

# Exploring Work from Home Experiences: A Study of Information Technology-Business Process Outsourcing Employees in Makati City during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:-** The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed how companies operated. Among the changes introduced to the workplace is the Work from Home (WFH) arrangement. Although many industries have long practiced WFH, it is not commonly considered in the Information Technology (IT) sector because of its high-level IT requirement. This paper explored the experiences of employees in the Business Process Outsourcing – IT sector in Makati through a phenomenological qualitative approach. The results revealed that the employees' experiences relate to the following: 1) initial impression about working from home, 2) readiness to work from home, 3) gains from working from home, 4) lessons from remote work set-up for communication, 5) adequacy of company support, 6) employees' mental well-being, and 7) conduciveness of home as the new workplace. These experiences are useful information in crafting interventions to consider WFH as an arrangement that can be considered post-pandemic.

**Keywords:-** Work from home, pandemic, COVID 19, employee experiences, new normal.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Global pandemics and disease outbreaks have been a constant threat to humanity throughout history, causing immense devastation. One of the deadliest pandemics, the Spanish Influenza flu virus, swept across the world in the first quarter of 1918. Fast forward a century and another pandemic of similar impact struck the world with the emergence of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in December 2019, first recorded in Wuhan, China [1]. The virus quickly spread across the globe, reaching the Philippines, among many other countries.

To contain the spread of the virus, particularly in Metro Manila, one of the Philippines' most densely populated regions, the government implemented a complete lockdown, or Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), which began on March 15, 2020. The implementation of community quarantines, lockdowns, and stay-at-home orders, not only in the Philippines but also in other countries such as the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and India, has resulted in a "new normal" work setup called "Work from Home" (WFH), forcing most employees to adapt.

WFH continued to be widely used even in 2021, despite the availability of COVID-19 vaccines for administration. Due to the limited availability of vaccines and the continuing threat of the virus, mass inoculation of a significant portion of the population was still not possible, making the WFH set up in the Philippines a necessity. Given that the WFH setup has become the "new normal" despite the vaccine's availability, it is relevant to examine employees' shared experiences of working from home.

Although previous studies have explored the WFH setup, few have investigated the shared experience of working from home during a pandemic, particularly in the context of the Philippines. Furthermore, the studies conducted in the Philippines on WFH during the pandemic have primarily focused on other industries or standalone topics, such as the education industry, employee productivity, stress, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Although there are shared challenges across industries, exploring the experiences of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, particularly the Information Technology sector, is noteworthy due to their high-level IT infrastructure requirement. Learning from their experiences can provide valuable insights into how the WFH setup can be adapted even beyond the pandemic.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The researcher utilized an interpretivist philosophical worldview to guide the research methods employed in this study. Interpretivism holds that reality can be accessed or understood through social constructions such as shared meanings and consciousness [2]. This worldview emphasizes gaining an individual's interpretation and understanding of the world they inhabit [3]. In this study, the researcher sought to comprehend and extract meanings from a phenomenon through the direct experiences of individuals who had undergone it. The interpretivist approach placed emphasis on data collection via interviews and observations, with the extraction of meanings occurring at the end of the research process (Business Research Methodology, n.d.). The researcher employed a qualitative research design, particularly the phenomenological approach.

This study utilized a phenomenological approach to investigate the perspective of individuals who previously worked in Makati City before the COVID-19 pandemic and their experiences of working from home from March 2020. Phenomenology was employed to explore the phenomena of working from home and to identify commonalities in the shared experiences of individuals. By employing this approach, the researcher was able to gain insight into the positive and negative effects of working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, as represented in the participants' shared experiences.

The researcher utilized Colaizzi's approach, which is a subset of descriptive phenomenology belonging to the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research is appropriate when extensive data is needed to understand the unique experiences of a group [4]. Phenomenological investigations enable researchers to obtain evidence that provides a clear understanding of an individual's lived experience and the significance of the phenomena being experienced [5]. Therefore, by using Colaizzi's approach in this study, the researcher aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the shared experiences of individuals working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For this study, a purposive sampling technique was used to select participants, with the snowball sampling method employed to expand the sample size. Purposive sampling is a commonly used method in qualitative research that allows for selecting information-rich participants with direct experience with the phenomenon of interest [6]. To begin the snowball sampling process, the researcher first identified one to three primary participants who met the inclusion criteria. These primary participants were then asked to suggest other potential participants who also met the criteria. The researcher then used purposive sampling to select individuals who fit the study's profile, while excluding those who did not [7].

The inclusion criteria for the participants are as follows: 1) employees were working in an office location in Makati City before the pandemic, 2) employees spent at least eight hours of work on a five-day work week at their office location before the pandemic, 3) Employees stopped working at an office as an option or as required by their company due to the rising cases of COVID-19 or community lockdown in March 2020, 4) Employees spend at least eight hours of work on a five-day work week at their home during the pandemic, 5) Employees' nature of work provides services as covered under the Information Technology-Business Process Outsourcing (IT-BPO) industry, specifically, as software support representative or software consultants, 6) have been in the Information Technology-Business Process Outsourcing (IT-BPO) industry for a combined experience of at least six (6) months to one (1) year starting March 2020, 7) living type is in a house or apartment with family member/s, and 8) currently working from home for a year but with office physical location within Makati City.

The number of interview participants is a crucial consideration in qualitative research. In this study, a total of 10 interviewees were considered. Accordingly, two to ten participants were sufficient to achieve saturation of the study participants. An extensive interview of up to 10 participants in a phenomenological study is also recommended [8]. The ten (10) participants that met the inclusion criteria consisted of eight (8) females and two (2) males. They were equally distributed into five (5) software support representatives and five (5) software consultants, all single, and employees of Makati based companies with an actual physical location in the Makati area and were working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview with these participants was also coded in the transcript using code names I1, I2, I3, and so forth, which were based on their interview sequence.

The researcher played the critical role of capturing the lived experiences of the participants and presenting them as shared experiences. To ensure the study's credibility and maintain objectivity, the researcher avoided any preconceived biases that could have influenced the study's outcome. The researcher proactively sought to comprehend the participants' experiences through a rigorous inquiry process, which helped to establish a comprehensive understanding of the participants' shared experiences.

To prevent potential biases from creeping into the study, the researcher took appropriate steps such as hiring an external interviewer to conduct the interviews and followed Colaizzi's step-by-step phenomenological process thoroughly. These measures helped to maintain the study's validity and prevent any biases that could have arisen from a qualitative type of research engagement.

Throughout the study, paramount importance was given to ethical considerations. To ensure the participants' autonomy and informed consent, confirmation of their participation was obtained through a consent form that clearly stated their voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any point if they felt the need to do so. Data confidentiality was a top priority, particularly during the collection and handling of interviewees' data. Stringent measures were implemented to protect the participants' privacy. All identifying information, such as names, was replaced with pseudonyms or code names to ensure anonymity and prevent any possibility of tracing the data back to specific individuals. Given that interviews were conducted online, interviewees were explicitly informed about the recording process. And that the recording shall only be accessed by the researcher. These were put in place to safeguard the participants' rights, maintain confidentiality, and ensure the study's adherence to ethical guidelines throughout the entire research process.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study participants collectively provided valuable insights and lessons from their shared experiences, which emerged because of the sudden transition from office-based work to remote work. Over time, it became evident that the participants' initial impressions about working from home underwent a transformation. Their evolving perspectives and reflections are effectively captured through direct quotes from the interviewees, denoted by interview codes such as I1, I2, I3, and so forth, reflecting the order of the interviews conducted.

There were seven (7) themes that emerged from their shared experiences, they include 1) Initial Impression about working from home, 2) Readiness to Work from Home, 3) Gains from Working from Home, 4) Lessons from Remote Work Set-Up for Communication, 5) Adequacy of Company Support, 6) Employees' Mental Well-Being, and 7) Conduciveness of Home as the New Workplace.

#### A. Initial Impression About Working from Home

Study participants have their own initial impression when the work from home setup was initially communicated to them by their respective companies. These initial impressions were employee retention, impossibility of work from home setup, period of WFH set-up, which is only for a short period of time, feeling of excitement, and feeling of relief.

##### ➤ Employee Retention

The transition to remote work instilled a sense of security among the study participants, as it enabled them to maintain their work commitments despite the limitations imposed by the need to be physically present in the office. The work from home arrangement during the pandemic reassured the participants that their companies possessed the resilience to sustain their business operations:

"Honestly, sa work namin is hindi, cause the company is really strong." [Honestly, not in our work, because the company is really strong.] - I9

"Actually, di ko naisip yung mawalan ng trabaho..." [Actually, I didn't think about losing my job...] - I9

"Tapos ayun, thankfully parang yung nature ng work ko is super essential sa mga businesses. Wala kaming, walang parang hindi mo naramdaman na may, nag slow down yung business namin kasi parang mas lumaki pa nga eh." [After that, thankfully, it seems like the nature of my work is very essential to businesses. We don't have anything, we don't seem to feel like our business has slowed down because it seems to have grown even more.] - I9

Employers or managers also provided assurance as to the absence of lay-off with working from home in place to keep the corporate activities going:

"Tapos sabi niya wala pa daw natatanggal, tapos parang complacent na ako na hindi ako matatanggal, kahit anong setup." [Then he said no one has been dismissed, and I felt complacent that I would not be dismissed, no matter what the setup.] - I4

Employees expressed concerns about job security, but the participants in this study held a different perspective. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, they did not perceive any threat to their job stability. While various industries experienced business decline and even closures, the companies in the IT-BPO sector where the participants were employed not only survived but thrived by leveraging technology to sustain their business activities.

##### ➤ Impossibility of Work from Home Set-Up

In the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak in Metro Manila, the idea of working from home was not even on the radar for employees. This is due to the usual office setup of five workdays a week established from the beginning of their work with their companies and with work tools being fixed in the employees' respective working stations. Since employees were also dealing with clients' data, VPN (a virtual private network) or proxy servers were used and accessible only within the office premises.

"...pinapa-work from home kami for the first time ever dun sa company kasi never sila nagpapawork from home ng support" [We were asked to work from home for the first time ever in the company because they never allowed for support to work from home.] - I1

"For the work from home, actually didn't cross my mind at first, because the company doesn't let us work from home. So we usually leave our laptops, and then it's not really an option for us initially. There was no option for us representatives to take our laptops home." - I2

"...di ko rin naisip yung work from home." [I also didn't think about working from home.] - I9

The WFH arrangement was deemed implausible [9]. This suggests that the concept of working from home had not been explored as a viable work arrangement within the participants' companies in the IT-BPO industry. Notably, there was no existing company policy indicating the availability of a WFH setup for employees.

##### ➤ Short-term Work Arrangement

Upon the communication of the WFH setup to employees, the initial belief was that it would be a temporary arrangement, lasting only for a few weeks or at most a month. The notion of a WFH setup enduring for an entire year was not initially considered.

"Tapos naisip ko parang, ano lang man siguro ito, at most, one or two months." [Then I thought, this would be like, at most, one or two months.] - I1

"Yun talaga like two weeks lang yung nasa isip ko...I realized that it may be longer than two weeks, parang maybe a month, two months

maximum siguro. I did not imagine it would take this long.” [It's really only two weeks in my mind... I realized that it may be longer than two weeks, like maybe a month, two months maximum, I didn't imagine it would take this long.] -I6

“Actually, ayun nga expectation ko, parang di siya magtatagal, so dun lang ko sa dining table namin.” (I7) [Actually, that's my expectation. It looks like it won't last long, so I'm just there at our dining table.] - I7

Initially, employees anticipated a brief WFH arrangement, many opted to maintain their apartment or condo rentals in Makati City and subsequently returned to their hometowns in the province. Consequently, they only brought the necessary tools and equipment essential for remote work, operating under the assumption that they would eventually be able to resume office-based work. However, the unfolding of unforeseen circumstances resulted in offices remaining closed indefinitely, contrary to their expectations.

The anticipation of a short-term WFH setup aligns with the expectations of many individuals who believed that the impact of the pandemic would only last for a few months [10]. This indicates that the possibility of a prolonged pandemic and the need for a long-term work arrangement was not initially considered. At the outset of the pandemic, there was an optimistic hope that the situation would be resolved swiftly, enabling a quick return to normalcy without extensive planning for sustained remote work.

#### ➤ *Feeling of Excitement*

The WFH setup, implemented for a five-day workweek during the COVID-19 pandemic, represented a novel experience of significant magnitude for the participants. Having been accustomed to commuting to an office location every weekday, the introduction of a WFH arrangement elicited a sense of excitement among them. This excitement stemmed from the realization that the elimination of travel hours for commuting and reduced preparation time afforded them more freedom and efficiency in starting their work each day.

"Actually na-excite ako kasi work from home nga, so ano ako, pwede ako magwork nang naka-shorts, nang komportable" [Actually I was excited because of the work from home set up, so I was like, I can work 112 wearing shorts, comfortably.] - I1

"Oo, parang excited pa at first sabi ko, "yes, work from home," ganyan. Sabi ko pwede pa, mahaba na yung tulog ko talaga." [Yes, I feel excited at first and I said, "Yes, work from home," like that. I said it's okay, I've been getting enough sleep.] - I8

"Oo. Kasi excited ako." [Yes. Because I'm excited.] - I9

Initially, many felt excited about the WFH arrangement [11]. The transition to a WFH setup introduced a fresh sense and experience for employees, which initially generated a strong feeling of excitement. They eagerly looked forward to the unique opportunities and benefits that working from home offered. However, as the WFH arrangement prolonged, this initial excitement gradually diminished or subsided over time.

#### ➤ *Feeling of Relief*

The WFH setup brought a sense of relief to the study participants.

“So yun, medyo nakaka-paranoid that time kasi ang daming, hindi mo maiiwasang makipag-interact with people like makakasalubong mo talaga siya, walang social distancing or anything...it was nice for the company to implement or to recommend like a work from home scenario, right before the lockdown ha.” [That's it, that time, I got quite paranoid. because there were so many, you couldn't help but interact with people like you could meet them, no social distancing or anything ... it was nice for the company to implement or to recommend as a work from home scenario, right before the lockdown.] - I6

"So at least now it's good to know na hindi kami pinipilit ng company na talagang pumasok sa office kasi we kind of feel safer in our own homes, ganyan." [So at least now it's good to know that the company doesn't force us to enter the office because we kind of feel safer in our own homes, that way.] - I8

"Tapos di ka na magwo-worry about face mask, and all that." [Then you don't have to worry about face masks and all that.] - I9

The WFH setup significantly reduced the participants' sense of paranoia associated with commuting to and from the office, especially considering the crowded and bustling nature of Makati City's business district. Interacting with many employees and navigating the busy streets and public transportation added to their concerns. However, with the shift to remote work, these anxieties related to daily travel and potential exposure were alleviated.

The WFH setup implemented by companies effectively served its purpose in mitigating the spread of the virus. It demonstrated its effectiveness as a suitable work arrangement for the companies of the study participants during the pandemic. By enabling employees to work remotely, it provided crucial assistance, protection, and an additional layer of safety, minimizing the risk of infection among employees. The WFH setup proved to be an effective measure in safeguarding the well-being of the participants and reducing the potential transmission of the virus within their respective work environments.

### B. Readiness to Work from Home

Study participants went through adjustments and quickly prepare to transition to get them ready towards a WFH setup due to the rising cases of COVID-19 upon the communication of this type of work arrangement in March 2020. These adjustments were important and necessary considering the drastic change applied to their usual status quo [12]. The readiness towards work from home involved getting used to the new normal, WFH dry run, movement of existing office work tools, investment in WFH tools, and reassessing living situations in Metro Manila.

#### ➤ *Adjusting to the New Normal*

The swift implementation of the lockdown in Makati City, enacted by the government to contain the spread of the virus, necessitated an adjustment period for the study participants. For some individuals, this transition to working from home took several months to adapt to. The adjustment period varied among employees, with some finding it challenging to quickly acclimate to the new work environment. Balancing the demands of the remote work setup with the uncertainties brought by the pandemic added to the complexity of the adjustment process.

“dun ako sa sala so inayos ko yung space and yeah kumuha ako ng space, nawalan na ng space yung ibang gamit namin kasi nga gamit ko yung table, ganun.” [I was there in the living room, so I arranged the space and, yeah, I took some space. There is insufficient space for other things because I'm using the table, like that.] - I3

“Ayun, kasi sa customer, normal yun na online. Pero sa team kasi dati before pandemic, nakapagbook kami ng room kapag may meeting, ganun. Ngayon, hindi na, parang online na lang din, parang ayun, adjustment din kasi di naman sanay sa ganun.” [There, because for the customer, it's normal to be in an online setup. But for our team before the pandemic, we were able to book a room when there was a meeting, like that. Now it's not, it's like it's just online, it's like that. I need an adjustment because I'm not used to that.] - I7

The process of adapting to the new normal involved familiarizing oneself with frequent virtual meetings, such as team meetings, as a substitute for face-to-face interactions. As employees became more accustomed to this shift, they experienced a sense of improvement and satisfaction in their daily work routines. Learning and updating their work routines in this new environment contributed to a greater sense of comfort and confidence in navigating the WFH setup.

The adjustment to working from home encompassed not only physical adaptations but also inherent adjustments, including behavioral changes. It required individuals to consciously set their mindset to acknowledge and accept the presence of distractions at home, managing their reactions and maintain focus on work. This innate adjustment was crucial in maintaining productivity and minimizing the impact of potential interruptions.

Furthermore, for extroverted employees accustomed to frequent face-to-face interactions, adapting to a WFH setup involved getting used to increased reliance on chat communication rather than in-person conversations. This transition required a shift in their communication style and finding alternative ways to fulfill their social needs within the remote work environment.

Adjusting to working from home required study participants to engage in open communication with their family members regarding their work hours and the importance of minimizing disruptions during meetings or designated work hours. Since the participants were in the IT-BPO industry, adapting to this new work arrangement also meant navigating the challenges of working alongside family members in the same household.

The adjustment process involved creating a shared understanding of the different work experiences, especially for those working night shifts while family members were sleeping. This included consciously lowering voices, ensuring that family members were aware of participants taking calls during the night, and managing overlapping hours when family members were awake while they were working.

Effectively coordinating with family members and finding ways to establish boundaries within the home environment were essential aspects of successfully adapting to the WFH setup for the study participants and their families.

“medyo mahirap kasi maririnig niya and the nature of our work is calls.” [It's a bit difficult because he can listen and the nature of our work is calls.] - I3

“Pero communication pa din, kasi kailangan mo sa kanila sabihin na kapag nagwo-work ka, most often than not may kausap ka, kung hindi yung client, andiyan yung mag teammates mo, ganun.” [But communication must be there, because you need to tell them that when you work, most often than not, you talk to someone, if not the client, your teammates are there, like that.] - I10

To adapt to the WFH setup, some study participants required approximately six months to learn how to protect and respect their work hours and personal space while at home. This adjustment involved employees disciplining themselves to minimize distractions, such as reducing social media activities during working hours, and maintaining focus on their daily tasks. Although the initial experience of working from home may have been uncomfortable for some, with the passage of time, employees have gradually become more accustomed to this arrangement, having successfully adjusted to working from home for over a year.

The shared experience among the participants underscores the universal need for an adjustment period during the pandemic. There is an expected period of adjustment for employees to adapt to new norms [13]. This collective experience highlights the fact that each employee requires a unique adjustment period when faced with a

significant change to their status quo, such as a shift in work arrangements.

It can be argued that managers should exhibit understanding and empathy towards employees, considering that everyone has a distinct adjustment period when confronted with a drastic change in company activities. Recognizing and accommodating individual differences in adapting to new circumstances can foster a supportive work environment and aid in smoother transitions for employees. By acknowledging and considering the varying adjustment needs of employees, managers can promote a more effective and compassionate approach to change management within the organization.

#### ➤ *WFH Dry Run*

Preparing for the transition to working from home included a dry run or trial of the new work setup. This involves simulating the remote work environment to identify potential challenges, test technology and connectivity, and ensure that all necessary tools and equipment are in place.

"Actually, nag take precaution yung company. Before March 16, siguro one week na yun, nagda-dry run sila ng work from home for supports, so kukuha sila ng sample, siguro di ko lang alam kung 5 support reps ang pinapauwi tapos naka work from home setup." [Actually, the company is taking precautions. Before March 16, maybe it's one week. They're doing a dry run of work from home for support, so they'll take a sample. Maybe I just don't know if 5 support reps were sent home for a work-from-home setup.] Transcript no. 1, Line 223-226, 11

"Actually, there was a pre-testing before the lockdown." - I2

"nagta-try pa lang nung time na yun, nagcomply yung company namin na i-check if kaya na maka-work from home... and then parang ako yung parang one of the first employees na pinili ng company na pwedeng mag work from home." [just trying at that time, our company complied on checking if we could work from home... and then it seemed like I was one of the first employees chosen by the company to work from home.] - I5

"I was first of na personnels na na-assign na lockdown kasi parang Friday, Saturday, Sunday, nagkaroon pa kami ng team building. And then pumasok kami ng Monday, tapos Tuesday, sa buong team namin, parang five or four lang ata na personnels na in-advise na, "okay test na natin if work from home will work per department."" [I was first of the personnel assigned during the lockdown because like Friday, Saturday, Sunday, we even had team building. And then we went in on Monday, then Tuesday, with our whole team, it seemed like only five or four personnel had been advised, "okay, let's test if work from home will work per department.] - I8

To assess the feasibility and identify potential issues related to working from home, some companies took a proactive approach prior to the first lockdown in Makati City. They implemented a gradual transition where selected employees were asked to work from home while others continued to work from their respective offices. This phased approach was designed to prevent causing unnecessary alarm among employees regarding the severity of the situation.

The experience of implementing a WFH dry run highlights the value of such trials in better-preparing organizations for the new normal [14]. Conducting dry runs enables companies to proactively identify and address potential issues before implementing significant changes across all employees. It provides an opportunity to assess the feasibility and practicality of the proposed changes based on the experiences and feedback gathered during the trial period. By conducting dry runs, companies can make informed decisions about the implementation of new processes and consider the impact on employee experience and overall feasibility.

#### ➤ *Transfer of Office Equipment*

As part of the preparation for working from home, employees were required to transfer essential work tools, such as laptops and headsets, to their homes. Personal effects were typically left behind at the office, with employees unable to retrieve these items for over a year into the pandemic.

This arrangement ensured that employees had the necessary tools to effectively carry out their work remotely. By bringing home only the essential work equipment, it helped facilitate a smooth transition to the WFH setup.

However, the prolonged nature of the pandemic meant that employees were unable to access their personal items and effects left at the office for an extended period. This circumstance further emphasized the significant shift in work dynamics and the need to adapt to the new reality imposed by the pandemic.

"ang dinala ko lang is yung laptop ko po. Pero all the other things na meron ako sa yung work station ko po, iniwan ko kasi akala ko mababalikan ko sila pero di na po kaya." [the only thing I brought was my laptop. But all the other things that I have at my workstation, I left because I thought I could get them back but I can't.] Transcript no. 5, Line 185-187, I5

"actually hindi na cause Tuesday I went home, ang dala ko lang talaga is yung mga tools ko, yung laptop and you know, my jabra and charger. So naalala ko, may iba pa akong pagkain like cereals sa pedestal ko and my tumbler, mga notebooks, ganun na lang." [not anymore because on Tuesday I went home, all I brought were my tools, the laptop and you know, my Jabra and charger. So I remember, I have other foods like cereals on my pedestal and my tumbler, notebooks, that's all.] Transcript no. 8, Line 281-284, I8

"Dinala ko lang talaga yung pinaka-essential; yung laptop, eto jabra. Tapos lahat ng essentials, so yung kumot ko iniwanan ko, yung mga, pati yung mga notebook ko na parang cheat ko, char, sinama ko syempre." [I really just brought the most essential; the laptop, the Jabra. 231 Then all the essentials, so I left my blanket, those things, even my notebooks that I use for cheating, char, I took them with me of course.] Transcript no. 9, Line 265-268, I9

The shared experience of study participants emphasizes the importance of employers providing necessary work tools for remote work [15]. This indicates that participants were equipped with the essential tools for working from home even before the pandemic. However, the sudden shift to remote work caught them off guard, necessitating a rapid transition and leaving personal belongings behind at the office.

This experience underscores the significance of preparedness and the need for employers to proactively support employees in remote work setups. While participants had the required work tools, the abruptness of the change in work arrangements posed logistical challenges and required quick adjustments. Recognizing the importance of preparedness and facilitating smoother transitions can contribute to a more successful implementation of remote work initiatives in the future.

#### ➤ *Investment in WFH Tools*

One of the challenges faced by study participants in the WFH setup was the lack of appropriate tools and equipment to create a comfortable working environment. This necessitated employees to invest their own funds in acquiring essential WFH tools such as desks and chairs, which indicated increased the expenditure on WFH equipment [16].

By investing personal expenses in WFH tools, participants aimed to improve their comfort, productivity, and overall well-being while working remotely. These investments highlight the adaptability and resourcefulness of employees in creating a conducive work environment at home.

"hindi ako ganun ka-komportable. So bumili pa ako ng sarili kong desk, and bumili ako ng sarili kong chair" [I'm not that comfortable. So I bought my desk, and I bought my chair.] - I1

"I decided to buy ergo chair at my own costs, medyo mahal which is yung din yung cons dun ng working from home because you need to buy at your own cost na yung mga needs mo sa work from home setup. So I bought the ergo chair, I think it's less than 10,000 and medyo mabigat kasi out of budget ka na eh" [I decided to buy an ergo chair at my own costs, it's a bit expensive which is also the cons of working from home because you need to buy at your own cost what you need to work from home setup. So I bought the ergo chair, I think it's less than 10,000 and it's a bit expensive because you're out of budget.] - I3

"Kasi walang, ako yung parang tipo na matiisin. Yung walang, hangga't di ko na, parang hindi pa siya sagabal sa akin, parang ayoko pa naman, parang hindi ko masyadong minamadali sarili ko. Yung ganung time na syempre ang sakit sa likod beh. Yun, nag decide kami na yun bili na kami para both naman kami gagamit." [Because I'm kind of a patient person. If it seems like it hasn't bothered me yet, or like I still don't want to, I'm not in too much of a hurry myself. That time of course, when your back hurts. We decided that we will buy it so that we can both use it.] - I9

In addition to investing in physical WFH tools, study participants also recognized the importance of investing in a reliable internet connection with higher speed. This was crucial to ensure uninterrupted work and mitigate potential delays caused by slow internet speeds. Participants understood that a stable and fast internet connection was essential for effective communication, collaboration, and accessing online resources. Moreover, participants took proactive measures to secure a backup internet connection in case their main Wi-Fi provider experienced disruptions. This contingency plan helped minimize potential downtime and allowed them to continue working without significant interruptions.

Study participants recognized the importance of creating a dedicated and comfortable workspace at home. However, the establishment of a home office setup did not happen immediately at the onset of the WFH arrangement.

Participants initially hesitated to invest in tools and equipment for their home office setup, as they were uncertain about the duration and long-term viability of the WFH arrangement. However, as the pandemic persisted and the WFH arrangement extended beyond their initial expectations, participants eventually recognized the need for a comfortable and efficient workspace.

"Oo, dun lang. Tapos medyo mahirap nga kasi laging nagagalaw pag kakain. Then parang after ilang months lang ako nagkaroon ng acceptance na parang long-term na talaga to so saka pa lang ako bumili." [Yes, just there. Then, it's a bit difficult because it's always moving when I eat. Then it seemed like after only a few months, I had an acceptance that seemed like it would be long-term, so just then I decided to buy.] Transcript no. 7, Line 252-254, I7

Understanding the importance of creating a productive and comfortable workspace, participants began investing in various items such as desk chairs, tables, extra monitors, and desk mats. These purchases were deemed necessary to adapt their homes into suitable work environments, as residential spaces were not originally designed to accommodate prolonged WFH arrangements. By investing in these WFH tools, participants aimed to enhance their overall productivity, comfort, and well-being while working remotely. These purchases reflected their commitment to

optimizing their work environments and mitigating the challenges associated with remote work.

#### ➤ *Reassessing Living Situations*

The shift to a WFH setup prompted study participants to reassess their living arrangements in Metro Manila. Some participants, originally from nearby provinces, had rented accommodations in the city for the convenience of commuting to their workplaces. However, with the transition to remote work, they faced the decision of whether to continue their lease contracts, terminate them, or return to their hometowns immediately.

The reassessment of living situations highlighted the significant impact of the WFH setup on individuals' choices and lifestyles. It required careful deliberation and consideration of personal circumstances, ultimately leading to decisions that best suited the participants' needs and preferences during this new normal.

"Naisip ko rin paano na rin yung lease ko sa Makati kasi bago lang din ako nun. Sabi ko, "matutuloy ba yun? Iho-hold ba nila yung payment for the next four or five months?" kasi kaka-sign ko lang ng lease nun for 6 months" [I also thought about my lease in Makati because I was new there. I said, "Will that continue? Will they hold the payment for the next four or five months?" because I just signed a lease for 6 months.] - I1

So yung dorm ko sa Makati, I left my things there at my dorm and then nagbabayad ako monthly until July because I think July, medyo MGCQ na nun pwede na magbye but with a complete documents. And yun, sabi ko i-end ko na yung dorm ko." [So my dorm is in Makati, I left my things there at my dorm and then I pay monthly until July because I think July, it was already MGCQ and I can travel but with complete documents. And that, I said I will not continue my dorm.] - I3

"Tapos di ko ine-expect talaga na magtatagal siya yun, so medyo hassle pa kasi nagru-run pa rin yung rent, ganun pa ata eh, then akala ko, parang mabilis lang pero tumagal nang tumagal." [Then, I don't expect it to last that long, so it's a bit of a hassle because the rent is still running, that's how it is. Then I thought, it seems like it will be over soon, but it took a long time.] - I7

Given the uncertainty surrounding the duration of the WFH arrangement, some study participants initially chose to retain their rental accommodations in Metro Manila while returning to their hometowns. They opted to maintain their lease contracts, hoping for a swift return to the office and a resumption of their regular work routines. However, as time went on and it became apparent that the WFH setup would last longer than initially expected, participants reconsidered their decisions.

As the months passed, study participants began to realize that the new normal was likely to extend beyond the originally anticipated short-term period. This realization prompted them to reassess their living arrangements and make more informed choices. Some participants eventually decided to terminate their lease contracts, recognizing that continuing to pay rent for a place they no longer needed for daily office commutes was no longer practical or cost-effective.

The shift to a WFH setup has indeed presented the participants with the opportunity to return to their hometowns. Prior to the pandemic, many employees had to leave their hometowns and relocate to urban areas in search of employment opportunities. However, the WFH arrangement has eliminated the need for physical presence in an office, enabling employees to work remotely from the comfort of their hometowns.

This newfound flexibility has allowed participants to reconnect with their roots, enjoy the familiarity and support of their families, and experience a better work-life balance. By eliminating the necessity of relocating or commuting long distances for work, employees can now reside in their hometowns while still fulfilling their professional responsibilities. This shift has not only provided convenience and reduced financial burdens but has also contributed to a sense of well-being and overall satisfaction among the participants.

Overall, the transition to working from home has not only provided the participants with the opportunity to return to their hometowns but has also reshaped the traditional notion of work and opened doors to a more flexible and inclusive work culture.

#### *C. Gains From Working from Home*

The WFH setup has brought several benefits that the study participants have enjoyed during their remote work experience. One significant advantage is the increased autonomy they have over their work. Without the need for constant supervision or in-person collaboration, employees have had the freedom to manage their tasks and schedules in a way that best suits their productivity and preferences. Another notable benefit is the potential for net monetary savings. Furthermore, the WFH setup has provided participants with extra free hours outside of their work responsibilities.

#### ➤ *Autonomy with Work*

The implementation of the WFH setup granted employees a greater degree of autonomy [17]. However, during the initial stages of this transition, some managers exhibited a tendency to micro-manage their teams, which subsequently led to employees feeling overwhelmed by excessive supervision. It is important to note that one of the benefits of remote work is the increased trust and autonomy bestowed upon employees, allowing them to take ownership of their work and exercise their professional judgment.



“Actually, nung mga first months parang nagkakaroon kami ng huddle na medyo nakakasakal din, pero nag tone down, naging once a week nalang. Yun, so parang may guidance pa rin naman kasi nagmi-meeting...kasi parang micro-managing, nagche-check lahat ng ginagawa...” [Actually, in the first months we seemed to have a huddle that was also a bit strangling, but it toned down, it turned to be once a week. So it looks like there is still guidance because we have meetings ... because it looks like micro-managing, checking everything that is done...] - I7

As time progressed, participants experienced a gradual reduction in strict supervision, allowing them to exercise greater autonomy in their work [18]. This newfound autonomy extended beyond work hours and encompassed various aspects of their daily routine.

Working from home provided participants with the flexibility to manage their work hours according to their preferences and personal needs. They were able to schedule breaks, including bathroom breaks and mealtimes, without the constraints typically associated with an office setup. This increased control over their time allowed participants to create a healthier work-life balance and engage in self-care practices throughout the day.

“...and may nakabantay sayo na, uy bawal matulog sa shift mo. So nung pandemic, walang pumipigil sa akin. So may times talaga, aminado naman ako, nakatulog ako. So hindi ko sinasadya na napasobra yung tulog ko dahil nagko-cope up ako sa, nasa bahay ako, cozy feeling ko, so hindi napigilan nakatulog ako.” [... and someone is watching you, hey, you're not allowed to sleep on your shift. So during the pandemic, no one stopped me. So there are times, I admit, I fell asleep. So I didn't mean that I slept too much because I was coping up with, I was at home, I was feeling cozy, so I couldn't help but fall asleep.] - I2

"yun lang talaga yung medyo bago ngayon kasi you'll have much time on yourself or maybe it is a very flexible one and walang masyadong nakatingin sayo, or nagmamanage sayo, or iche-check" [that's the only thing that's a bit new now because you'll have a lot of time on yourself or maybe it's a very flexible one and no one is looking at you too much, or managing or checking on you.] - I3

"Ano kasi pag nasa office, wala akong magagawang iba kundi mag work, nakakahiya namang mag cellphone ka or manood ka ng Netflix habang nagwo-work, nasa malapit lang yung mga supervisor mo, manager mo. Eh pag sa bahay kasi, parang yun yung temptation kapag wala akong bantay." [Because when I'm in the office, I can't do anything but work. It's embarrassing to use your cellphone or watch Netflix while working. Your supervisors or managers are just nearby. It's a

temptation when I'm at home, when no one is checking on me.] - I10

The WFH setup introduced a level of flexibility and freedom for employees in managing their work, unlike the more restricted environment of the office. In a traditional office setting, employees are often subject to observation and scrutiny, which can limit their actions and decision-making. Working from home, however, offers employees greater autonomy in how they approach and execute their tasks. They have the freedom to structure their workday, prioritize assignments, and choose the most suitable methods to complete their work. This increased flexibility can lead to enhanced productivity and job satisfaction.

While some companies may consider implementing monitoring or tracking software to monitor remote employees, it is important to approach this cautiously. Such measures can potentially undermine trust and create cultural issues within the organization [19]. Constant monitoring can create a sense of surveillance and hinder employee autonomy, which may negatively impact morale and engagement.

Trust and autonomy in remote work arrangements are important [18]. Encouraging a culture of trust and giving employees the freedom to manage their work without excessive monitoring can foster a positive work environment and maintain healthy relationships between managers and their teams.

#### ➤ *Increased Savings*

During the WFH setup, study participants experienced both reduced and increased expenses, resulting in net savings for many of them over time. There were certain expenses that increased because of working from home. These included higher electricity bills due to increased usage, additional expenses for internet upgrades or backup connections, and investments in home office equipment and furniture.

“mas mahal yung pa-deliver kapag naka work from home ka, kasi unlike sa office na diretso ka nalang sa canteen or dun ka sa mas mura sa food court ayan. So mas naging costly ako pagdating sa food.” [it's more expensive to deliver orders when you work from home because unlike in the office, you go straight to the canteen or you go to the cheaper ones in the food court. So I became more costly when it comes to food.] Transcript no. 2, Line 798-801, I2

“yung electricity na ginagamit mo sa laptop mo is medyo mahal din.” [the electricity you use on your laptop is also quite expensive.] Transcript no. 3, Line 475-476, I3

nagko-commute ako before, sobrang laki ng bayad ko sa grab. Kung di nga lang napunta sa Shopee yun, makakapag save talaga ako. Pero yun nga nakabili naman ng konting stuff na parang halos same thing lang.” [I commute before, I paid too much for the grab. If it hadn't gone to Shopee, I

would have been able to save. But that's what I bought a little bit of stuff that looks like it's almost the same thing.] Transcript no. 5, Line 1349-1352, I5

Despite these increased expenses, the overall net savings for study participants were still positive, primarily due to the significant reduction in commuting and related costs. Working from home eliminated or greatly reduced expenses associated with daily transportation, such as fuel costs, toll fees, and public transportation fares. Some also saved from the cost of rent because they opted to go home to their provinces.

“Ayun, may mga gastos na nawala at may gastos na nadagdag so overall...siya pero I can say na mas...yung mga prior na gastos ko dati, parang mas malaki pa rin yung dating gastos. So mas nakaipon ako ngayon.” [Well, some costs have been lost and some costs have been added so overall... but I can say that more ... my prior expenses before, it seems like the previous costs are still bigger. So I have more savings now.] Transcript no. 7, Line 984-987, I7

“I was able to save tapos mas malaki yung savings ko ngayon kesa before.” [I was able to save and then my savings are bigger now than before.] Transcript no. 10, Line 1561-1562, I10

Initially, there may be additional costs associated with setting up a WFH environment, such as purchasing necessary equipment and tools. These costs are typically borne by the employees themselves.

However, over time, participants were able to reap financial benefits and achieve savings while working from home. This was primarily due to the reduction in commuting and associated expenses, such as transportation costs, parking fees, and eating out. By eliminating these daily expenses, participants were able to accumulate savings.

#### ➤ *More Free Time*

Working from home gave study participants extra time and flexibility in their daily schedules. The absence of commuting allowed them to reclaim those hours for personal activities and self-improvement. As a result, they engaged in learning new skills, taking care of themselves through activities like yoga or exercise, and pursuing personal interests. This increased "me" time and focus on self-care contributed to their personal fulfillment and overall well-being.

Moreover, the absence of time constraints in preparing for work in the morning meant that participants had more free hours to do as they pleased. They were not bound by the need to get ready and commute to the office, allowing for a more relaxed and flexible start to their day.

“So mas naging ano siya, mas naging free yung pag handle ko sa sarili ko. So wala nang constraint ng time. So positive, so more time to sleep, which is good.” [So the more it became, the freer I was able to handle myself. So there's no more time constraint. So positive, so more time to sleep, which is good.] - I2

“...may mga bagay na hindi ko magagawa before na like yung pagyo-yoga ko, there's something na yung tipong di ko pa nagagawa before, ngayon lang ako nakapag make time.” [... there are things I can't do before like my yoga, there's something that I haven't done before, only now have I been able to make time.] - I5

“Siguro kasi mas maraming time mag-isip kasi nasa bahay ka lang, and parang yun lang, mas more time with yourself...siguro mas better ngayon syempre yun nakakapag-skin care na ako. May time na kumpara dati na yung may commute time ka pa, ganun. Parang may mga na-save ka na time na napunta sa sarili mo.” [Maybe because there is more time to think since you're just at home, and it's just like that, more time with yourself ... maybe it's better now of course that I can do skincare. You still have commute time compared to before, that's how it is. It's like you saved some time for yourself.] - I7

Overall, the WFH setup provided study participants with the freedom to invest time in activities that brought them joy, personal growth, and self-care. The absence of the fast-paced environment of Makati City and the associated time pressures allowed for a better balance between work and personal life.

#### *D. Lessons from Remote Work Set-Up for Communication*

The shift to remote work highlighted several challenges related to digital communication that study participants experienced. These challenges included increased barriers to effective communication, difficulties in using chat as a medium of communication, limited opportunities for collaboration, and a decrease in spontaneous small talk.

#### ➤ *Increase in Barriers to Effective Communication*

With the shift towards remote work and the absence of in-person interactions, it became apparent that digital communication posed additional challenges and barriers. Specifically, there was a noticeable increase in the lack of non-verbal cues, leading to heightened physical barriers to effective communication.

In the realm of remote work, the absence of face-to-face communication has made it more difficult to convey and interpret non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, body language, and gestures. These subtle yet essential elements of communication are often instrumental in understanding the emotions, intentions, and context behind someone's words. Consequently, the reliance on written text or voice alone can create misunderstandings or ambiguity,

making it harder to establish rapport, empathy, and clear understanding.

“people tend to take your messages in a different tone, so parang, di ka naman galit, or galit ka pero the other person na nakareceive ng message thinks otherwise” [People tend to take your messages in a different tone, so it seems, you are not angry, or you are angry but the other person who received the message thinks otherwise.] - I1

The inability to observe non-verbal cues remotely also impacts the flow and dynamics of group discussions, presentations, or collaborative projects. Without the ability to read visual cues, individuals may unintentionally interrupt or talk over each other, leading to a breakdown in effective teamwork and collaboration.

“Honestly, kasi wala yung non-verbal eh, so ang hirap niya intindihin. Medyo mahirap siya intindihin. So unlike kapag katabi mo yung kausap mo, tapos nag instruct siya or nag kwento siya, andun yung emotions eh.” [Honestly, because there is no non-verbal communication, so it's hard to understand. It is a bit difficult to understand. So unlike when you're next to the person you're talking to, then he instructs or he tells a story, there are emotions.] - I2

“Siguro mga ano, 70-80% lang kasi hindi mo mare-relay 100% yung gusto mong sabihin. Kasi kapag kausap mo face-to-face, may tone ka sa communication. Yung iba nami-misinterpret or minsan hindi mo matype nang maayos kapag sa Slack lang, parang may nami-miss kang data at work. May nami-miss ka na information and minsan di pa okay yung mga punctuations kapag magkausap sa Slack.” [Maybe, only 70-80% because you can't relay 100% of what you want to say. Because when you talk face-to-face, you have a tone of communication. Others misinterpret or sometimes you can't type properly when it's just Slack, it's like you're missing data and work. You miss some information and sometimes the punctuations aren't good when talking to Slack.] - I4

Working from home introduced a noticeable delay or lag time in communication, which hindered the speed and efficiency of interactions compared to face-to-face communication. This delay created an attention barrier, as study participants had to contend with the limited attention given to them by their co-workers or managers. Unlike in a traditional office setup, employees were unable to swiftly exchange ideas to troubleshoot problems at work.

“Slack is not usually enough, I can say, kasi hindi mo talaga sure kung nandun yung kausap mo eh, that's the other problem.” [Slack is not usually enough, I can say, because you're not sure if the person you're talking to is there, that's the other problem.] - I2

“the delay of the messages that your co workers or your leads or anybody is having the hard time because before we can just tap our leads are coworkers na, "hey, I need help." But for now, you just need to message them and maybe you'll get the reply or the response, I think five or ten minutes or more than that. So it is not easy and good as before.” [the delay of the messages that your co-workers or your leads or anybody is having a hard time because before we can just tap our leads and coworkers like, " Hey, I need help. " But for now, you just need to message them and maybe you'll get the reply or the response, I think five or ten minutes or more than that. So, it is not easy and good as before.] - I3

Before the pandemic, employees could quickly determine if their manager was available or occupied. They had the assurance that the person they were communicating with was physically present and could respond promptly. However, in the current remote work scenario, employees must rely on chat messages and wait for replies, which are not immediate or real-time. Sometimes, they need to schedule a Zoom meeting to have a timely conversation with colleagues or managers. This makes it more challenging to approach others for help in troubleshooting customer issues because there is uncertainty about their availability. The delays in replies create a perception that the intended person may be busy, further slowing down the communication flow.

“May mga times na parang super urgent nung mga concerns ko and then magchat ka sa kanila and di sila parang ganun kabilis or sloppy mag reply.” [There are times when it seems very urgent when I have concerns, and then you chat with them and they don't seem that fast or sloppy to reply.] - I5

As remote work became widespread globally, identity barriers in digital communication were recognized. Participants observed the absence of established work etiquette for digital communication.

“Tsaka kasi wala tayong work ethics, I mean wala tayong Zoom ethics na tinatawag diba to prepare us for this type of work setup na dapat ganito ganyan.” [Besides, we don't have work ethics, I mean we don't have Zoom ethics to prepare us for this type of work setup that should be like this or like that.] - I10

There is an increased barrier to communication [20]. This demonstrates that even those familiar with digital communication when interacting with clients abroad still face communication challenges, particularly with co-workers and managers. The significance of non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, voice, and body language, becomes evident as they impact how messages are interpreted by recipients. These findings underscore the difficulty of replacing face-to-face communication with digital methods.

➤ *Challenges of Chats as Medium of Communication*

The shift to remote work has replaced in-person, verbal communication with primarily text-based chat communication. While chat communication offers the advantage of filtering and considering words before sending a message, relying solely on this method is inadequate for effective remote work. Despite the availability of other platforms like Zoom, the overreliance on chat communication poses limitations in the WFH setup.

“So pag chat lang kasi, unless i-call mo siya, kulang na kulang talaga...di mo alam na yung itsura ng kaibigan mo mukha nang stressed, kinukulit mo pa.” [So when you are just chatting, unless you call him, it's not enough... you don't know that your friend looks stressed, and you annoy him.] - I2

Participants found it challenging to express everything through typed words despite the convenience of messaging platforms like Microsoft Teams and Slack.

“And yeah, my adjustment is to type all the details that I have gathered from my customers...it is very hard to type in all the details on a very detailed one.” [And yeah, my adjustment is to type all the details that I have gathered from my customers ... it is very hard to type in all the details on a very detailed one.] - I3

In digital communication, the recipient may not be able to see all notifications simultaneously.

“Eh yung sa Slack, natatakluban siya tapos kahit meron siyang notification, yung mag pop na yung yung message na ganyan, di mo agad siya maasikaso lalo na kapag nagwo-work ka.” [Eh the one on Slack, is covered up and even if it has a notification, the message will pop up like that, you can't take care of it right away especially when you're working.] - I4

Messages can easily be overlooked despite notifications, as recipients may need to manage multiple incoming messages simultaneously and prioritize them while also focusing on other tasks.

Chat communication demonstrates that relying solely on chat communication or predominantly using it can lead to quick overlook, miscommunication, and inefficiency. Effective communication in the new normal requires a combination of different communication tools. It is important to have a documented communication plan or guidelines that outline the specific communication tools to be utilized as a part of operational strategies for managing a virtual workforce [21].

➤ *Limited Opportunities for Collaboration*

Collaboration was simpler in the office setting, with employees seated next to their co-workers. However, in the WFH setup, collaboration has decreased, with some team members being unresponsive to chat communication if alternative online communication tools are not utilized.

“may mga taong hindi ganun ka-cooperative or hindi masyado nakikipag-usap. Mahirap magreach out sa kanila. And to the point na minsan siguro magre-reach out ka sa manager para ibring up para lang magbago” [some people are not that cooperative or they don't talk much. It's hard to reach out to them. And to the point that sometimes maybe you will reach out to the manager to bring it up just to change.] Transcript no. 1, Line 952-954, I1

“so ang problem lang is with the collaboration, parang after ko mag work from home, hindi na ako gaanong na-monitor ng senior ko so parang I went on my own.” [So the only problem is with the collaboration. It's like after I work from home, my senior doesn't monitor me much anymore, so it's like I went on my own.] Transcript no. 10, Line 234-236, I10

Study participants predominantly relied on Slack, Zoom, and Teams for communication with their co-workers. Working from home led to reduced collaboration, prompting employees to become more independent in their tasks. This was not universally true for everyone in their company, as some individuals decided to leave the organization within a month of transitioning to remote work. Additionally, extroverted participants faced challenges in collaborating effectively. The WFH setup resulted in decreased collaborative work, impacting overall work performance. Employees became more inclined to handle tasks individually rather than reaching out to their colleagues.

“Tapos ayun, yung challenge din pagdating sa collaboration with your teammates, sa mga co-workers, ganyan. Parang kunwari, pag opener ka ganyan, wala kang mapapagtanungan, parang you're on your own lang talaga so sariling sikap ka na maghanap ng materials or references para sa trabaho mo.” [After that, the challenge is also when it comes to collaboration with your teammates, co-workers, that's it. It's like when you are the opener, you don't have anybody to ask about your concerns, it's like you're really on your own so you try to find materials or references for your work on your own.] - I9

Remote work fostered increased independence among employees but also had an impact on their collaborative abilities with co-workers. There is a decline in collaboration during the pandemic-induced WFH scenario [22]. The study participants experienced a significant shift away from traditional face-to-face collaboration due to remote work. Although collaboration in a digital platform can be

challenging, it is not impossible, and the adoption of collaboration tools.

➤ *Increase in Professional Conversations*

Workplace communication has shifted primarily to formal and work-related conversations, limiting social interactions and casual chitchat among employees. Messaging coworkers has become easy and quick, but messages tend to be more professional and planned, removing the randomness of office communication.

“...nawala na yung communication namin. So hanggang chat nalang kami parang professional na lang talaga, tanong ka nalang sa cases, ganyan, sa issues. So wala na yung factor na kamustahan sa ibang friends mo which is nakaka-miss siya kasi honestly sa work namin, medyo difficult siya in the sense na kapag wala kang katulong dun sa ibang cases mo or walang nagbibigay ng insights, parang natata-trap ka kasi pinapanhanap sa iyo yung problem, and yet, ikaw syempre hindi mo naman master na master yung system. Pero ngayon parang sobrang limited and na-apektuhan talaga yung interpersonal relationships.” [... we have lost communication. We just chat, it's like we're professionals, you just ask about cases, like that, about issues. So there's no longer the factor of being nice to your friends which I miss because honestly in our work, it is a bit difficult in the sense that when you don't have someone who would help you in your other cases or no one gives insights, you seem to be trapped because you are being asked to find the problem, and yet, you are of course you don't know the system very well. But now it seems that interpersonal relationships are very limited and are really affected.] - I2

“hindi ko nakakausap yung mga friends ko like hindi ganun kasing dalas, and mostly work-related lang” [I don't talk to my friends that often, and mostly work-related only] - I5

“Parang wala nang matiyempo na masyadong time para makipag-kamustahan sa mga ka-workmates mo or friends mo during work din, kasi ang pag-uusapan niyo talaga is purely work, ganun. Parang makakahanap ka lang ng time after work pa, kung maluwag-luwag, malapit na end of shift, ganun. Dun nalang kami makakapag-bonding.” [It seems like there isn't much time left to say hello to your workmates or friends during work as well, because what you are talking about is purely work, that's it. It's like you can only find time after work, if it's easy when you are at the end of your shift, that's it. Only then can we bond.] - I9

The participants' experience highlights how remote work communication tends to be more professional, leaving less room for non-work conversations. This lack of informal communication can lead to employee exhaustion, as there are no small talks or breaks to provide relief during the workday. This emphasizes the value of small talk with co-

workers, even in a remote setup. Employees can try to initiate or engage in small talk as a relevant aspect of remote work [23].

E. *Inadequacy of Company Support*

Study participants received company support from their employers to facilitate a smooth transition to and effective implementation of the WFH arrangement. However, participants found the support to be lacking in several areas, including emotional and psychological support, assistance with transitioning to remote work, support for non-work activities and email communication, subsidies for WFH tools, and office perks.

➤ *Transition to Remote Work*

Companies provided guidelines for employees to transition to remote work, including minimum internet requirements and setting up a suitable workspace at home. However, these guidelines were not tailored to individual employees. Study participants were allowed to bring home their laptops and headsets, enabling them to work remotely during the pandemic.

"Sa no sa first months, definitely may ganun. Syempre idiscuss nila kung how this will work. Yun lang mostly kung intial ano lang, initial discussion on how the work from home setup will work from now on, tapos magdadagdag-dagdag na lang sila ng new process as time goes by, depende kung ano yung tingin nilang effective." [In the first few months, there was something like that. Of course, they will discuss how this will work. That's mostly if it's just initial, initial discussion on how the work from home setup will work from now on, then they'll just add new processes as time goes by, depending on what they think is effective.] Transcript no. 1, Line 982-986, I1

“Parang okay, tapos andun yung requirements na para makapag work from home ka, kailangan mo ng ganitong internet, kailangan mo ng anong tawag nun sa...okay yung work environment, ganyan. So ikaw yung maghahanap, bahala ka na daw maghanap dun sa part ng bahay.” [It seems okay, then there are these requirements for you to be able to work from home, you need this kind of internet, You need what do you call it ... the work environment is okay, that's it. So you're the one who's looking, it's up to you to look in that part of the house.] Transcript no. 4, Line 891-895, I4

“For the work from home set up I think both of them are kind of lenient, in like giving us all the necessary parang stuff that we should have to finish our work.” Transcript no. 6, Line 862-864, I6

Companies implemented various initiatives to prepare employees for the WFH setup. These initiatives included orientation sessions, group chats for sharing WFH tips, workshops, trainings, and seminars. These efforts aimed to equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively work from home.

➤ *Emotional and Psychological Support*

Managers and supervisors provided some level of emotional support and encouragement, although it was not always intensive. Employees often felt hesitant to reach out to managers, recognizing that they too were facing their own challenges during the WFH setup and the pandemic.

"Kasi yung ano, yung schedule, walang pang night shift...So yun. I guess sufficient siya kung in-attend ko. Pero for me it doesn't really work kasi baka hindi naman applicable sa akin yung seminar na yun." [Because of the schedule, there was no night shift yet ... That's why. I guess it would have been sufficient if I attended. But for me, it doesn't really work because maybe that seminar doesn't apply to me.] - I1

"Meron naman po silang na parang nabibigay na support, pero hindi po parang ganun ka intense or, ano lang...iisipin mo parang di lang naman ikaw yung nakakaexperience ng ganun. Parang ganun. Tapos sila nakakahiya naman yun for me." [They seem to be giving support, but it doesn't seem to be that intense or, whatever... you will think that you are not the only one who experiences that. Like that. Then, that's embarrassing for me.] Transcript no. 5, Line - I5

Sobrang dami, sobrang daming invites regarding that. Yung mga webinar na for COVID na related, ganyan. Pero hindi kasi ako yung tipo na nagjoin ng mga ganun..." [Too many, too many invites regarding that. The webinars for COVID related that's it. But I'm not the type of person who joins in stuff like that...] - I9

Although some company support was offered during the transition to working from home, there was a delay in aiding with the mental and psychological aspects of the new normal. It was only after several months into the lockdown that such support was implemented. Management interventions included discussions to discourage working beyond regular hours and addressing feelings of cabin syndrome or feeling trapped at home. Managers encouraged employees to use paid time off and reduce overtime hours to prioritize quality time and engage in activities with their families at home.

This experience reveals a discrepancy between the level of emotional and psychological support that participants desired and what was provided to them. Although webinars were available, participants had limited opportunities to attend them due to scheduling conflicts. This indicates that while webinars were designed for employees, their effectiveness was hindered by a lack of available schedules that accommodated employee attendance. Additionally, the workload burden led employees to prioritize work over attending seminars.

➤ *Support for Non-Work Activities*

Company intervention also involved non-work activities aimed at keeping employees engaged, such as entertainment activities, online games, team building, and prize incentives. However, these activities were not conducted frequently, their frequency decreased over time, and they were limited to the transition phase of working from home.

"So meron kaming, may games pero sa Slack lang, parang sasagot kayo nang pabilisan, ganyan. Medyo nakakatanggal ng stress yun, pero for me sana mas madalas yung mga ganung kind of events para mas makakausap mo yung team kasi iba yung may mga bagay kang ginagawa for entertainment..." [So we have, we have games but only in Slack like you will answer quickly, like that. It relieves a bit of stress, but for me, I hope those kinds of events are more frequent so that you can talk to the team more because you have different things to do for entertainment ...] - I4

"Kasi yun nga, di ko siya na-experience na sumali sa talks even once, yung sa mga emails, binabasa ko naman yung iba. Oo, yung mga iba binabasa ko naman. Well, I do read emails naman tapos parang minsan okay, pero wala akong masyadong ano-Oo, take away. Parang just a reminder siguro, just a reminder to do that stuff, parang ganun." [Because that's it, I didn't experience participating in talks even once, the ones in the emails, I read the others. Yes, I read the others. Well, I do read emails, and then it seems okay sometimes, but I don't have much-Yes, take away. It seems like just a reminder maybe, just a reminder to do that stuff, it seems like that.] - I8

Meron naman, pero parang di siya na-sustain." [There is, but it doesn't seem to be sustained.] - I10

Participants were provided with non-work activities. However, the frequency of these activities did not meet the participants' preferences, indicating a gap between their desired frequency and what was provided by their companies. These non-work activities can play a role in reducing employee stress, particularly during a pandemic. Increasing the frequency of these activities can contribute to employee well-being by providing a means to unwind and not solely focus on work throughout the day.

➤ *Subsidy for WFH Tools*

Companies provided subsidies and allowances to support study participants in managing their WFH setup. This included reimbursement for internet expenses up to a certain amount. However, participants felt that the provided subsidies and allowances were insufficient, as they only covered a limited portion of the expenses.

“And for the provision for work, actually, what the company did is that they provide us with a 1,000 reimbursable internet expense, so just to support the internet for our work. So beyond that, there was no additional support but the company tries its best by creating meetings where we can join in and have fun or just relax or just catch up with the upper management because we don't usually talk with them.” [And for the provision for work what the company did is that they provide us with a 1,000 reimbursable internet expense, so just to support the internet for our work. So beyond that, there was no additional support but the company tries its best by creating meetings where we can join in and have fun or just relax or just catch up with the upper management because we don't usually talk with them.] - I2

“Yeah, or it is not enough just to have a, say for example, you just need to buy at least 250 pesos or 500 pesos for the whole month and they think it is not enough for us to have that amount for all the stress that we had for that couple of months, I think for that couple of weeks. And then yeah sometimes parang sinasabi namin na ang yaman naman ng company namin hindi magbigay ng weekly, kasi every week kami naiistress eh, ganyan. Parang wala man lang dagdag ganito, ganyan, bonus parang ganun...” [Yeah, or it is not enough just to have a, say, for example, you just need to buy at least 250 pesos or 500 pesos for the whole month and they think it is not enough for us to have that amount for all the stress that we had for that couple of months, I think for that couple of weeks. And then yeah sometimes we seem to say that our company's wealth doesn't give weekly incentives, because we get stressed every week, that's how it is. It seems like nothing is added like this, like that, like bonus...] - I3

Tapos ayun, internet subsidy, ay reimbursement pala, ganun.” [Then that's it, internet subsidy, or reimbursement, like that.] - I9

This experience highlights how participants perceived the inadequacy of subsidies and allowances provided by their employers during remote work. It can be inferred that employees observed the reduction in expenses incurred by their employers, such as internet, electricity, and office rental costs, due to office closures. Consequently, employees may have felt that these cost savings were transferred to them, particularly through increased internet and electricity expenses while working from home.

#### ➤ *Office Perks*

Office perks, such as complimentary snacks, beverages, and coffee in the office pantry, were no longer available to employees during the WFH arrangement.

“So yung, let's say yung pantry, yung accessible food. Nawala yun...so, unlimited yung kape so hindi ko na kailangang mag timpla or so mag

order.” [So, let's say the pantry, the accessible food. It's gone... so, the coffee is unlimited so I don't have to make one or make an order.] - I2

“Parang kapag may bagong, may recent version yung accounting system, madalas nagpapakain yung bosses namin. Parang lahat yun, nawala.” [It seems that when there is a new, recent version of the accounting system, our bosses often feed us. It seems like it's all gone.] - I5

Kasi before, may team building annually. Ngayon, ano, virtual tapos bibigyan ka nalang ng like 500 reimbursable for food. Tapos yung before din, meron din Christmas party na annually, ngayon bibigyan ka nalang din ng reimbursable na, nabawasan kasi yung budget feeling ko mas maliit na yung budget nung nasa work from home ka nalang compared sa ano.” [Because before, there was team building held annually. Now, what, virtual then you will just be given like 500 reimbursable for food. Then before, there was also a Christmas party annually, now you will be given a reimbursable because the budget has been reduced, I feel like the budget is lower when you work from home compared before.] - I4

“Tapos yung, nasa office kasi kami sobrang ano, sobrang frequent ng pakain, yun yung na-miss ko rin na, "uy may patiger milktea diyan," mga ganun, mga month-end meal, ganun. Tapos pag sobrang busy week namin, bibili ng ilang boxes ng pizza, ganun, yung mga birthdays, ganun.” [Then, in the office, they give us food frequently. That's what I also missed, "hey, there's a tiger milktea there," things like that, month-end meals, like that. Then, when we have a very busy week, we will buy a few boxes of pizza. Like that, on birthdays, like that.] - I9

With the transition to remote work, employees no longer have access to the perks they enjoyed in the office, such as free snacks, recreational areas, and breakout spaces. While it is impractical to deliver these perks to individual remote workers, companies can explore alternative "work from home" perks, such as redeemable rewards that help foster company culture during remote work [24].

#### *F. Employees Mental Well-Being*

The study participants reported experiencing social isolation and a negative impact on their psychological well-being in the WFH setup, especially in relation to their peers. They felt that employee appreciation and motivation efforts were insufficient in improving their overall well-being, considering the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic.

#### ➤ *Feeling of Social Isolation*

Working from home resulted in a sense of isolation for the study participants. The elimination of social activities and reduced non-work conversations with co-workers led to a work-focused environment, leaving them with no outlet to vent their work-related stress. They missed the social interactions they had at the office, such as sharing meals or

going out with colleagues after work. These activities were valued by the participants and are now sought after in the new normal.

“Parang nawala yung mga kasama mo, parang ikaw lang palagi yung mag-isa. Yeah. Yun yung feeling.” [It seems like your companions disappeared, it seems like you are always alone. Yeah. That's how it feels.] - I2

“I just feel na I'm stuck in a box kasi nandito lang ako sa bahay and there's nothing to talk to.” [I just feel like I'm stuck in a box because I'm just here at home and there's nothing to talk to.] - I3

“...yun yung parang sa workplace ko yun yung nilo-look forward ko lalo na kapag first haf ng work ko sobrang stressful. So nilo look forward ko yung lunch breaks din kasi madalas talagag stressed yung madali lang mag rant or magshare ng thoughts.....wala na akong parang masasabihan na, "tara lunch na tayo," or "tara usap tayo"...Parang ang hirap...” [... it's what I look forward to in my workplace, especially when the first half of my work is very stressful. So I look forward to lunch breaks as well because I'm often really stressed and it's easy to rant or share thoughts ..... I don't feel like I can say, "let's have lunch," or "let's talk". ...it seems too hard.] - I5

“Mahirap siya kasi hindi mo matantya if available yung tao and all. So most of the time I think ayun ako lang mag-isa and then for work related concerns, may Slack naman, you can just ping anyone away.” [It is difficult because you can't estimate if the person is available and all. So most of the time I think I'm just alone and then for work-related concerns, there's Slack, you can just ping anyone away.] - I6

“Parang kung sino lang yung kakilala mo since nag start yung pandemic, yun pa rin yung friends mo pa din. Parang nabawasan yung parang socialization parang hindi na ako nakapag-friends sa work, kasi same pa din.” [It seems like the only people you know since the pandemic started, are still your only friends. It seems that the socialization has decreased, it seems like I can no longer make friends at work because it's still the same.] - I7

The new normal has hindered participants' ability to expand their professional networks and develop strong social relationships within the workplace. As a result, remote workers are more susceptible to feelings of loneliness in their work environment.

#### ➤ *Affected Psychological State*

Initially, study participants experienced a significant impact on their psychological well-being when transitioning to remote work. The change in work environment, combined with the ongoing pandemic, heightened their stress levels [25]. The limited personal communication and reduced

social interactions in a WFH setup resulted in increased burnout, as work became solely focused on professional tasks. Additionally, physical activity levels decreased during the initial adjustment to the new normal, as participants missed out on activities such as walking within the office premises or commuting to work.

“siguro I would say medyo nakaka-affect sa mental health mo din yung nasa bahay ka lang lagi. Less socialization...” [maybe I would say that the fact that you are always at home also affects your mental health a bit. Less socialization.] - I7

“nag kaka-anxiety ako don sa pag rereach out sa mga tao na iniisip ko na hindi nila ako gusto kausapin or baka naiisturbo ko sila, hindi lang sila makapagsabi, ang daming stressed don.” [I get anxiety when I reach out to people, I think they don't want to talk to me or maybe I'm bothering them, they just can't say, it's stressful.] - I4

Friends provided psychological support to the employees, acknowledging that they were not alone in facing the challenges of working from home, including anxiety and stress. This support helped them appreciate the fact that they still had a source of income during these difficult times. Family members also played a role in providing psychological support by being present and preparing delicious meals for the employees, which served as a comforting reward after a stressful day of work. This support was particularly valuable as employees had previously relied on eating out rather than home-cooked meals before the pandemic, emphasizing the positive contribution of family support during the WFH period.

“...my mom cooks a very delicious dish so that I could eat a good one after the stressful working hours during that time. So I think everyone contributed the same thing, just to have my mental health back to normal.” - I3

“I can say that emotional support first is my family kasi sobrang nagwo-worry din sila everytime na, they always reach out to me na ayun, matulog daw ako, magpahinga, uminom ng vitamins, always take care of myself, don't get so caught up of working, and a lot of time sa pagwo-work lang.” [I can say that my first emotional support is my family because they are very worried every time, they always reach out to me like that, they say I must sleep, I must rest, take vitamins, always take care of myself, don't get so caught up of working, and a lot of time just working.] - I8

The participants shared experience emphasizes that significant changes to the usual routines and activities can have a profound impact on one's psychological state. It also highlights the correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and the mental health crisis [26]. The pandemic has led to an increase in symptoms of depression and anxiety, necessitating substantial investments in addressing this crisis.



➤ *Not Enough Employee Appreciation and Motivation*

The study participants expressed that while they were able to deliver their work, there was a lack of employee appreciation and motivation, which hindered their level of engagement. Providing employee appreciation initiatives can help foster greater engagement among employees.

“wala masyado dun sa employee appreciation. So parang work ka lang nang work, parang di siya masyadong fulfilling, parang di ka vina-value, ganyan. Pero merong times din na motivating din and parang lagi nalang na hit mo tapos wala naman corresponding incentive...increase sa sweldo or anything.” [there’s not much employee appreciation. So it's like you're just working, it's like it's not very fulfilling, it's like you're not valued, that's it. But there are times when it is motivating and it seems like you always hit your goal and then there is no corresponding incentive ... increase in salary or anything.] - I7

“Nagagawa ko naman yung work because need, not for the reason that super motivated ako.” [I can do the work because I need to, not for the reason that I'm super motivated.] - I1

“I can say that medyo nag less lang nang onti, kasi nung pumapasok pa ako sa office, there's a lot of things para maging reason to be motivated. Parang from yung performance metrics and there's a lot of parang pakain sa office and then mga prizes when you're excelling, and then yun engaging and meeting new people, now na wala masyado. And ano pa ba reason for being motivated. Yun, kapag after shift, mamo-motivate ka kasi magra-ramen kayo, magsa-samgyup—” [I can say that it lessened a bit because when I was still in the office, there were a lot of things or reason to be motivated. It's like from the performance metrics and there's a lot of like food in the office and then prizes when you're excelling, and then that's engaging and meeting new people, now, there is nothing much. And what else is the reason for being motivated. That is when after shift, you will be motivated because you will eat ramen, samgyup— ] - I8

“Feel ko mas magiging motivated ako pag nasa office ako kasi doon, mas mabilis nilang makikita yung ginagawa ko compared yung dito.” [I feel like I'll be more motivated when I'm in the office because there, they can see what I'm doing faster compared to here.] - I4

Remote work has resulted in a decrease in appreciation and motivation, which has had a negative impact on the passion and commitment of employees. This lack of motivation and appreciation has led to employees perceiving their work as less fulfilling and undervalued. Additionally, the feeling of being unappreciated can significantly affect employee engagement.

G. *The conduciveness of Home as the New Workplace*

The participants faced challenges in creating a conducive workspace at home, which included the need for a designated area for work and dealing with distractions during their work hours.

➤ *Availability of Workspace at Home*

Participants in the study had to create a makeshift workspace at home, often using a combination of their bedroom and a designated area where they set up a worktable and chair. This arrangement allowed them to perform their work tasks effectively despite the lack of a dedicated room for work and rest.

“Nasa bedroom ko lang tapos isang corner naman na nakatalikod ako sa mga tao na pwedeng pumasok at lumabas. So may corner ako na space ko lang talaga, tapos may table din.” [Just in my bedroom with a corner and my back facing the people who can come in and out.] - I4

“definitely not separate room for work and for bed, and my table is beside my bed.” [definitely not separate room for work and for bed, and my table is beside my bed.] - I8

“Actually, sulok lang siya pero hindi siya room, pero ano talaga, ako lang yung pumupunta rito tapos ako lang yung nandito, tsaka nandito lang ako pag work time or pag may meetings, ganun.” [Actually, it's just a corner but it's not a room, but really, I'm the only one who comes here and then I'm the only one here, and I'm only here during work time or if there are meetings, like that] - I10

The experience of participants in this study highlighted the challenges of working from home, particularly the lack of a dedicated workspace when the transition to the new normal began. Having a designated area for work not only helps in organizing work activities but also allows for better focus and minimizes distractions from family members moving around the house.

➤ *Distractions at Home*

The WFH setup presented more distractions compared to a traditional office environment, including interactions with family members during work hours. However, over time, employees adapted to these distractions, and customers on the other line were understanding, as they were also experiencing similar work arrangements.

“I can say naman na mostly conducive siya, except syempre from time to time, if nasa meeting, or middle ka ng meeting or call, madi-disconnect ka like us. May mga background noises ng pets, yun, pero mostly conducive naman siya...yung bark ng dog, and yung dogs kapag umaga na...maririnig mo na yung mga kapitbahay, mga busina ng mga kapitbahay...nakakaffect rin siya especially if nasa meetings or calls ka, baka hindi ka kasi maririnig nung kausap mo because of those noises...usually, I just acknowledge it. And if narinig ng kausap ko, nag-aapologize lang ako. I'll have to repeat myself

in case hindi nila marinig,” [I can say that it is most conducive, except of course from time to time, if you are in a meeting, or in the middle of a meeting or call, you will be disconnected like us. There are background noises of pets, but it is most conducive ... the bark of the dog, and the dogs in the morning ... you can hear the neighbors, the horns of the neighbors ... it also affects it especially if you are in meetings or calls, maybe you can't be heard when you talk because of those noises ... usually, I just acknowledge it. And if the person I'm talking to hears it, I just apologize. I'll have to repeat myself in case they don't hear] - I1

“medyo affected nga rin kasi minsan nagwo-work ako, kakausapin ako bigla so mawawala yung focus ko. Pero parang minsan di nire-respect yung boundaries, so nakakawala ng parang, nawala ka na sa momentum pag ganun so parang naapektuhan rin.” [A little bit affected because sometimes when I work, they will suddenly talk to me so I lose my focus. But sometimes the boundaries are not respected, so you lose your momentum, it seems to be affected as well.] - I7

“Yeah. Tsaka hindi kasi need sa, sa nature of work call lang naman kasi, yung hindi naman kailangan ng video so ayun, kaya kahit may tao dito sa paligid ko basta tahimik lang, okay lang.” [Yeah. Besides, I don't need to, because my nature of work is call, no need for video, so even if there are people around me as long as it's quiet, it's okay.] - I9

The presence of family members and their interruptions during work hours added to the perceived stress of working from home. This lack of acknowledgment of personal space and boundaries affected employee focus. However, participants have adapted to these distractions, and it did not significantly impact their overall performance. It was emphasized that family members respecting work hours and minimizing noise during calls or meetings was crucial. Despite occasional interruptions, employees managed to maintain their work momentum and not let it negatively affect their productivity for the entire day.

One of the significant challenges faced by employees while working from home was the difference in internet connectivity compared to the office environment. Participants experienced internet latency and disruptions at home, particularly when multiple users were utilizing the internet simultaneously. The quality of the internet connection at home impacted the efficiency of work tasks. Participants often had to rely on backup connections, which were typically slower compared to their primary internet provider. The reliability and speed of internet connectivity played a crucial role in ensuring uninterrupted work for study participants.

“yung internet namin, yung PLDT, nasabi ko na. Bigla siyang nawawala so parang kalagitnaan ng work nagvi-view ako ng system, bigla siyang mawawala so nai-interrupt yung work ko. It's not good, unlike sa office na stable talaga siya...nagloloko na bumabagal. Di mo alam, di mo masabi kung dahil ba si PLDT or maybe may nagda-download yung parents ko ng kung anuano.” [our internet, the PLDT, I already said. It suddenly disconnects so it's like in the middle of work I'm viewing the system, it suddenly disconnects so my work is interrupted. It's not good, unlike in the office where it's really stable ... interrupted and slowing down. You don't know, you can't tell if it's because of PLDT or maybe my parents are downloading something.] - I2

Despite the presence of distractions at home, the overall impact on work productivity for study participants was not significant. However, participants successfully adapted and continued to perform their job responsibilities even a year into the pandemic. While occasional distractions are unavoidable, the study participants demonstrated that remote work can be effectively carried out in the long term.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The pandemic necessitated the implementation of WFH arrangements, prompting researchers to examine employee experiences and uncover valuable insights for future reference in similar circumstances. The study's findings shed light not only for navigating the current pandemic but also for potentially embracing remote work beyond it. Through interviews with select employees, several noteworthy experiences emerged. Initially, employees had expectations of a short-term arrangement but soon realized the long-term nature of working from home and adapted accordingly. They also identified certain benefits and learned important lessons about communication through firsthand experiences. Additionally, employees expressed concerns regarding inadequate support in various aspects and highlighted the impact on their mental well-being. Lastly, the challenge of establishing a suitable workspace at home was acknowledged, but employees found ways to make it work.

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