THE EFFECTS OF A MANDATORY WORK FROM HOME POLICY ON RESPECT, TRUST, AND MUTUAL OBLIGATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN SWITZERLAND

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Abstract

This research explores how a mandatory Work from Home (WFH) policy during the Covid-19 Pandemic impacts the relationship between supervisors and supervisees. Using the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) as a framework, dyadic relationships in the workplace involving respect, trust, and mutual obligations, are explored through in-depth semi-structured interviews with six supervisors and six supervisees under a WFH policy in Switzerland.

The findings of this study indicate that a mandatory WFH policy does not have negative impacts on respect, trust, and mutual obligations, between supervisors and supervisees. For supervisors, however, frequent communication is of paramount importance in maintaining a high level of trust. The results also indicate that WFH can potentially slow down the development of new relationships; and therefore, supervisors are reluctant to recruit new employees as they feel that this would impose limitations on establishing a well-functioning relationship in a WFH situation. Last but not least, this study finds that the benefits of WFH are highly valued by both supervisors and supervisees, who have stated that they would prefer to work from home at least a few days a week in the future, once the pandemic is contained.

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INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of Covid-19 stunned the world and plunged numerous countries across all continents into a crisis, in the first half of 2020. In order to reduce the spread of the virus, many governments decided to introduce lockdown measures to various degrees as suggested by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Prochazka, et al., 2020). This posed many challenges on businesses who were suddenly tasked with implementing a Work from Home (WFH) policy wherever it was possible (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020).

As Dubey and Tripathi (2020) reported, this shift to WFH was generally met with positive reactions by those affected, as many of them were looking forward to experiencing the concept of working from home. A number of research articles have explored the performance aspects and the pros and cons of WFH (Apgar, 1998; Brownson, 2004; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Feldman and Gainey, 1997; Pinsonneault and Boisvert, 1999). Positive impacts include, for example, a reduction or elimination of transport time, cost savings related to work habits (e.g., travel, clothing, and food), flexibility in the organisation of work hours and leisure activities, and an increase in productivity. Negative impacts on the other hand, are feelings of isolation, a reduction in the chances of promotion, a tendency to overwork, and a decrease in the frequency of communication.

Whilst a lot of research has focused on the performance aspects and the pros and cons of WFH, there seems to be a lack of attention paid towards the relationships between supervisors and supervisees, and how a WFH policy can affect those relationships (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Taylor & Kavanaugh, 2005). This research has chosen to adopt the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) as a framework to explore how a mandatory WFH policy impacts the relationships between supervisors and their supervisees. The dyadic relationships at the workplace, involving respect, trust, and mutual obligations, are also explored. Following this, the literature review, the theoretical context of the paper, and the research methodology, and findings will be laid out. The conclusions, limitations, and future research recommendations will then be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Work from Home

There are many different terms for the concept of working from home such as "teleworking" (common in European literature) or "telecommuting" (common in

American literature) (Baruch, 2001). This alternative mode of work was initially enabled firstly by an increase in the use of information technology, and secondly, by a new managerial approach defined by Davenport and Pearlson (1998), which states that work is what you do, not a place where you go.

Several studies highlight the benefits of working from home. For employees, WFH can improve the work-life balance; increase morale; result in higher productivity; save time; reduce costs; reduce stress levels; offer more flexible working hours; and has the benefit of fewer interruptions. This will likely lead to greater job satisfaction and increased productivity levels (Apgar, 1998; Brownson, 2004). Whereas at the firm level, WFH can reduce real estate costs; lower the levels of absenteeism; increase levels of employee loyalty; a better retention of skilled employees; increased productivity; cost savings; increased flexibility, and the potential to quickly recover from interruptions due to unexpected events such as natural disasters (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Pinsonneault and Boisvert, 1999).

On the downside, reduced face-to-face interactions or "the human moment at work" makes immediate feedback and effective signals more difficult to send and receive. WFH is likely to reduce the amount and the quality of interactions with supervisors, and the spatial distance from others at work can also translate into psychological distance (Hallowell, 1999). Employees may fear isolation, while managers may fear reduced control over their subordinates (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

Feldman and Gainey (1997) explained that WFH will negatively affect individuals' abilities to satisfy their needs for affiliation, while workers who prefer to have other people around them in order to feel secure and motivated are less likely to thrive in WFH situations. Moreover, managers are faced with a new set of challenges in such WFH situations. There are internal anxieties associated with the loss of physical control over their employees and a perceived threat of loss of influence as they realise that their employees are becoming, to a large extent, self-managers. Consequently, some managers react to those fears by micromanaging their employees in their WFH arrangements (Taylor & Kavanaugh, 2005).

Given the pros and cons, it seems that WFH could not simply be introduced across the board for everyone. According to Chaudron (1995), a successful WFH arrangement needs the "right reasons", the "right job", and the "right employee". So first and foremost, both management and employees should discuss the reasons for WFH. Any arrangement should provide a clear benefit to the employee, and in return lead to increased productivity which will satisfy the management. The right job is one that mainly involves individual work rather than team

projects, which are harder to accomplish in a WFH situation without personal contact. Lastly, the right employee is the one with the appropriate personal traits for WFH, and an already established close relationship with the supervisor (Chaudron, 1995). An employee suitable for WFH is results oriented, self-disciplined, well organised, a good time manager, and is trusted by the manager (Taylor & Kavanaugh, 2005). Taylor and Kavanaugh (2005) later argued, that the "right manager" and the "right environment" should be added to the three conditions of Chaudron (1995). They explained that the manager's personality traits are just as important as the ones of the employee. Moreover, the workplace environment at home should also be considered, this includes the available resources and infrastructure, communication channels, as well as possible distractions at home (Taylor & Kavanaugh, 2005).

A study by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) on supervisor relationship quality under telecommuting showed that in a setting where WFH is not mandatory, employees are selected based on certain criteria. Supervisors are more willing to grant the possibility of WFH to trusted employees who are already performing well. This indicates that the level of trust and respect for professional skills must already be established. In such a WFH arrangement, the level of mutual obligations increases as well. The chosen employees are aware of the fact that WFH may lead to a reduction in relationship quality and therefore, they increase the frequency of updates through reports and phone calls to their supervisor. Additionally, supervisors might focus more attention on structured communications with employees who are working from home, because they have fewer opportunities to meet them.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic forced companies all over the world to rapidly rethink their approaches to WFH in early 2020. It was no longer an option or a privilege to work from home, but a requirement. Therefore, the situation during Covid-19 is so significantly different from the past. Even the underperforming employees, the new employees, or the ones without sufficient IT equipment are working from home. Such unexpected mandatory WFH arrangements are challenging to manage, because even employees who would never have chosen such an environment voluntarily are expected to do their jobs effectively from home. The consequences of such mandatory WFH arrangements are expected to be very different (Zbar, 2001).

Leader-member exchange theory (LMX)

Leader-member exchange theory (LMX) describes the process by which a leader develops and fosters a relationship with each subordinate (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). It is defined as the quality of the social

exchanges between a supervisor and an employee. The LMX theory postulates, that through different types of exchanges, leaders differentiate in the way they treat their followers leading to different quality relationships between the leader and the follower as well as the followers' work performance (Anand, S. et al, 2011). For example, the quantitative study from Martin et al. (2016) examines the correlations between Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) relationship quality and a multi-dimensional model of work performance. The authors reported a positive relationship between LMX and task performance, while trust, motivation, empowerment, and job satisfaction, were found to mediate the relationship between LMX and performance, with trust in the leader having the largest effect. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) further identified the key dimensions and their characteristics for such a leadership approach, as trust, respect, and mutual obligations.

Respect

Respect is gained in the process of both the delegation of authority and in listening to what subordinates have to say (Bartolomé, 1989). This professional respect is based on the degree to which each member of the dyad has built a reputation for excelling in his or her line of work. This perception can be based on historical data, such as personal experience with the individual, comments made about the person from others, and awards or other

professional recognition achieved by the person. Individual professional capabilities are critical within work relationships as each individual is looking to see what the other can do for him/her. In managerial relationships, the leader wants followers who are competent and possess the relevant skills to improve productivity. Whereas the followers want leaders who have a thorough understanding of the company, are knowledgeable about the profession, and are interpersonally and politically astute (Uhl-Bien et. al., 2000). Respect builds the foundations for successful relationship. Regardless of the levels of trust and obligation, if there is a lack of professional respect, relationships will suffer when work becomes more challenging; because one person will not believe in the other's ability to perform their part of the project (Uhl-Bien et. al., 2000).

Trust

Trust can be characterised as a willingness to be vulnerable. It also promotes more risk-taking in relationships, based on the expectation that the other person will not exploit that vulnerability (Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Tan, 2000). Interpersonal trust also includes the expectation that the word of another individual can be relied upon (Rotter, 1980). According to Lewicki and Bunker (1996), trust is a critical element in ensuing success in most business, professional, and employment relationships. However, it must not be viewed as static, but

rather as a dynamic phenomenon that takes on a different characteristic in the early, developing, and mature stages of a relationship.

In the early stages of relationship formation, trust is unstable as the parties are continually evaluating and balancing the costs and benefits of the exchanges. This type of trust can be described as "calculus-based trust" (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Once individuals trust another to not cause them any harm, they begin to let their guard down and become slightly more relaxed about taking risks. Individuals also become more confident in the other person's dependability, predictability, and reliability (Uhl-Bien et. al., 2000). Once dyad members are able to fully commit to one another, trust reaches the partnership level where individuals share the same professional needs, choices, and preferences. They can count on one another for support because the partner will act for them, even when they are not present to do so (Uhl-Bien et. al., 2000).

Mutual Obligations

According to Nahapiet and Goshal (1998), obligations represent a commitment or duty to undertake some activity in the future. In relationships, obligation can act as a motivator and drive the partnership. Commitment to a relationship means that one is willing to offer favours and support to another, knowing that someday this "credit" will be repaid by the other party. The receiving party of the favour therefore has the obligation to return a comparable favour in the future. In the early stages of relationships such payback is expected almost immediately, and obligation is minimal. As the relationship develops, more favours are exchanged, and payback is still expected within a reasonable amount of time. However, once the partnership level of obligation is reached, dyad interests are placed before individual self-interest. This means that there is an open exchange of favours and support, without being asked and without consideration of payback (Uhl-Bien et. al., 2000).

The LMX theory explains that leaders build different relationships with each subordinate. While high quality LMX relationships based on trust, open communication, information sharing, and a liking of the subordinates are developed. On the other hand, low quality LMX relationships which do not extend beyond the employment contract may be formed with other subordinates (O'Donnell, Yukl, & Taber, 2012).

The core concept of the theory is that leadership processes become effective once leaders and subordinates are able to develop mature leadership relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Such high-quality relationships can be of tremendous benefit to organisations. Compared to their low LMX counterparts, performance is about 20% higher and satisfaction is around 50% higher for high LMX subordinates (Mayfield, & Mayfield, 1998). Low LMX employees can also incur extra costs to the

organisation in the areas of training and recruitment. This is because the employees are more likely to leave after a short time and move to other organisations.

The next part focuses on the specific dimensions of dyadic relationships between employees and supervisors. In LMX theory, high quality relationships can only be achieved if the dyads reach "partnership" levels in the three relational components: respect, trust, and mutual obligations. Employees and supervisors must have respect for each other's professional capabilities. They must also have trust in the intentions of the other, relative to their commitment to the relationship and support. Finally, dyad members must feel obligated to one another enough to support the other when needed, even without consideration of payback. Only with high levels of all three of these components, can the relationship have the strength to endure the many challenges placed on it by demanding work situations (Uhl-Bien et. al., 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to examine how a mandatory WFH policy impacts the relationship between supervisors and their supervisees, this research adopted qualitative, in depth semi-structured interviews. In total, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with six supervisors and six supervisees who are currently in a WFH situation. To facilitate the openness of conversations and to avoid a potential bias at work, this research did not select a pair of direct supervisor-supervisee for interviews. Also, because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions in place, all the interviews were held through online Zoom meetings in order to avoid close personal contact. A summary of the interviewee profile is presented in Table 1.

A content analysis was also conducted. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed. Categories and a list of codes (Appendix 1) were set up in order to code those transcripts, and important passages from the transcripts were marked with a code. A data analysis sheet was set up to compare and summarise, with the goal to identify similarities, reoccurring themes, or discrepancies. Following which, discussions and conclusions were drawn.

FINDINGS

An Overview of Respect, Trust, and Mutual Obligations Before Covid-19's policy on WFH:

From the supervisees' perspective, the six supervisees respected their supervisors and were confident that their supervisors possessed the necessary knowledge and skills to lead their teams. None of them ever felt disrespected by their superiors. Three interviewees even specifically highlighted that they felt very much appreciated by their supervisors (I2, I5, I6).

Four supervisees described the "before covid-19's WFH policy"-

Table 1: A Summary of Interviewees' Profiles

Interview	Role	Gender	Age	Industry	Company Size
I1	Supervisee	Male	28	Accounting Textile Fashion	Multinational Corporation (100 employees in Switzerland)
I2	Supervisee	Male	24	Management Consulting	Multinational Corporation (120 employees in Switzerland)
I3	Supervisee	Female	25	Industry Consulting	Multinational Corporation (2,000 employees in Switzerland)
I4	Supervisee	Male	22	Private Banking	Multinational Corporation (16,000 employees in Switzerland)
I5	Supervisee	Male	33	Real Estate Banking	Large Swiss Enterprise (5,100 employees in Switzerland)
I6	Supervisee	Female	52	Accounting & Control	Large Swiss Enterprise (22,000 employees in Switzerland)
I7	Supervisor	Male	58	Accounting & Control	Large Swiss Enterprise (22,000 employees in Switzerland)
I8	Supervisor	Female	48	Human Resources	Large Swiss Enterprise (2,200 employees in Switzerland)
I9	Supervisor	Male	57	Engineering, Design & Advisory	Multinational Corporation (1,000 employees in Switzerland)
I10	Supervisor	Male	52	Banking IT	Multinational Corporation (21,000 employees in Switzerland)
I11	Supervisor	Female	53	Human Resources	Large Swiss Enterprise (2,200 employees in Switzerland)
I12	Supervisor	Male	37	Treasury Services	Medium-sized Swiss Enterprise (60 employees in Switzerland)

Source: Authors

Table 2: An Overview of Supervisees' Respect, Trust, and Mutual Obligations Before Covid-19's Policy on WFH.

Supervisees	LMX Dimensions		
	Respect	Trust	Mutual Obligation
I1	Very high	Very high	Low
I2	Very high	Relatively High	Low
I3	Very high	Low	Low
I4	Very high	Very high	Low
I5	Very high	Very high	Low
I6	Very high	Very high	High

Source: Authors

level of trust between them and their supervisors as being very high (I1, I4, I5, I6), and one as relatively high (I2). Only one felt that the relationship between her and her supervisor was exclusively on a professional level without much trust (I3). She explained this low level of trust was a result of the infrequent contact between her and her supervisor. Because she was not working very closely with her supervisor, communication between them was kept at the bare minimum, and therefore no real interpersonal trust was ever established (I3).

With regards to mutual obligations, all supervisees stated that they did not expect any specific consideration for their support and favours to their supervisors. Such a repayment of "credit" was generally not expected; however, they still valued the appreciation which they received from their supervisors (I4, I5, I6). Four supervisees described the exchange of favours and support in the relationship with their superiors as rather one-sided,

meaning that they supported their supervisors more than the other way around (I1, I2, I4, I5). One supervisee, however, described the level of mutual obligations in the relationship with her supervisor as very high. They could fully rely on each other, and favours were exchanged frequently without any expectations of repayment (I6). An Overview of supervisees' respect, trust, and mutual obligations before Covid-19's policy on WFH is presented in Table 2.

From the supervisors' "before covid-19's WFH policy"-perspective, all of them felt respected by their supervisees. They thought that their supervisees possessed the necessary knowledge and skills to do their jobs properly. The supervisors also pointed out other details, such as different temperaments, personalities, age, and backgrounds, of their team members (I7). Supervisor I10 stated:

"Yes, they do. But in every team, you have stronger and weaker employees. Some need

more attention, and some are very self-reliant."

(Interview, I10)

"Absolutely, we have a very highly qualified team, many of them have university degrees and PhDs. Everybody has the skills, the qualifications, and respect for the work they do. […] I have been working with some of these people for 15 years and yes, everyone has a lot of experience, and is very passionate about their work."

(Interview, I9)

With regards to trust, all supervisors described the "before covid-19's policy on WFH"-level of trust between them and their teams as high or very high. They trusted their team and gave them the necessary freedom to carry out their work. Nevertheless, this trust between supervisors and employees was never taken for granted, as there was always some form of monitoring involved. Each supervisor described their own way of management, either through clearly defined processes, customer feedback, deadlines, or simply result-based analysis of their teams. Interestingly, none of them actively controlled each step of the work process of their employees; or as interviewee 8 put it:

"I do not systematically control my employees. I also do not do spot checks. I wouldn't even have the time to do that."

(Interview, I8)

Interviewee I10, explained:

"Everybody works Independently, and it is not possible to control everyone, I also don't want to do that. A certain level of trust is simply required."

(Interview, I10)

In terms of mutual obligations, all supervisors regarded mutual obligations from a professional standpoint. If supervisees did their jobs well, anything above that was nice to see, but not expected from their side (I11). None of the supervisors ever had expectations of payback for favours and support. Obligations are a required part of teamwork that requires support from each other (I8, I10, I12). Nevertheless, most supervisors rewarded their supervisees for their good work, or for special favours that they had done. Such a reward could merely be a simple "thank you", or a paid lunch, support for further education, or even a chance for promotion (I8, I9, I11, I12).

Three supervisors described the "before covid-19's WFH policy"-level of mutual obligations as rather low (I7, I9, I11). However, this was mostly due to clearly defined hierarchical processes, which did not allow much exchange of favours or support between the supervisors and their team.

An overview of the supervisors' respect, trust, and mutual obligations, before Covid-19's policy on WFH is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: An Overview of Supervisors' Respect, Trust, and Mutual Obligations, Before Covid-19's policy on WFH

Supervisor	LMX Dimensions		
	Respect	Trust	Mutual Obligation
I7	Very high	Very high	Low
I8	Very high	Very high	High
I9	Very high	Very high	Low
I10	Very high	Very high	High
I11	Very high	Very high	Low
I12	Very high	Very high	High

Source: Authors

Impacts of a Mandatory WFH Policy on Respect, Trust, and Mutual Obligation:

From the supervisees' perceptive, the overall impact of WFH on the relationships with their supervisors was perceived as minimal. Five out of six thought the relationship was more-or-less the same as before (I1, I2, I3, I5, and I6), or at least did not change for the worse, but also did not develop any further during WFH (I5). Only one supervisee observed an improvement in his relationship with his supervisor. He explained that his self-confidence increased during this time, as they had some challenging projects which they managed to successfully finish while working from home. He was very proud of this achievement and felt like it strengthened the relationship between him and his supervisor (I4).

With regard to the aspect of "respect", only two supervisees noticed minor changes, one a decrease and one an increase in the respect shown towards their supervisors. Supervisee 1 explained that his supervisor was "getting on people's nerves" with increased attempts at control, which negatively affected his level of respect for her (I1). The other supervisee, thought the level of respect may have even increased slightly, as she and her supervisor could take more time, and put more thought into their answers, instead of being forced to answer right away in a face-to-face conversation (I6).

Regarding the aspect of "trust", four out of six supervisees did not notice any changes in the level of trust (I2, I3, I4, I6). Interviewee 2, 4, and 6 explained that the implementation of WFH did not affect their relationship at all, as they already had such a well-established basis of trust with their superiors. Additionally, frequent communication was maintained during WFH which helped considerably (I2, I4, I6).

One supervisee described an increase in trust from his supervisor (I5). He explained this change by the

very anti WFH stance of his superior before the pandemic. However, after more than a year in WFH mode, the supervisor realised that his supervisees were actually doing their work properly when working from home.

One supervisee, on the other hand, observed a negative impact of WFH in the area of trust. Despite the previously very high level of trust between him and his supervisor, he felt like the increased degree of control from his supervisor during WFH was a sign of lower trust from her side. He also noticed a lower level of trust from his side because he did not know whether or not she was telling the truth when she often mentioned how busy she was (I1).

Looking at the area of "mutual obligations", half of the supervisees described a decline in mutual obligations since WFH was introduced (I1, I2, I4). They mentioned that it had become much more difficult and time consuming to support each other when working from home. Instead of walking over to the other's workstation, they now needed to set up video calls and screen-sharing in order to help each other (I1). Interviewee 2 explained that usually such favours were discussed and exchanged during coffee or cigarette breaks. With WFH, there was no such direct contact and the hurdles in contacting one another for support were much higher (I2). Moreover, interviewee 4 explained that most of the consideration he received from his supervisors was in the form of paid team lunches, Christmas dinners, and birthday presents. With WFH, such team gatherings were not allowed. Nevertheless, he did not feel that this reduced his willingness to offer support to his supervisor (I4).

Two supervisees did not recognise any change (I3, I5), and one felt a slight increase in mutual obligations during WFH. She explained this increase as being the result of her close collaboration with her supervisor in improving work processes during WFH (I6). A summary of the impacts of WFH on respect, trust, and mutual obligations, is presented in Table 4.

From the point of view of the supervisors, overall, they did not perceive any negative impacts of WFH on the relationships between them and their teams. Two supervisors explained this as being due to the fact that they were working with very well-functioning teams (I7). Another supervisor explained that the transition to WFH was seamless as they already had previous experience with WFH (I9). One supervisor even highlighted a positive WFH impact, namely that she and her team had learned new competences and skills, especially in the area of digitalisation. They were proud that they functioned so well during the WFH situation and in the way that they learned new things together. She believed that this improved her relationship with her employees (I11).

None of the supervisors noticed any change in the area of "respect" between them and their supervisees

Table 4: A Summary of the Impacts of WFH on Respect, Trust, and Mutual Obligation.

Interviewee	Key Informants	Respect		Trust		Mutual Obligations		Overall WFH impact
		Before WFH	After WHF change	Before WFH	After WFH change	Before WFH	After WFH change	
I1	Supervisee 1	Very high	Slight Decrease	Very high	Slight Decrease	Low	Slight Decrease	No change
I2	Supervisee 2	Very high	No change	Relatively High	No change	Low	Slight Decrease	No change
I3	Supervisee 3	Very high	No change	Low	No change	Low	No change	No change
I4	Supervisee 4	Very high	No change	Very high	No change	Low	Slight Decrease	Slight Increase
I5	Supervisee 5	Very high	No change	Very high	Increase	Low	No change	No change
I6	Supervisee 6	Very high	Slight Increase	Very high	No change	High	Slight Increase	No change
I7	Supervisor 1	Very high	No change	Very high	No change	Low	No change	No change
I8	Supervisor 2	Very high	No change	Very high	No change	High	No change	No change
I9	Supervisor 3	Very high	No change	Very high	Increase	Low	No change	No change
I10	Supervisor 4	Very high	No change	Very high	Increase	High	No change	No change
I11	Supervisor 5	Very high	No change	Very high	Slight Increase	Low	No change	Slight Increase
I12	Supervisor 6	Very high	No change	Very high	No change	High	No change	No change

Source: Authors

due to WFH. Interestingly, three supervisors mentioned that they were now trying to show their respect for their employees more actively (I7, I8, I10). Interviewee 10 explained that he believes that appreciation can quickly go missing when working from home. Therefore, he actively tried to show his respect to his employees and regularly thanked them for their good work and their stamina during these difficult times (I10).

With regard to the aspect of "trust", three supervisors felt no difference in the level of trust between them and their employees due to WFH (I7, 8, and 12). Interviewee 8 highlighted the fact that:

"No, I think if you don't trust your employees, you have the wrong employees. It does not matter if you work from home or in the office. The place of work

does not change anything about that."

(Interview, I8)

One supervisor reported a slight increase in trust because she now trusted her employees to be able to deal with the increased freedom when working from home (I11). The other two supervisors also described noticeable improvements in mutual trust (I9 & I10). Interviewee 10 explained that this was mainly due to the fact that the topic of WFH was generally met with scepticism in their organisation before the pandemic, and many management levels did not trust their employees to really do their job from home. However, over time, they realised that it worked quite well, and revenues even increased, proving that employees are potentially even more efficient when WFH. This led to an increased level of trust from both management and the team members (I10).

For "mutual obligation", the perceived impact of WFH was similar amongst all six supervisors. Interviewee 9 explained:

"The work does not change in WFH or normal office work. But you have to be more formal now in requests for support, because you cannot just do it in a break over a cup of coffee"

(Interview, I9)

According to interviewee 8, supervisors are generally required to actively communicate slightly more with their teams, but the attitude or the behavior regarding mutual obligations does not change (I8). All of the supervisors maintained very frequent contact with their teams, ranging from multiple times a day to at least once or twice a week.

It was highlighted by supervisor 11 and 12 that the impact of WFH differs when it comes to establishing relationships with new employees. Interviewee 11 even mentioned that she was reluctant to recruit new employees during this time, believing that it would have been too difficult to establish a well-functioning relationship under the circumstances (I11). Similarly, interviewee 12 explained that WFH has made it much more difficult for him to establish a relationship with newly hired employees. He added that one of his new employees is rather introverted, which makes it even harder to build a relationship (I12).

CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Despite reducing the number of face-to-face interactions, the lack of human contact at work, and the potential for more psychological effects of distance, isolation, and superiors' fears of reduced control over their subordinates, the findings of this study indicate that mandatory WFH does not cause negative impacts on the relationships between supervisors and supervisees. The effects are not that different from non-mandatory WFH, as was shown in the study by Gajendran and Harrison (2007).

In our study, it is worth noting that respect and trust levels between supervisors and supervisees, before a mandatory WFH policy, were reported as high or even very high. In business, respect is often based on individual professional capabilities, and these capabilities do not suddenly change when WFH is introduced. These results indicate that a mandatory WFH situation does not influence the level of already well-established respect between supervisees and supervisors. However, the perceived change in trust was noticeable. For the supervisees, the trust in their supervisors did not change; however, supervisors trust in their supervisees increased. WFH could be seen as a challenge for supervisors to motivate, co-ordinate, and deliver results, in a new working environment. Supervisors underwent new challenges in their experiments with WFH. They may have started off with doubts, but once it was proven that their supervisees could deliver the work, they granted more trust and more confidence to their supervisees.

From a managerial perspective, a trusting and respectful relationship should not be taken for granted. Even though the findings of this research implicate that a mandatory working from home situation did not have a significant impact on the quality of the supervisee-supervisor relation-ship, it is important to maintain a high level of trust and respect. It is also crucial that challenges arising from the work from home arrangement are analysed and

discussed openly, and that such challenges are communicated in a way that empowers and inspires the team to maintain or even improve their work. All challenging experiences that the teams went through will strengthen the level of trust, and respect, and build the self-confidence of both supervisees and supervisors. As supervisor I11 stated, she believed that challenges from WFH helped to improve her relationship with her team. Everyone was proud that during the WFH situation, when the team were required to learn new things, this was done together, and the team functioned very well (I11).

For mutual obligations, interviewees in this study had hardly any expectations on mutual obligations that went beyond their professional work. To them mutual obligations are part of their job in helping and supporting their team. None of them thought about it in terms of a level of "credit" or "payback". The results show that supervisees observed a slight reduction in mutual obligations. From a managerial perspective, supervisors should be aware that mutual obligations might not be that visible but still relevant for their relationships. For the employees, exchanges of favour and support often took place informally, such as during coffee or cigarette breaks. However, during WFH, such spontaneous interactions were usually non-existent and opportunities to ask each other for support or favours became much

lower. Any potential request must be planned and delivered through formal channels which would sometimes make them think twice before asking for support. Interestingly, none of the supervisors described any changes in the frequency or the behavior in which mutual obligations were exchanged.

Frequent communications were highlighted by all those interviewed as an important tool in maintaining a good relationship and a high level of trust. Although, most of this communication was now handled through different channels, it helped both supervisees and supervisors to maintain a high level of trust in their dyadic relationships. This is in line with Strukan and Nikolic's (2017) findings, that continuous interactions and adequate channels of communication have a significant positive impact on dimensions of mutual trust.

However, from a managerial perspective, in situations where trust between supervisees and supervisors has not yet been established properly, WFH can slow down the development of those new relationships. The loss of "human contact at work" can hinder the development of new relationships because immediate feedback and effective signals are much more difficult, both to send and receive (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Hallowell, 1999). In other words, some employees might need more social interaction with their supervisors and team members than

others, especially those employees who have not yet established a viable and reciprocal social relationship based on trust and respect. Also, the findings of this study confirm that, as mentioned previously, some supervisors were hesitant to recruit new employees, as they felt like they could not establish a well-functioning relationship in a mandatory WFH situation. Additionally, difficulties in integrating new employees into the team were mentioned, and one supervisee felt that the process of getting to know his supervisor was slowed down considerably due to WFH. Therefore, establishing a new LMX relationship based on respect, trust, and mutual obligations can be challenging and take longer in a WFH arrangement.

There is a clear preference for a mixed model of WFH and work in the office. Across the board, both supervisees and supervisors would prefer to benefit from both workplaces, at home and in the office. None of them would prefer 100% WFH but would rather have a combination of work in the office and WFH (a hybrid WFH policy). While Dubey and Tripathi (2020) reported, that at the beginning of the pandemic people were looking forward to WFH, it appears that the interviewees of this study are now looking forward to going back to the office, at least for a few days a week. This is an important point that businesses should bear in mind when planning future working models.

LIMITATION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As is often the case in qualitative research, the scope of this research is limited and potentially leaves several areas of interest undiscovered. Moreover, because of the relatively small sample size and less than desired diversification of the sample, the results of this qualitative study are not statistically representative. The interviewees in this research are quite homogenous in the levels of respect-trust-and mutual obligations; the levels of respect and trust in their team are at a high level. The findings must be used alongside a good understanding of the limitations. The findings are likely to be different if the model is applied with samples that have greater variation in terms of respect, trust, and mutual obligations.

Future research could be enhanced by using a more diversified sample that has greater variation in the levels of respect, trust, and mutual obligations, especially in smaller scale businesses. While the LMX moderators in general have already been validated by quantitative studies (Martin, R. et al., 2016) the authors suggest, to conduct a quantitative study to validate the research findings. It would also be worthwhile undertaking comparative research on this topic. For example, in terms of cultural differences, the meaning and expectations of mutual obligations, and the boundaries of business and personal issues would be different. Moreover, the development of new relationships during WFH is also worth exploring. It would also be interesting to explore the impacts of employees' background information and firm factors such as the level of IT literacy, firms' readiness to support staff in working from home (e.g. IT support), and personal readiness to work from home (e.g. availability of computer equipment, workspace at home, ability to manage work/personal time at home). Additional research is needed to identify how the negative impacts of WFH on relationships could be offset, and how the positive impacts can be enhanced.

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Appendix 1: Definition and Coding of Trust, Respect, and Mutual Obligation

	Trust	**Respect**	**Mutual Obligation**
LMX category definition	Trust is characterised as a willingness to be vulnerable. Trust promotes greater risk-taking in relationships, based on the expectation that the trustee will not exploit the other's vulnerability (Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Tan, 2000, p. 564). Interpersonal trust includes the expectancy that the word of another individual can be relied on (Rotter, 1980, p. 1).	Individual professional capabilities are critical to work relationships because each is looking for what the other can do for him/her. In managerial relationships, the leaders want followers which are competent and possess relevant skills to improve productivity. Whereas the followers want leaders who have a thorough understanding of the company, are knowledgeable about the profession, and are interpersonally and politically astute (Uhl-Bien et. al., 2000, p. 157).	The final requirement for relationships is mutual obligation. According to Nahapiet and Goshal (1998), obligations represent a commitment or duty to undertake a certain activity in the future. In relationships, obligation can act as a motivator and drive the partnership. Commitment to a relationship means that one is willing to offer favours and support to another, knowing that someday this "credit" will be repaid by the other party.
Coding	o When interviewees describe the level of trust in their relationship o When the level of control is mentioned o When interviewees talk about reliability o When different stages of trust are mentioned Employees: TRU0X_keyword Supervisors: TRU0Y_keyword	o When interviewees describe the skills and attributes of their supervisors or when they describe their leadership qualities. o When interviewees talk about earlier information or knowledge about their supervisors in a non-working context. o When interviewees talk about the level of appreciation and respect they receive from their superiors. Employees: RSP0X_keyword Supervisors: RSP0Y_keyword	o When interviewees talk about the exchange of favours o When the interviewees talk about support or extraordinary help o When the interviewees talk about expectations after exchanging favours Employees: OBL0X_keyword Supervisors: OBL0Y_keyword

Source: Authors