

CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING MASTERS DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

How was it for you? A case study of construction office workers' experience of working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic

The widespread mandated Working From Home (WFH) made possible by the COVID-19 pandemic has provided an equal opportunity for many to experience WFH for an extended period of time. WFH could be defined as an employee who performs their duties at home rather than in an office and it was the most common form of remote working during the pandemic. The effects of this new form of WFH were understudied because studies conducted prior to the pandemic were likely to be heavily influenced by selection bias due to the discretionary and privileged access to WFH, especially in the construction industry, which was widely viewed as unsuitable for WFH. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, a growing body of literature suggests that the benefits of WFH outweigh its negatives, and the focus of study has shifted from determining whether to adopt WFH to how to maximise its benefits. Recent surveys also show that employees would like to continue WFH in the hybrid form beyond the pandemic as they have grown accustomed to WFH and may consider leaving their jobs if the option is not available. Therefore, it is important for organisations to understand how to make best use of WFH post the COVID-19 lockdown as it plays a key role in addressing some of the biggest challenges facing the construction industry such as skill-shortages, low career attraction, job retention and poor work-life balance.

This research aims to provide deep insights and understandings of the effects of this new form of home working by studying Construction Office Workers' WFH experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. 30 construction office workers of wide-ranging ages (21 to 67) and seniorities (apprentice to executive) from a large UK construction company were interviewed to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perceptions. By analysing their WFH experience during the COVID-19 pandemic using carefully chosen personal and work factors, this case study research has showed how the new form of WFH affected them and provided profound insights into their perceptions of WFH. Furthermore, it provides real-world evidence demonstrating that WFH can be effective for certain roles in the construction industry when correctly implemented and highlights how WFH can be less effective for certain individuals. It is anticipated that the findings will address the gaps in the existing research and contribute to the resolving of these challenges facing the construction industry by informing the changes in company culture, business model, work policies, training, and support necessary to enable effective use of WFH beyond the pandemic.

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