



The Changing Nature of Work due to COVID-19

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Centre for Research on Inclusion at Work (CRIW)

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1

Researching During Crisis

Plan:

- Interview up to 30 Canadians working from home (WFH) due to COVID-19
- Interview as many of them as possible *at least* once more
- 2 researchers + 1 PhD candidate
- Successive waves of social media recruitment

Actual:

- Over 60 responses in 48 hours (deleted all recruitment posts)
- 2 researchers + 1 PhD candidate + 4 RAs
- Bi-weekly virtual team discussions
- 56 interviews (round 1)
- 39 interviews (round 2)



2

Resources and Team

Funding

- *CR/W* Ignite!
- Carleton University COVID-19 Rapid Research Response

Team

- Linda Schweitzer, Sprott School of Business, Carleton University
- Sean Lyons, Lang School of Business, University of Guelph
- Kat Lauch (PhD Candidate), Sprott School of Business, Carleton University
- Sophia Krystek (MSc Candidate), Sprott School of Business, Carleton University
- Jen Kostuchuk (MA Candidate), University of Victoria
- Rachel Barton-Bridges (MA Candidate), University of Victoria
- Kelly MacDonald (PhD Candidate), Lang School of Business, University of Guelph

3

We wanted to explore:

1. How the current situation changes how people envision and navigate work during the pandemic and moving forward.
2. The current challenges (and benefits) associated with remote work during the pandemic
3. The potential challenges and benefits of remote work in the future
4. How the integration of roles affects work and home
- ~~5. How the current situation is reflected in professional identities and career expectations~~

4

Sensemaking in Crisis – Seeking Normal

Our participants were engaging in sensemaking to reconstruct their work lives wrt: how, when, and where to work as well as the integration of roles

Weick (1993): sensemaking in a cosmology episode

Faced with a crisis situation, individuals seek to re-establish a sense of order in the midst of perceived chaos. Genuis & Bronstein (2017): seeking normal

Two broad themes emerged:

- Seeking the old normal: yearning for or replicating usual ways of work (backward focussed)
- Seeking a new normal: perceiving advantages/opportunities or adapting to new ways to work (forward focussed)

Weick (1993): rather than recruiting/training/rewarding for competence within the system, organizations should develop skills in improvisation and bricolage - a crisis/disruption is “normal natural trouble”

5

Behind the (shower) Curtain

Our participants seemed appreciative of the opportunity to share their experiences

The interview experience mirrored the blurring of boundaries between home and other realms

Interviews led to rapport and felt almost intimate

Most notably, participants spontaneously shared beyond our interview scope:

- Showing the outputs of new hobbies, touring workspaces, noting what they are wearing, sharing personal situations – both good and bad
- Second round interviews led to a feeling of “catching up” (the same interviewer did the second interview)

The blurring of boundaries for both interviewer and interviewee seemed organic and may have implications for the future – both positive and negative

6

Work-Life Integration

Both positive and negative aspects to extreme integration of work and home

Work ⇌ Home:

- Most appreciated the flexibility to work wherever and ability to control workspace
 - Some noted the lack of space or need to keep work spaces separate/impersonal
- Many noted challenge in mentally separating work from personal life

Home ⇌ Work:

- Many appreciated fitting personal tasks into usual work hours or breaks
 - Some made efforts to keep the work realm separate
- Perception of embracing humanity of coworkers
 - Some worried that their home personal life was exposed
- Parents noted the need for childcare/school to make integration viable

Overall, the integration itself was surprisingly positive but had some negative aspects. Need for flexibility, choice and control over the integration.

7

Not Another Day at The Office

Makeshift approach - trial and error wrt workspaces, technology, schedules, sharing spaces

Challenges:

- Extreme blending work and personal realms (space, schedule, psychological, roles)
- Social isolation
- Very few noted productivity/work outcome challenges

Benefits:

- Flexibility of work schedule
- Time and money saved - no commute and homemade snacks and lunches
- Increased productivity and creativity
- Enjoyed the opportunity to tend to personal tasks or take "real" breaks

Overall, almost all settled in to WFH relatively quickly – second round suggested little had changed

Most of our participants aspire to a future with at least some aspect of WFH - many noted the "proof of concept"

8



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9

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10