employee motivation through improvements in work–life balance. Enhanced balance between professional and personal responsibilities has been associated with reduced turnover intentions and stronger organisational commitment, as employees perceive greater organisational support and trust (Mohamed et al., 2024). The flexibility afforded by WFH enables individuals to manage family obligations, minimise commuting time, and limit workplace interruptions. Collectively, these factors contribute to improved personal well-being, which subsequently enhances work engagement and performance (Sharip et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on WFH, prior research has predominantly concentrated on outcomes such as work-life balance, burnout, and occupational prestige. Consequently, empirical research on the direct link between WFH and employee performance warranting further attention. As such, a more nuanced understanding of how WFH influences employee performance is crucial for advancing both theory and managerial practice.

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to examine whether WFH leads to higher levels of employee performance. A quantitative and cross-sectional research design is employed, and data are collected using a structured questionnaire developed to obtain reliable and relevant information for the investigation. The target population of this study comprises 250 active employees working in Asiacell, a private-sector organisation operating in the Kurdistan Region. Asiacell was selected due to its continued implementation of WFH even after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as its large workforce.

The population size for this study is 250 respondents. Based on the sample size determination table by Morgan and Krejcie (1970), a population of 250 requires a sample size of 152 respondents. Accordingly, the sample size for this study is 152, and a convenience sampling technique was employed. Data were collected anonymously using a survey questionnaire adapted. The questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms. It consisted of

several sections covering demographic information (such as age and marital status) as well as items measuring WFH practices and employee performance.

The measurement of WFH practices was adapted from the framework proposed by Gajendran and Harrison (2007). Employee performance was assessed using the scale developed by Koopmans et al. (2014). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The collected data were analysed using a quantitative approach. Statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to organise and analyse the data in a systematic and reliable manner. Correlational analysis was used to examine the relationship between work from home (WFH) and employee performance.

Research Findings

This section presents the findings of this study. All respondents completed the questionnaire, and all items were answered in full. In terms of demographic characteristics, most participants (55.9%) were married, while 44.1% were single or divorced. Additionally, the majority of respondents were between 33 and 37 years of age. Overall, most respondents agreed that working from home enhances employee performance and provides greater flexibility. Correlation analysis indicated a significant positive association between WFH practices and employee performance. The Pearson correlation coefficient was $r = 0.67$, with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, reflecting a strong relationship in accordance with the criteria outlined by Pallant (2013). These findings suggest that the adoption of WFH practices is strongly associated with higher levels of employee performance.

Table 4.1

Pearson's Correlation

Work-from-home Practices	Employee Performance	
	r	p
	0.669**	<0.001

*Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed): N=152

Discussion, Limitations, and Recommendations

Discussion on the Relationship Between WFH and Employee Performance

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between WFH practices and employee performance. Understanding this connection is critical for organisations aiming to enhance productivity in remote work settings. Correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between WFH and employee performance, suggesting that increased engagement in WFH practices is closely linked to higher employee performance levels. This strong correlation highlights the practical importance of WFH strategies for organisational success, demonstrating that remote work arrangements can meaningfully influence employee outcomes.

WFH provides multiple advantages for employees that likely contribute to this positive relationship. These include greater flexibility in scheduling, reduced commuting time, and the ability to work in a familiar and comfortable environment. Such conditions help employees concentrate better, minimise distractions, and improve overall efficiency. Employees who can

tailor their work environment and schedule to their personal preferences often report higher motivation, job satisfaction, and engagement, which in turn supports improved performance.

Nevertheless, remote work is not without challenges. Employees may experience feelings of isolation, struggle with maintaining work-life balance, or encounter technological and communication barriers that hinder their productivity. The findings of this study suggest that organisations can strengthen the positive effects of WFH and mitigate its challenges by implementing targeted strategies. These include establishing clear goals, providing necessary resources and technical support, promoting work-life balance initiatives, encouraging employee engagement programs, and maintaining robust communication channels.

Furthermore, the strength of the correlation ($r = 0.67$) indicates that while WFH has a substantial positive impact on performance, it should be complemented by supportive organisational practices to maximise outcomes. Regular performance assessments and feedback mechanisms are essential for monitoring effectiveness and making adjustments as needed. By addressing both the benefits and potential challenges of WFH, organisations can foster a productive, supportive, and sustainable remote work environment that enhances employee performance and contributes to overall organisational success.

The positive effects of WFH can be explained through theoretical perspectives. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), for instance, posits that employee motivation and performance are enhanced when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their work (Deci & Ryan, 2000). WFH inherently provides greater autonomy by allowing employees to manage their own schedules and work environments. This autonomy can increase intrinsic motivation, which is closely associated with higher engagement, focus, and productivity, supporting the strong positive relationship observed in this study.

Limitations and Recommendations

Several challenges were encountered during the study. First, obtaining accurate data on home-based employees in the service sector proved difficult, as available records only included total employees in the sector, which may not reflect the target population. Second, time constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic limited data collection, as contacting participants and obtaining responses became more challenging. Third, the study focused on employees across various roles at Asiacell in Kurdistan, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other job positions or organisations with different company cultures.

To maximise productivity and sustain high levels of performance in remote work environments, organisations should adopt a comprehensive set of strategies. First, it is essential to establish clear communication channels and well-defined goals. Clear expectations and regular updates enable employees to understand their responsibilities, stay aligned with team objectives, and reduce misunderstandings that may arise in a virtual setting. Consistent communication also fosters a sense of connection and collaboration among remote teams.

Second, organisations should provide supportive work conditions, including ergonomic office setups and access to reliable technology. Ensuring that employees have the necessary tools

and equipment helps minimise physical strain, prevent technical disruptions, and maintain efficiency while working remotely.

Promoting flexibility and work-life balance is another critical factor. Employees should have the ability to structure their schedules in a way that accommodates personal and professional responsibilities, while organisations should encourage clear boundaries between work hours and personal time. Such practices not only reduce burnout but also enhance motivation and overall job satisfaction, aligning with principles of self-determination theory, which emphasises autonomy and competence as drivers of employee engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Finally, organisations can further enhance remote work effectiveness by fostering employee engagement. This may include virtual team-building activities, online social events, and collaborative platforms that encourage interaction and connection among employees. Engagement initiatives help sustain a sense of community, support knowledge sharing, and promote teamwork despite physical distance.

To be effective, these practices should be regularly evaluated and adapted based on feedback, changing work conditions, and evolving employee needs. By implementing a holistic and dynamic approach, organisations can create a remote work environment that supports both employee well-being and high performance, ultimately contributing to long-term organisational success.

Conclusion

The findings of this study, including the strong positive correlation between WFH and employee performance, highlight the substantial potential of remote work to enhance productivity when effectively implemented. To realise these benefits, organisations must approach remote work strategically, with careful planning, clear communication, and ongoing evaluation. Implementing supportive measures, such as providing necessary resources, facilitating virtual collaboration, offering training and development, promoting employee well-being, and recognizing achievements can help mitigate the challenges of remote work and strengthen employee engagement. Regular monitoring, feedback mechanisms, and performance evaluations are essential to ensure that remote work arrangements continue to support high levels of performance and contribute to overall organisational success. By integrating practical strategies with a theoretical understanding of motivation and job resources, organisations can create a remote work environment that not only sustains productivity but also fosters employee satisfaction and long-term growth.

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