# PUBLIC CONSULTATION FOR REMOTE WORKING
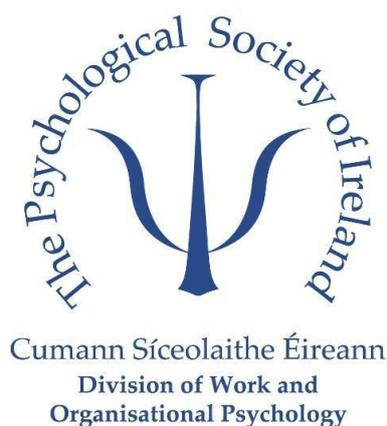
*Submission on behalf of:*
The Psychological Society of Ireland Division of Work & Organisational Psychology

August 2020

Cumann Síceolaíthe Éireann
**Division of Work and Organisational Psychology**

The Division of Work and Organisation (DWOP) is a division of The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), a professional body, representing more than 120 Work and Organisational Psychologists who serve a variety of workplaces and organisations throughout Ireland.

Our vision is to advance the psychological wellbeing of individuals, communities, and organisations through the application of psychological science concepts in the workplace, by contributing to public discourse and by developing accessible practical tools for everyday living and wellbeing.

DWOP would like to thank the following for contributing to this submission:
- Dr Barbara Caska, Chartered Work and Organisational Psychologist;
- Cathy Coleman, Chartered Work and Organisational Psychologist at The Behavioural Insights Team;
- Anna Connolly, Chartered Work and Organisational Psychologist, Chair, DWOP;
- Kathleen Halligan, Chartered Work and Organisational Psychologist;
- Graham Murray, MSc Applied Psychology;
- Dr Deirdre O'Shea, Chartered Work and Organisational Psychologist;
- Teresa Tarpey, Chartered Work and Organisational Psychologist, Chair-elect, DWOP.

In this document we have responded to the questions on the guidance provided around Health and Safety, Employment Rights, the Right to Disconnect, Equality and Training as referred to on the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovations (DBEI) webpage 'Guidance for working remotely during COVID-19'. We have not looked at or commented on the guidance around Data Protection in our submission.

Our response to the five questions posed by DBEI in their request for submissions are:
1. The current guidance is suitable in relation to the topics covered in the DBEI document. However, we believe that there is scope to address the wider psychosocial elements of work and training provision for managers and employees;
2. The current guidance provides clarity on the topics covered.
   However, we believe that clarity is needed around the wider psychosocial elements of work;
3. The current guidance could be improved by the addition of guidance in the areas covered in this paper (see below items 1 - 6);
4. Further areas in which employers need guidance are covered in Table 1 on page 6;
5. Further areas in which employees need guidance are covered in Table 2 on page 7.

The points below are a summary of suggestions informed by research which have been submitted by members of the Division of Work and Organisational Psychology (DWOP) for your consideration. Supporting material is included in the appendix. We welcome further consultation on any of the items below.

## 1.    Mental Health and Wellbeing

Employees who work remotely report benefits that include increased flexibility to manage work/home life balance and gaining back valuable time by avoiding the daily commute. Businesses also benefit from remote working arrangements through increased retention, access to a wider talent pool, enhanced productivity, and cost efficiencies (DBEI, 2019).

Equally some employees report challenges notably social isolation and loneliness when working remotely (DBEI, 2019). Excessive working hours, additional anxiety and stress are also potential downsides of remote working. These issues can be difficult for managers to recognise and then know how best to support (DCU, 2020).

Guidance around the following areas would be helpful to both employers and employees:
- Implementing evidence-based mental health programmes that address social isolation and foster belonging;
- Development of peer support Initiatives such as mental health or wellness champions;
- Creating workplace cultures that encourage employees to protect their mental health by managing work and home boundaries, taking time for rest and recovery;

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- Access to effective Wi-Fi is crucial and connectivity issues need to be addressed at the outset (DBEI, 2019);
- Training for managers who supervise remote workers to help them recognise and address risk factors for burnout, and mental health issues with the aim of ensuring that the organisation does not purposefully or accidentally reward risky behaviours;
- Training for employees in self-monitoring and seeking support when they are experiencing difficulties associated with remote working.

There is a need here to address employee mental health and wellbeing in a systematic fashion looking at the individual, group, leader, organisation, and organisational context. One example of guidance using this approach are the guides developed by Affinity Health at Work to help employees and employers to stay mentally healthy at work during COVID-19. Much of the guidance here is applicable to the remote working context (AHAW, 2020).

Guide for colleagues
Guide for employees
Guide for HR professionals
Guide for Line Managers

## 2.    The Right to Disconnect

The line between work and home life has blurred considerably. Technostress related to an 'always-on culture' and 'work intensification' has been found to negatively impact productivity, job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation (Tarafdar, et al., 2007 & Ayyagari, et al., 2011). The degree to which technology enables the user to be reachable is exacerbated in remote working situations by the absence of normal cues such as start/finish or break times.

Guidance around the following areas would be helpful to both employers and employees:
- Development and implementation of practical 'Ways of Working' protocols regarding emails, calls, meetings, and other work contact;
- Respect and support for the rights of employees to disconnect during breaks, when they are finished work for the day or when they have a day off;
- Managerial support (protocols) for limiting teleconferencing may be helpful in reducing employee stress and anxiety.

## 3.    Direction on the Establishment of New Social and Organisational norms Relating to Performance Management and New Ways of Working

Employers now have a real opportunity to review existing workplace systems and structures and implement those that are fit for purpose, and future proofed. Traditional organisational productivity measures that focus on being visible in the place of work can be replaced by measures that reflect

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outputs that serve the business and employees in a more sustainable way (Ayyagari, et al., 2011). Remote working can also facilitate greater diversity in the workplace and if managed well can create a culture of innovation.

Guidance around the following areas would be helpful to both employers and employees:
- How to measure productivity and performance for employees who are working remotely in a fair and sustainable way;
- Collection and sharing of organisational data and relevant case studies to challenge negative perceptions of remote working and development of new organisational norms (CIPD, 2018);
- Facilitating line managers to set clear performance expectations and communicate continuous feedback (DCU, 2020);
- How to ensure that employees are not penalised for working remotely in terms of career progression and promotion (DCU, 2020).

## 4.      Helping Leaders to Empower Employees to Work Remotely

Management styles that worked well in office settings may not work as effectively in remote work situations. Micro-managing behaviours are often a default for people who are inexperienced in managing teams and individuals remotely. Research (Corgnet, et al., 2019) confirms that such behaviour undermines trust and negatively impacts employee morale.

Guidance around the following areas would be helpful to both employers and employees:
- Training to help supervisors manage and empower individuals and teams by building trust, support, and collaboration;
- Training to guide managers on clear communication and performance management for remote employees, including fair, continuous, and consistent feedback practices;
- How to identify individual challenges and strengths related to remote working. Personality assessments and other Remote Working Scales are one way to address this (please see supplementary document for further information in this area).

## 5.      Support on developing policies and practices enabling equal access to remote working for all employees

Currently in the draft Programme for Government 2020 'Our Shared Future', there is a goal to have 20% of the public sector working remotely by 2021. The aspiration is that the private sector will follow suit. The draft Programme aims to increase remote, flexible and hub working arrangements to promote better work life balance, higher female labour market participation, less commuting and greater regional balance. A growing number of countries in Europe offer all employees the right to request flexible work (including remote working) (DBEI, 2019).  Employers need support to develop the policies and practices required to allow all employees equal access to remote working.

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To inform Irish guidance, there is a useful evidence-based toolkit for employers on flexible working (including remote working) published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in the UK (CIPD, 2018) and Dublin City University (DCU) has produced an excellent report on remote working during and post COVID-19 policy considerations (DCU, 2020).

Guidance around the following areas would be helpful to both employers and employees:
- Understanding which jobs can be done remotely (looking at both tasks and dependencies);
- Building in remote working into recruitment and retention policies e.g. including remote working on job advertisements to attract a more diverse group of employees, looking at remote working as a means of retaining existing employees at different life stages;
- Incorporating remote working as a key enabler in Diversity and Inclusion policies;
- Ensuring all employees have equal opportunity to request remote working and equal access to the equipment, training and support they need to work remotely safely and effectively.

## 6. Guidance on Good Work Design in a Remote Working Environment

Since lockdown, a large part of the workforce has been forced into remote working with no choice in the matter. Anecdotally our members are reporting that employees are already looking at the opportunity for blended working arrangements with some days in the workplace and some remotely. As we emerge from the COVID-19 restrictions, organisations should strive to give workers choice and flexibility around how often they work remotely.

Research into workplace culture has found that employees with higher levels of autonomy in their work reported positive effects on their overall well-being and higher levels of job satisfaction. (Wheatley, 2017)

From Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) we know that autonomy, mastery and relatedness are key drivers of our intrinsic motivation at work. This model could be used to identify key activities and areas that will ensure a motivated remote workforce as shown in Table 1 and 2 on the following pages.

Other models that outline the essential components of good work design such as Smart Work Design (Parker, 2020) could also be used as a good starting point. There is also useful guidance from the Future of Work Institute on Thriving at Work from Home (Centre for Transformative Work Design, 2020).

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## Table 1: Further Areas on Which Employers need Guidance

| Table 1: | Autonomy *A sense of control over our lives.* | Mastery *Feeling capable in our interactions with the world.* | Relatedness *Connecting with others and feeling a sense of belonging.* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Further areas on which Employers need guidance** | ✔ Providing employees with the flexibility and autonomy to decide when and where they complete their work<br>✔ Supporting employees to set clear boundaries between work and home<br>✔ Making responsible behaviour easy for employees<br>✔ Trust and psychological safety are crucial – important to build awareness of the dangers of micromanagement | ✔ Providing the resources and training to improve skills and engage in development activities<br>✔ Role modelling a strong feedback culture<br>✔ Review or re-design performance management practises to improve productivity and reduce presenteeism<br>✔ Providing equal opportunities for career progression | ✔ Implement evidence-based mental health programmes to reduce burnout and foster social belonging<br>✔ Support teams and individuals in task management and appreciation of work achievements<br>✔ Enabling employees to work-well – set clear expectations, performance measures, feedback, conflict resolution<br>✔ Provide opportunities for staff to interact informally, to collaborate and share knowledge |

## Table 2: Further Areas on Which Employees need Guidance

| Table 2: | Autonomy<br>*A sense of control over our lives.* | Mastery<br>*Feeling capable in our interactions with the world.* | Relatedness<br>*Connecting with others and feeling a sense of belonging.* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Further areas on which Employees need guidance** | ✔ Structuring work, identifying priorities, planning the day, setting clear boundaries and timelines<br>✔ Negotiating when and how you do your work with your manager<br>✔ Work-life balance - Prioritise mental and physical health activities for self-care<br>✔ Asking for help from others when necessary | ✔ Taking responsibility for learning and development<br>✔ Availing of opportunities for career progression<br>✔ Seeking feedback and clarity on role and performance | ✔ Actively plan to connect with colleagues, build a shared sense of purpose<br>✔ Engage in informal activities to build a sense of belonging in both team and organisation<br>✔ Actively activities that support team cooperation and collaboration<br>✔ Build professional networks to prevent social isolation |

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# Supplementary Information

**Graham Murray and Barbara Caska**

Summary of areas of individual considerations and circumstances relevant to remote working; work-life balance/merge; and using assessments to examine suitability for remote working.

Potential theme:  Steps to ensure employee well-being, health, job performance, positive attitudes towards employer during remote work.

**Prevalence of remote work in Ireland**

Working remotely became common in Ireland during the COVID-19 crisis.

In a remote working survey by NUI Galway (2020), 86% of respondents indicated they were now working remotely due to restrictions set out by the Irish Government as a protective measure to control the Coronavirus. 51% of these had never worked remotely prior to lockdown. In Murray survey 68% working remotely as a result of COVID-19. Many employees were faced with the stresses of a situation which was entirely new to them.

The unexpected prevalence of remote working has thrust working into a virtual environment and appears to have caused companies and work practices to become more task orientated and less people focused.

**Tools**

There have been several studies examining the effects of stress and fatigue levels from poor quality audio and visual teleconferencing. During teleconferencing we experience higher cognitive load as our brains need to work harder to navigate nonverbal cues and body language (Ferran & Watts, 2009).

A German study on misattribution of transmission delays found that a delay of only 1.2 seconds was enough for those on the call to perceive the responder as less friendly (Schoenenber et al., 2014).

Reliance on remote working hubs to solve Wi-Fi or dedicated workspace may only be a temporary solution. Issues with security, file sharing etc. and social engineering (how secure are conversations etc.).

The responses in Graham Murray study to the statement 'I would welcome the idea of Remote working hubs in my locality. (A remote working hub is a building with individual cubicles that enables the benefits of being in an office/work setting but very close to home and childcare

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facilities') was mixed. Strongly Agree 27%, Agree 34%, Neutral 24%, Disagree 14%, Strongly Disagree 2%.

Personality trait may also be a potential issue here. If remote working hub solves dedicated workspace and Wi-Fi issue, it may overlook potential mental health issue. Workers who are introverted may suffer in an environment that is full of strangers (the nature of remote working hubs means little continuity in who is there at any given time). We are still not sure about the social implications of this. Who controls poor office etiquette in a remote working hub?

Low Emotional stability has been linked with 'Counterproductive work behaviours' (CWB) in several studies. CWB has been shown to be both individual and environmental; such behaviours can be a result of negative emotions and can be influenced by work stressors (Martinko, et al., 2002; Spector & Fox, 2005).

Research by Seddigh, et al., (2016) discovered that in an office environment, agreeableness was associated with high levels of distraction.

Conclusion/recommendation: Managerial support for limiting teleconferencing throughout the workday may be helpful. Access to sufficiently connective Wi-Fi needs to be addressed at organisational level – are requirements matched to available access for each employee, as Ireland as a whole works to improve internet access. Possibly: Audit employee internet access when determining how to allocate work?

When designing or planning work environment, consider personality-based preferences or likely responses.

**Matching management style and employee concerns**

Management styles which may have worked in the office may now become challenging with remote work. A 2019 report found that the topics managers who had no training in remote working were least concerned about with regard their employees were, loneliness (59%), the career implications (65%), employees overworking (67%), and difficulty managing them (68%) (Owl Labs, 2019).

Ironically, in almost all remote work surveys examined, these four topics are often the most frequently reported issues related with remote working by employees (NUI Galway, 2020; Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Bloom et al., 2014; Buffer.com, 2019).

Such is the emphasis on eliminating shirking and the preoccupancy on performance when it comes to remote working, that up to now the mental health of employees appears to be an afterthought in many discussions.

Recognising problems such as stress and burnout can be a challenge in itself for managers when employees are in front of them. Removal from daily contact with work team members may compound this.

Conclusion/recommendations: Managers should be trained in the importance of remote worker mental health and wellbeing. Employees might be advised/trained in self-monitoring and seeking support at times when they experience loneliness, stress, or concerns about their career and future working status.

**Turning off: Work life merge vs. Work-life balance**

In Ireland, the 2020 Sign of the Times' survey highlighted that 57% of employees check emails last thing at night or first thing in the morning, an 11% increase since 2019. 36% check work emails on holiday because they feel it is expected, up 13% from 2014, and 25% find it hard to switch off in evening/weekends which is a 9% increase on 2019 (Behaviour & Attitudes, 2020).

Remote working may mean for some that normal cues for the aspects of everyday working may no longer exist, such as start and finish times or even such straightforward taken for granted cues like breaks and mealtimes.

Many advocates of remote working claim the traditional 9 to 5 is a thing of the past (Fried & Hansson, 2013). Surveyed remote working employees have consistently cited one of the biggest issues they face is knowing when to switch off (Behaviour & Attitudes, 2020; NUI Galway, 2020; Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Buffer.com, 2019).

A combination of remote and company-based work may be beneficial to employees. Sharkey and Caska (2020) found greater job satisfaction and life satisfaction among an Irish sample of persons who worked from a combination of their workplace and home than those working strictly from their place of employment.

There may be boundaries to the benefits of merging work and non-work lives, though.

Ayyagari, et al., (2011) defined the situation as to the degree to which the technology enables users to be reachable as "presenteeism".

Such presenteeism contributes to burnout as employees are continuously accessible by their job through electronic devices such as phones and laptops, no matter where they are. Much like generalised employee stress; studies have found that individuals experiencing technostress have lower productivity and job satisfaction, and decreased commitment to the organisation (Ayyagari et al., 2011)

There may be implications for stress and mental health.

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"We need to acknowledge that isolation, anxiety, and depression are significant problems when working remotely, and we must figure out ways and systems to resolve these complex issues" (Buffer.com, 2019).

Loneliness and social isolation have been continually reported as issues by remote workers, and we have still to see the extent of this. In the framework set out by the Irish Government, both of these issues were recently cited as potential mental health concerns from the consultation panel of remote working stakeholders (Future Jobs Ireland, 2019).

**Flexible work arrangements**

A 2019 Irish Government remote working survey showed 43% of respondents claiming increased schedule flexibility as the foremost motivation to work remotely. This was the most popular motivator for those in the Private Sector and the second most popular in the Public Sector (Future Jobs Ireland, 2019). In the NUI Galway (2020) survey, the top advantage of remote working listed was no commute/not sitting in traffic.

Several studies suggest that work life balance has a direct effect on not only turnover intention but also on attracting skilled workers to an organisation (Council of Economic Advisers, 2010).

Flexible working arrangements help to reduce costly behaviours to employers such as absenteeism, lack of engagement and poor timekeeping (Konrad & Mangel, 2000).

Women, in particular, have shown that flexible working arrangements are high on the list when exploring a potential new role (Chung, 2018; Future Jobs Ireland, 2019).

Research suggests that companies with greater proportions of women at senior leadership levels offer more work life balance orientated packages (Bloom et al., 2009).

A 'Results Only Work Environment' (ROWE) is where employees are evaluated on what they produce not the hours they work. Employees can choose when and how they work provided they achieve the desired results (Council of Economic Advisers, 2010).

However, longitudinal evidence has demonstrated these types of work practices are severely detrimental to the wellbeing of employees over longer periods of time, with many employees engaged in this type of work practice reaching burnout within three to four years (Michel, 2014).

**Work life merge/ too much participation**

Participative work practices that encourage practically 100% freedom of start and finish times can be just as detrimental to the mental health of employees. Michel (2014), who conducted a 12-year

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ethnography of Wall Street work participation practices, found that the levels of burnout far exceeded those of normal workers.

Michel (2014) writes, "One perverse outcome of these participatory practices was indiscriminate overwork. Bankers worked up to 120 hours per week, including nights and weekends, even when there was nothing urgent to do" (p522).

Conclusion/recommendation: With flexible working arrangements, it is important to support separation from work and non-work time through company policies and practice. Applies to both managers and employees.

It may be helpful to track work hours. Avoid situations where focus is more on produced output than hours work if salary-based employment arrangements.

**Matching management style and employee concerns**

Management styles which may have worked in the office may now become challenging with remote work. A 2019 report found that the topics managers who had no training in remote working were least concerned about with regard their employees were, loneliness (59%), the career implications (65%), employees overworking (67%), and difficulty managing them (68%) (Owl Labs, 2019).

Ironically, in almost all remote work surveys examined, these four topics are often the most frequently reported issues related with remote working by employees (NUI Galway, 2020; Global Workplace Analytics, 2018; Bloom et al., 2014; Buffer.com, 2019).

Such is the emphasis on eliminating shirking and the preoccupancy on performance when it comes to remote working, that up to now the mental health of employees appears to be an afterthought**.**

**Management area to address:  Trust**

Trust remains a prominent barrier for allowing employees to work from home (Future Jobs Ireland, 2019).

Managers and companies alike are increasingly concerned about the productivity of remote employees (Owl Labs, 2019).

However, there have been some significant developments of late to contribute to the theory that remote working does not mean a decrease in productivity (Bloom et al., 2014; Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Hunter, 2018). For example, The C-Trip China remote working trial showed a 13% performance increase for the remote working group versus the office control group.

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There is scope to look for some compromise towards management trust levels of remote workers and its effect on their wellbeing. For example, "workers supervised by family-supportive managers reported improved physical and mental health" (Council of Economic Advisers, 2010, p20).

**What not to do:  Mistrust and micromanaging**

Surveillance type management practices have been shown to inhibit productivity and employee job satisfaction (Corgnet et al., 2019) and the cost of micromanaging employees is extensive.

Worryingly 85% of those surveyed stated that micromanaging had impacted negatively on their morale (Chambers, 2008).

There is sufficient research to suggest that there are many health issues that arise from working for a micromanager such as chronic stress, high blood pressure, insomnia, increased risk of heart attack and in some cases can drive employees to alcoholism and eating disorders (Quick et al., 2015).

Conclusions/recommendations: Trust between managers and employees is essential for successful remote working. It may be beneficial to create supervisor awareness of the dangers of micromanagement.

**Training supervisors in remote working is essential**

While the level or type of training was not specified, remote working trained managers showed a 15% reduction rate in these concerns, compared with untrained managers (Owl Labs, 2019).

This suggests that additional training for managers may help with fears that allowing trust and autonomy may hamper productivity. Employees in high trust working environments report 40% less burnout, 74% less stress, 29% more life satisfaction and 76% more engagement than employees in low trust working environments (Zak, 2019).

Conclusion/Recommendation: Training managers in supervising remote workers is key. Employees may not attend to risk factors for burnout, mental health, or long-range performance. Ensure that organisation does not purposefully or accidentally reward these types of behaviours.

**Illness, stress and working from home**

We have yet to understand the long-term impacts of being sick while working remotely.

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A statistic of concern is that remote workers have a propensity not to call in sick as they are at home already (Future Jobs Ireland, 2019). Although anecdotal, accounts have been frequently reported in the media of employees being told to work from home because they are sick, instead of taking the time to recover like they should (Wilkie, 2019).

Managing and recognising stress in a remote working environment is a relatively new phenomenon and appears to not yet have been addressed in Irish health and safety legislation.

Additional considerations/recommendations: Sick leave policies for working at home need to be addressed at both an organisational and societal level. Requirements for medical certs may be impossible, unless remote physical examinations are available.

During the COVID crisis, questions of quarantine and work status/sick leave should also be considered. For example, what if an employee becomes sick while quarantining? Need societal policy, company policy and awareness for supervisors as well employees. Note: Wellbeing of employees should be paramount.

**Individual assessments for remote working success**

Employee suitable for remote working might be addressed through questionnaire-based measurement.

The R.W.S.S. (Murray, 2020) consists of 5 constructs and 36 items and is divided into these constructs based on significant findings and themes from previous literature. These constructs were Job tools, Motivation, Efficiency and discipline, Work life balance, Social aspects and Trust. This questionnaire comprehensively considers key areas found to impact adjustment to remote working.

Personality-based assessments may additionally predict remote working outcomes.

Murray (2020) found that Conscientiousness and Emotional stability significantly predicted remote working preference.

The recently derived 16pf (Sixth edition) Remote Work report evaluates personality-based competencies in the three areas of agility, achievement and affiliation to predict remote working responses. Based on the PSI, Services LLC. Remote Worker Model (PSI, 2020), this assessment may be used to check one's alignment with skills needed for successful remote work, to identify relevant strengths, and determine developmental opportunities.

Conclusions/recommendations: Assessments can help to identify individual challenges and strengths related to remote working.  Examples such as Murray's R.W.S.S. and reports based on

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the 16pf Remote Worker Model may be useful in preparing and guiding employees through their experiences with remote work.

Data from assessments can provide organisations with an improved understanding of remote working behaviours, and the potential mental health issues involved with long periods of social isolation. Further, it may assist in developing working guidelines and training programmes in how to recognise and address issues like stress, or performance challenges.

**Importance of choice:  Does remote working match one's preference?**

A lack of choice about work remotely may be detrimental to mental health. There are volumes of research linking mental health to the 5-factor personality traits (Lewis & Cardwell, 2020; Topić, et al., 2012; Chien, et al., 2007; Bagby, et al., 1995). Evidence for personality trait in particular and across several types of personality assessments that people tend to gravitate towards certain employment categories but also choices in life (Ickes et al., 1997; Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990).

Conclusion/Recommendations: Importance of clearly laying out company policy/manager expectations so that employees can make informed decisions about working from home, moving forward – if this is an option. Now many will be making informed and experienced decisions.

**The role of personality**

**Personality and remote working choice**
As the flexibility of working environments continues to evolve there is reason to suggest the likelihood of a gravitation effect towards remote working in individuals with certain personality traits (Judge et al., 1999). More recently, we have seen much discourse with regard to the attraction of increased flexible working packages, which may give rise to such a suggestion. There has been much research looking at the outcomes of the effects of personality on situation choice, including employment situations (Ickes et al., 1997; Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990).

**Personality factors promoting remote work**
Murray (2020) found Conscientiousness to be a significant factor as a predictor for remote working preference among a group of Irish employees. This was not surprising, as industrious individuals like to get work done and generally do not like to be idle for long periods of time. It is probable that Conscientiousness remote workers are confident working independently and may see the distractions of the workplace as inhibitory.

Murray (2020) also found Emotional Stability to be a predictor of remote working preference.

**Personality traits deterring work from home**

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Too much Conscientiousness can potentially be damaging in a work environment. This is something that should be a mental health consideration for remote workers and managers alike. Extreme Conscientiousness has been demonstrated to exhibit negative consequences such as diminished wellbeing and obsessive-compulsive behaviours (Carter, et al., 2015).

The negative associations of Emotional instability could also translate into uncooperative deviant behaviours, difficulty dealing with transient situational stress and lack of goal orientation (Berry, et al., 2007; Malouff et al., 1990; Penley & Tomaka, 2002; Norris, et al., 2007).

Employees experiencing negative emotions frequently not only may behave in a manner that isolates them from their colleagues (Brief et al., 1995) but also spend a lot of time focusing on failures (Watson & Slack, 1993).

Low Conscientiousness when combined with low levels of Emotional Stability and low Agreeableness will elicit rash behaviours under stress (Settles et al., 2012), which may be difficult to detect when employees are not working remotely. Involuntary situations such as the COVID-19 restrictions may expose employees to experience unfamiliar forms of stress.

**Loneliness/Social Isolation**

The health implications of loneliness are of concern and should not be overlooked when implementing a remote work framework or developing mental health interventions.

Cole et al., (2015) found that perceived social isolation increased mortality rates and risk of chronic illness.

Loneliness was cited in the study by Bloom et al., (2014) as the main reason that most of the remote working trial employees returned to the office.

In Murray's 2020 study, 53% of respondents that were working remotely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic agreed that remote working can feel lonely at times, while almost 13% strongly agreed with this statement (see Table 1).

Conclusions/recommendations: Data from assessments can provide organisations with an improved understanding of remote working behaviours, and the potential mental health issues involved with long periods of social isolation. Further, it may assist in developing working guidelines and training programs in how to recognise and address issues like stress, or performance challenges.

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**Appendix**

Murray (2020) Table 1

*Selection of percentage-based responses from mental health related facets from the R.W.S.S.*

| Statement | Flow | S.A | A | N | D | S.D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Remote working means I can get more work done during time I would normally spend commuting. | A | 54% | 29% | 12% | 4% | 0% |
| | B | 29% | 53% | 16% | 12% | 0% |
| | C | 33% | 37% | 6% | 14% | 1% |
| Remote working helps me achieve work life balance. | A | 66% | 21% | 6% | 6% | 1% |
| | B | 47% | 41% | 12% | 0% | 0% |
| | C | 39% | 36% | 10% | 14% | 1% |
| When remote working I find it difficult to disconnect from my job at the end of the day. | A | 12% | 31% | 19% | 28% | 6% |
| | B | 0% | 18% | 41% | 29% | 12% |
| | C | 12% | 34% | 32% | 10% | 0% |
| I work longer hours when working remotely. | A | 18% | 41% | 19% | 16% | 6% |
| | B | 18% | 29% | 24% | 24% | 6% |
| | C | 9% | 39% | 19% | 30% | 3% |
| Remote working might mean I am not included in team decisions. | A | 1% | 19% | 21% | 34% | 15% |
| | B | 6% | 24% | 24% | 24% | 18% |
| | C | 5% | 28% | 12% | 45% | 7% |
| I enjoy the social aspect of the workplace. | A | 22% | 59% | 15% | 3% | 1% |
| | B | 6% | 65% | 18% | 12% | 0% |
| | C | 26% | 56% | 21% | 2% | 1% |
| Remote working can feel lonely at times. | A | 4% | 53% | 25% | 15% | 3% |
| | B | 18% | 47% | 0% | 24% | 2% |
| | C | 13% | 53% | 17% | 15% | 2% |

Flow A= Worked remotely prior to COVID restrictions, Flow B= Does not work remotely but wants to, Flow C= Working remotely due to COVID restrictions.

S.A. = Strongly agree, A= Agree, N= Neutral, D= Disagree, S.D.= Strongly disagree.