forced us to confront them. This book is a much-needed exploration of these issues as we look for a 'new normal' in the post-COVID era, and it will help readers understand and negotiate these ethical dilemmas in a more thoughtful and productive way."
Todd Weaver, Dean, College of Business & Leadership, Point University, Georgia, USA.

"The COVID-19 pandemic of 2019-22 exposed weaknesses in our society's ability to respond to a pandemic threat. This was true not only in terms of public health interventions, but also challenges to our national and global economy, security, and social fabric. These new and important volumes address the ethical dilemmas arising with the many and complex dimensions affected by a serious virus threat."
Peter Hotez, Dean, National School of Tropical Medicine and Professor, Departments of Pediatrics, Molecular Virology & Microbiology, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas, USA

"These two texts provide a comprehensive and timely account of the many different ethical dilemmas posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ranging from a consideration of the long-term effects of on-line schooling for children to the ways in which the pandemic revealed the ugly realities of racial disparities across the globe, these texts are an invaluable resource for anyone wanting to pursue the moral questions raised by the pandemic. Additionally, they reveal the ethical choices faced by governments, businesses, health care providers as well as individual community members both during, and in the aftermath of the novel corona virus."
Donna Ladkin, PhD, Professor of Inclusive Leadership, University of Birmingham, UK

"These two COVID-19 volumes offer a groundbreaking look at the many ethical dilemmas associated with our current pandemic, and with important implications for those future pandemics that will inevitably follow this one. The editors of this collection, Eleftheria Egel and Cheryl Patton, have done a remarkable job, and provided a great service, by curating these diverse writings by scholars from around the world. In so doing, the collection provides a thought-provoking, deep dive into varied ethical considerations associated with this global challenge to human health and societal well-being."
Larry C. Spears, School of Leadership Studies, Gonzaga University, Spokane, USA

"The fallout from COVID-19 has had a wide-ranging impact on diverse social institutions and populations in developing and industrial nations. In many instances, we are still grappling with what its effects will mean for our shared future. This innovative collection provides thoughtful and useful pathways through the myriad ethical issues we face. It raises important questions and proposes valuable solutions while engaging and challenging readers with how best to move forward at this critical historical juncture. Its range is as expansive as the

problems we face. It is essential reading for those who want to navigate through the implications of the pandemic in a more ethical, deliberate, and thoughtful way."

Valerie Palmer-Mehta, Ph.D., Professor of Communication & Communication Internship, and Director, Dept. of Communication, Journalism, & PR, Oakland University, California, USA

"The COVID-19 pandemic has presented enormous ethical and moral challenges. In this collection the authors present their perspectives on these challenges. A very thought-provoking and timely work for our time."

Kathryn M. Edwards M.D., Sarah H. Sell and Cornelius Vanderbilt Chair Professor of Pediatrics, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, Tennessee, USA.

Ethical Implications of COVID-19 Management

Evaluating the Aftershock

Edited by

Cheryl Patton and Eleftheria Egel

Ethical Implications of COVID-19 Management: Evaluating the Aftershock

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INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), a novel human coronavirus. The virus was detected when multiple severe pneumonia cases of unknown etiology emerged in December 2019 in Wuhan City, China. The earliest date of symptom onset was December 1, 2019, with patients displaying symptoms of fever, malaise, dry cough, and dyspnea and given the diagnosis of viral pneumonia (Liu et al., 2020). Initially, the disease was known as Wuhan pneumonia, as reporters termed it in early media reports (Liu et al., 2020) and the 2019-novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV; Ruiz-Medina et al., 2021). Colloquially, it has been termed COVID, corona, and the coronavirus.

By March 11, 2020, the number of cases of COVID-19 had increased to over 118,000 cases, spread to 114 countries, and caused 4,291 deaths, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). At that time, the WHO officially declared the health crisis a pandemic. To date, COVID-19 is responsible for millions of deaths worldwide (Ruiz-Medina et al., 2021).

Crises are defined as undesirable and unexpected situations that possess latent harm to people, organizations or society (Canyon, 2020). The pandemic can be regarded as one of the most impactful crises in history for its far-reaching aftershocks at the micro, meso, and macro levels. This book attempts to evaluate the crisis responses, the decisions made by leaders as they attempted to react to the pandemic expediently. Making consequential decisions where risk and uncertainty abounded was no small feat and it is apparent that mistakes were made along the way.

These mistakes made throughout the pandemic decision processes led to interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, and interorganizational conflicts. You will read about some of them within this collection. A vital step in conflict mitigation and management is to listen to all sides. While this was not always possible due to the urgency of crisis decision making, at some point, it is important to gain alternative perspectives. Often during the pandemic, individuals and groups tuned the "other side" out, disregarding the root

causes of various conflicts associated with pandemic-related issues, while intensifying distrust and polarization. Thus, when we were planning what we had in mind for this collection as co-editors, we shared a goal that the collection would offer accounts from various perspectives, while remaining scholarly in nature. Week after week, as we both collaborated when coediting this collection, we discovered that we disagreed on quite a few aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic responses. Despite that fact, we respected each other and in some instances, moved closer to common ground. That is our hope for the readers of this collection. We would like our readers to seek a greater understanding of the "other," the person with the opposing stance on the issues of this polarizing pandemic. It is our wish that a more civil response to alternate views may be considered.

Our book consists of four sections. Section A of this book highlights the multiple disruptions that individuals, families, and communities faced as their customary lives were turned upside down. Remote work, online schooling, and social isolation became the new normal and individuals were left grieving the loss of what was left behind and trying to grasp the reality of their current situation. Section B tackles the difficult subject of social inequities. Unequal distribution of resources led to disparities in suffering and death. The pandemic provided the reminder that the time to fight for social justice is now. Section C offers the readers a chance to determine if suppression measures such as lockdowns, school closures, and public temperature testing were necessary and effective, excessive and ineffective, or somewhere in between. The final section, Section D, focuses on business and the economy. As government and business leaders made decisions to help those affected, they found that their actions came with a tradeoff. Was it worth it? Readers can be the judge.

We wish to thank our chapter authors, experts in various fields, for their eclectic contributions. Without them, this collection would not be possible. We also thank you, our readers. We sincerely hope that you enjoy reading this collection and, once completed, you are able to broaden your perspective on this most difficult crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to retain our authors' authentic voice, we preserved their use of American and British English spelling and styling.

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PART ONE

Disruption is the New Normal

ETHICAL MANAGEMENT IN THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES: COVID-19, GENDER, REMOTE WORK, AND THE SEARCH FOR EMPLOYEE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Bethany Huxford Davis[1]

Abstract: For many engaged in the workforce, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a reevaluation of the intersection of work and life. Employees—especially women for whom the pandemic impact has been felt more sharply—are pondering the sustainability of experiencing an imbalance between work and life. The temporary shift to remote work for employees forced both organizational and individual assessment as the world reopened and many began to push for a return to "normal." Employees are not always willing to return to a fully in-office job and are demanding more flexibility to attend to life, to shorten commutes, and to alter schedules. This wide-ranging change in workplace norms demands a sharp attention to ethical managerial practices. Questions surrounding logistics and feasibility remain and are vital for employers to address. Critically, the equitable decision making needed around who *can* work remotely, and who *should* do so must be considered. Solutions for the future must be made in partnership with employees rather than in managerial silo. This chapter explores the impact of the sudden shift to workplace flexibility created by COVID-19, offering practical solutions for individuals and organizations seeking to address the future with a priority on ethical approaches.

Facing a once-a-century pandemic tests every facet of work and life, and not insignificantly, the collision of the two spheres. Management during such unprecedented times presents major challenges and demands an acute attention to ethics (Allen et al., 2021). Almost overnight, employees who might not otherwise have been approved for working from home were being remotely managed. Managers were unexpectedly overseeing teams scattered across living rooms and kitchen islands, frequently needing to

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make schedule exceptions for parents supervising virtual learning and adapting to employees being unable to work due to quarantine or illness. Employers tending towards sharper managerial oversight found themselves considering just how invasively to supervise suddenly remote employees. Ethical challenges abound in the "how to" of managing a remote employee *without* a pandemic. This is only complicated further by adding in pandemic factors such as extreme stress, concern for health, and for many employees the complication of additional caring responsibilities (Allen et al., 2021).

The push for returning to "normal" as soon as possible has been prevalent throughout the pandemic, and increased with the dawn of vaccines, reduced hospital counts, and expired patience. In writing on this phenomenon, Chang (2022) notes, "We still want to get back to normal, and we can't acknowledge the realities of our current world" (para. 19). The process of determining who should return to the physical office remains at the forefront for many professionals and their employers. Whose job *can* be done at home? Whose job *should be allowed* to be done at home? Are workplace leaders and managers equipped to make these decisions as we collectively move towards a "new normal"? In a not-quite-post-pandemic reality, employers find themselves faced with the challenge of determining how to move forward equitably and ethically.

In the months immediately preceding the pandemic the International Labour Organization (2020) brought the complicated reality of family needs to the forefront, noting most of the "family work" is handled by women. The ILO also notes "the issues of work-life balance are relevant to all workers and have become a priority in both urban centres and rural areas across the globe" (p. 1). The ILO maintains a goal to ensure that "workers with family responsibilities – women as well as men – are not disadvantaged in relation to other workers and, in particular, that women with family responsibilities are not disadvantaged in comparison to men with family responsibilities" (p. 2). These are not new issues, but rather issues that were amplified by the dawn of a pandemic and the struggle to "make it all work" when the sustainability of such a concept was already shaky at best.

COVID-19's Immediate Workplace Impact

Nearly as soon as we could get our collective minds around what was happening to us in the wake of COVID-19, news outlets began reporting on the uneven impact on women attempting to balance career and family responsibilities during a global pandemic (Cain Miller, 2021a, 2021b; Cohen & Hsu, 2020; Robertson & Gebeloff, 2021). Writing for NBC news in 2021, Jessica Denson said this of the balancing act:

Don't misunderstand me. My husband has helped out a lot by doing laundry and assisting with the mopping and sweeping. But, honestly, the messy kitchen, the dirty bathroom and the cluttered dining room table just don't bother him like they do me. So I have felt personally responsible for taking care of them much more often and have generally done so. (para. 4)

Again, this tendency for women to hold more of the household burden is not new. Thoreau (n.d.) reporting on the She-Cession, includes this summation, "the pandemic did not create new gender inequalities in the workforce, but it is noteworthy that it did substantially worsen existing inequalities" (section 2, para. 1). Of course, the "second shift" of household work after one's job present in many women's lives morphed into what seems to be more a third shift when making considerations for the challenges of caregiving, managing remote learning, and navigating pandemic health concerns. This pressure to "do all the things" is only amplified for single mothers as Cohen and Hsu shared in a 2020 article for *The New York Times.* Also in *The New York Times*, in 2021, a series of images and profiles of women and how they were navigating this tightrope were portrayed. Chapman et al. (2021) share, women seem to have more options and yet, "that also means that whether they work for pay or stay at home with children is considered a personal choice, and one they're often judged for. It's different for men, because society expects them to work. Women's identities feel hard-earned" (para. 5).

For women who left outside employment during the pandemic, and those who did not, considerations for the future are important for employers. Many women will mull their options for returning, staying, finding something new, or some other solution. A part of the equation must be

employers reconsidering the equitable and ethical priorities they set. The impact of COVID-19 did not create a new focus on how to treat employees equitably and ethically. Indeed, in their 2011 report, *Equality at Work*, the International Labour Organization outlined many areas of concern, including several that largely impact women, such as gender inequality, maternity and paternity protection, and sexual harassment. These inequalities must be addressed at both the national and workplace level (ILO, 2011). This ILO report was written on the heels of the global economic crisis of 2008 and emphasizes that economic uncertainty can increase discrimination (p. 5). In the recovery from the financial crisis, the ILO warned, "whatever has been the social impact of the financial crisis, post-crisis recovery strategies and measures must not ignore the principles of non-discrimination and equality" (p. 5). This warning holds true now, in the earliest days of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic—days when hospital rates and case counts and booster shots are still a glaring part of an emerging new norm. As the world begins to move forward from COVID-19, employers must seek to impact employee work-life balance via flexible and remote schedules, helping employees to find a reasonable path toward work-life balance.

The Sudden Shift to Flexibility

To determine next steps for employers, it is necessary to understand the context of the past and the present. Long before the impact of a global pandemic, there was a sense of frustration or confusion in trying to find a healthy balance at the intersection of work and life (Akanji et al., 2015; Huxford Davis, 2017) that seems to feel more immediate and frustrating for many in the current reality (Sun et al., 2020, Veal, 2020). Various factors entangle the struggle towards balance, such as parenting responsibilities (Orel, 2019); the sense of a breakdown of the psychological contract between employer and employee (Kaya & Kartepe, 2020); being single and childless (Akanji et al., 2019); and being a female professional (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018; Høg Utoft, 2020).

A part of the complication around understanding the push to remote work during COVID-19 is the idea that the shift was not voluntary (Allen et al., 2021; de Klerk et al., 2021; McGloin et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). This was

true for employees who previously were not given the opportunity to remotely work or did not desire the shift (Zhang et al., 2021). The loss of the physical separation between work and home for many was a challenge to boundary management (Allen et al., 2021; Awada et al., 2021; de Klerk et al., 2021; Mirchandani, 2008). Indeed, the shift to widespread remote work during the beginning of the pandemic might best be described as abrupt or jarring, forcing organizations, "even those with a reluctance to change—to modify practices and processes that influenced the employee experience far faster than would have occurred without the crisis" (Nyberg et al., 2021, p. 1968; see also Zhang et al, 2021).

Organizations were forced into quick decisions and the vital nature of "clear, authentic communication" became more critical as employer and employee struggled with health concerns, capabilities of remote work technologies, and the unrelenting anxieties of pandemic uncertainty (Nyberg et al., 2021, p. 1968; see also McGloin et al., 2022). Even when attempting to communicate clearly and deliberately, many organizations discovered that confusion often remained prevalent, leading them to focus on "continuous messaging, consistent messaging, and the power of listening" (Nyberg et al., 2021, p. 1968). The sudden shift to widely dispersed and unsettled remote work, must be understood according to Awada et al. (2021) in three ways: "the work (the what), the workspace (the where), and the worker (the who)" (p. 1172). The intersection of the "what, where, and who" Awada et al. refer to, created a work-life collision for many.

Feelings about work-life boundaries, of course, vary from person to person, but these "preferences are important to the extent that individuals are able to act in ways consistent with their needs and preferences" (Allen et al., 2021, p. 63). The sense of organizational-individual fit and the collective sense of role conflict was rather complicated already pre-pandemic (Awada et al., 2021). Divisions between work and life have "become more permeable," leading to people switching roles more frequently (Leroy et al., 2021). The loss of separation and privacy for remote workers is not a new concept, but it quickly became a prevalent one in early 2020. Mirchandani (2008) describes it as "the spheres of work and nonwork" being "under perpetual threat from one another" (p. 92). The boundary violation involved "reinforces the

publicness of work and the privateness of nonwork" (p. 92). Suddenly work was encroaching on one's home life in new ways, and life was simultaneously pushing back on the boundary of work.

The ability to maintain these boundaries in terms of physical space and working schedules is a key aspect of successful remote work (Mirchandani, 2008). As de Klerk et al. (2021) note, "The absence of natural daily structures made it complicated to distinguish between work and personal life and to create distance between home and work, making it challenging to maintain a healthy work-life balance" (p. 7). No doubt this is challenging enough for those who participated in working from home pre-pandemic, but in a time when many of us stayed home for weeks and months without so much as going to a grocery store, the loss of distinguishing moments between "who I am as a human" and "who I am as a worker" began to fade quickly.

An important caveat to all of this is the privilege of being able to work from home in relative safety rather than being an essential worker serving the public with little protection, as seen frequently in the earliest days of the pandemic. The challenge for nonessential workers was figuring out the adaptation of working remotely and doing so quickly (Zhang et al., 2021). As Jacks (2021) argues, this shift is not all positive, but indeed has highlighted digital inequities, wherein "white-collar knowledge workers" could shift to remote work while blue collar workers did not see the same benefit (p. 94). This is complicated further when moving outside the United States' context, as "the digital disparity between 'haves' and 'have nots' increases further in countries that lack IT infrastructure and stable/cheap Internet access" (p. 94).

For those able to work from home, some of the known benefits of more flexibility were immediately seen. Of course, there are some obvious benefits to working from home for many professionals, including a more flexible management of one's life, saving time and money without a commute, and saving the expense of more formal work attire (de Klerk et al., 2021; Jacks, 2021). Interestingly, the lack of commute seems to be primarily a benefit but for many it also serves as "a tangible boundary between work and home" (de Klerk et al., 2021, p. 8). This leads some teleworkers to "develop rituals of going to work which replace the traditional commute to the workplace"

(Mirchandani, 2008, p. 91). Notably among the benefits, one particularly vital during the pandemic, is flexibility around childcare options (Jacks, 2021). There is also a benefit for employees with disabilities (Goldfarb et al., 2022) in terms of accessibility, comfort, and opportunity for specific kinds of work that had previously been more limited.

In addition, flexible work arrangements lead to fewer physical health issues for some, positively impact "psychological well-being" and lead to fewer illness-related absences (Senthanar et al., 2021, pp. 295-296). Not all work from home (WFH) experiences are positive, of course. The "initial excitement" of the early-pandemic arrangement was often tempered by the reality of the need to find space, quiet, and focus in one's home for one's job (de Klerk et al., 2021). While those participating in remote work have long appreciated "having a 'flexibility' to meet nonwork demands" throughout the day, this is tempered with the process of dividing and labeling household and childcare as "not work" (Mirchandani, 2008, pp. 94-95). Challenges in finding the oft-recommended "dedicated workspace" or a moment of quiet to focus away from the people one lives with were immediately apparent for many (Allen et al., 2021; Awada et al., 2021). Workers trying to make do in a new reality were frequently forced to shuffle—physically and mentally—around the complications of life. These included such factors as children doing remote learning and finding time for care responsibilities, which included enhanced cleaning in many cases (Awada et al., 2021). Challenges with a lack of privacy when housemates are a part of the equation, including sound from video meetings were also quickly apparent (Natomi et al., 2022). Other challenges include the technology used for remote working, as software such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and others used for team connectivity could increase worker anxiety. If an employee was already nervous about some of these tools, they may have become more so when suddenly required to use them with increased frequency and urgent need (Prodanova & Kocareve, 2021).

Natomi et al. (2022) illuminate one of the greatest challenges of this time in striking language, saying, "…while the way that we work has changed dramatically, the residences of many employees have remained the same. It is conceivable that employees are being forced to bear the brunt of both changes" (p. 12). For those who shifted to remotely working from home

during the pandemic, the sudden experiment led to work and life encroaching on each other in significant ways.

Work–family boundary stressors capture the blurriness or dysfunctional permeation of work–family boundary during the COVID-19 outbreak. Although existing research has shown that increased family needs and demands can promote employee adoption of telework (Shockley & Allen, 2010), working from home may also make it easier for family activities to encroach upon work time, blurring the work–family boundary (Golden et al., 2006; Hill et al., 1996). This is especially true as COVID-19 outbreak engenders an abrupt increase in family demands (e.g., taking care of children due to school closure) that may interfere with working at home (Kanfer et al., 2020). Not surprisingly, these stressors are more likely to occur and interfere with work activities in the home setting, as it involves more frequent interactions between the employee and his/her family members. (Shao et al., 2021, p. 827)

Tangled into the family demands outlined by Shao et al. (2021) above, are the ways in which we now must learn to live with COVID-19. As we move from the immediate crisis into living with the virus, employees find themselves at times making daily choices or "just-in-time decisions" about where to work (Shao et al., 2021, p. 825). Shao et al. note this is part of a "coping strategy to manage stress-eliciting demands and events from the previous day" which is "particularly relevant and informative to daily work location choices" based on pandemic uncertainty and related demands (Shao et al., 2021, p. 826). It is critical that organizations seek to understand the ways in which employees are *permanently* changed by the pandemic and experience daily decisions about remote work, family care dynamics, and quarantine choices that most could not have reasonably imagined before 2020.

Organizational Issues

There is pressure now on organizations to be more flexible and allow more permanent remote work arrangements and schedule options for employees. The arguments of "your job cannot be done from home" or "your job must be done between these set hours" are harder to make when the pandemic

forced us to see that many jobs *can* be done from home *and* at varied times. Sensibly, there are more considerations than "can X be done at home," when we are aware of technological challenges (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016) and benefits of being in group settings for some tasks. As Shao et al. (2021) note, "many necessary (or even specialized) infrastructures, equipment, and software remain more accessible or operate more efficiently at the work sites" (p. 828). Workers at home tend to be more productive but do lose out on collaboration and can feel isolated (de Klerk et al., 2021). While one might communicate less with coworkers, there are potentially more interruptions, including those "emanating from the nonwork domain" (Leroy et al., 2021, p. 1448). Employers and employees alike must grapple with new concepts like the "fatigue that can be associated with a heavy reliance on videoconferences" (Bennett et al., 2021 as cited in Nyberg et al., 2021, p. 1971). Beyond technical challenges, building on the work of Jett and George (2003), Leroy et al. (2020) note employees working from home might experience many types of other interruptions, labeled as: intrusions, distractions, breaks, multitasking, and surprises. People you live with, people who are making deliveries, laundry buzzers, and the noises of one's neighborhood are all contenders for distraction.

It is, of course, not just the individual that varies in preferences and fit for remote work, but also the organizational approach taken by each workplace (de Klerk et al., 2021). As Allen et al. (2021) point out, "workplaces vary with regard to the extent that they supply conditions that facilitate integration [and] segmentation" (p. 65). Not all organizations were prepared in practice or policy to support a major transition to WFH for employees, especially so suddenly (Awada et al., 2021). Challenges for organizations include communication, training for roles and the required skill set, and adaptation to organizational culture (Nyberg et al., 2021). These challenges, combined with personal preference and organizational needs contribute to a "fit" equation for each job and its capability for being done remotely. The challenge for organizations to determine "fit" must also include doing so equitably across the organization.

As the International Labour Organization points out, within flexibility there is a greater chance to increase inequality (ILO, 2022). McGloin et al. (2022) describe that the shift to remote work may have caused on-site

employees to experience disruptions in managerial rapport, which is a critical piece of the supervisor and employee relationship with impacts on "job satisfaction, employee retention, and reduced stress" (Swarnalatha & Prassanna, 2013 as cited in McGloin et al., 2022, p. 45). A key aspect of this idea of remote work functioning well includes trust. The "the tone at the top" matters in determining how to move forward, including how leaders communicate, behave, prioritize, and manage (Lašáková & Remišová, 2019). As Hungerford and Cleary (2021) define it, "high-trust work environments are those where the workplace culture supports and engenders trust between colleagues: leaders and team members alike" (p. 506). Employees generally start with a "willingness to trust" and hold expectations for that to "develop over time" (p. 507). For example, the inherent lack of employer trust seen in excessive monitoring is, understandably, not taken well by employees and can lead to turnover (Nyberg et al., 2020).

Organizations have been forced to trust *more*. This includes trusting new employees to work remotely, often hired without ever meeting in person, for jobs that will later be expected to be largely on site. The loss of opportunity for training, settling into in-person team dynamics, and developing communication routines is a significant challenge for organizations and their employees (Waizenegger et al., 2020 as cited in McGloin et al., 2022). Video substitution for in- person interactions leads to losing out on things like spontaneity as well as "shared identity, shared context, and reduce[d] conflict" (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005 as cited in McGloin et al., 2022, p. 50). This trust is a part of the organizational climate and this matters for flexible work arrangements. Organizational climate has a "negative and significant effect on work stress" meaning a "conducive organizational climate will reduce the level of work stress and vice versa" (Pradoto et al., 2022, p. 352). Senthanar et al. (2021) concur, noting:

> Flexible work arrangements are in large part dictated by organizational climate. Organizations that have a supportive organizational climate value nonwork aspects of people's lives and seek to accommodate the multiple needs of employees to create a positive work environment and enhance organizational productivity. Conversely, a hindering organizational climate requires that employees prioritize work over nonwork activities which can mean putting in extra time to get the work done or the embedded

> understanding within the organization's practices that nonwork activities may negatively impact career progression. (p. 296)

Both job stress and organizational climate have an impact on overall employee performance (Pradoto et al, 2022). Organizations must consider how they focus on goals, foster communication, create an environment of respect, and reward performance as part of the move to more flexibility (p. 352).

It is critical that leaders are involved in the process of building *and* supporting these structures, processes, policies, and practices related to trust-building *with* employees (Hungerford & Cleary, 2021). A lack of trust leads to higher stress, which impacts mental health and feelings of safety. This is resolved, in part, via improved work and life balance which should include "respect and kindness" as a key focus in the work environment (p. 512). It's not just paperwork to create a policy, rather "leaders need to understand how their decisions are intertwined with the company culture and climate" (Lašáková & Remišová, 2019, p. 26).

Beyond the availability of specific technology to make remote work a reality, organizations need to focus on business continuity planning and the infrastructure that supports remote work (Jacks, 2021). An important part of this is the need to pay attention to those who may not be able to take advantage of remote work in an industry where it is more prevalent (Kawaguchi & Motegi, 2021). The question *who can work from home?* is a key starting point for the conversation organizations need to have internally for moving forward.

Dingle and Neiman (2020) estimate that 37% of jobs can be done at home when allowing for characteristics that make it impossible (i.e., a grocery store cannot likely accommodate remote work for cashiers). They note "jobs in finance, corporate management, and professional and scientific services" are more easily done at home (p. 3). The Pew Research Center estimates that 60% of workers "*don't* have jobs that can be done from home, and others who do have these types of jobs are going into their workplace at least sometimes. For a large majority of these workers, their jobs continue to involve at least some in-person interaction with others at their workplace" and we cannot

ignore that about half of those who ever interact with other people at their workplace say they're very (19%) or somewhat (32%) concerned about being exposed to the coronavirus" (Parker et al., 2022, para. 6). As Kawaguchi and Motegi (2021) see it, it makes sense that jobs focused in telecommunication and information can shift to a remote setting, but "workers in transportation, the postal industry and the public sector, who are considered essential workers are less likely to engage in remote work" (p. 6). Those with higher incomes tend to have more availability for remote work as well (Kwakguchi & Motegi, 2021). All of this has been at play for many years in various contexts and industries, but the COVID-19 pandemic has clarified a need to be more intentional and consistent in making calls about flexible and remote work for employees where possible.

Considerations for a Flexible Future

An abrupt shift in the separation of work and life unfolded rapidly with COVID-19. The increased shift to more employees working from home is likely here to stay on at least some level (Awada et al., 2021). Many who began working from home in early 2020 find themselves uncertain that a return to 40 hours a week in an office building is a sustainable future. With this shift, employers must address the new tensions in the ever-elusive search for work-life balance. As employers reopen buildings, are employees truly needed in a shared workspace five days a week or are we longing to justify a shift back to "the before times"? Of course, remote work is not practical for some industries, but where it can be, there is a louder push for it than perhaps ever before. For companies continuing to use a mostly hybrid or remote approach, are employees able to find rest and balance away from the job now being done at their dining room table? Who is allowed to work at home? How can employees function best when childcare is shut down or quarantine is required by a school? How do we set procedures during the ever-changing dynamic of COVID variants *and* a mandate from employees that we do better when it comes to balance?

Lopez-Leon et al. (2020) note we can learn from this experience – and must – that "we need to systematize the lessons learned in times of crisis to be able to implement them efficiently and successfully if and when the need arises to do so again" (p. 374). The push of the pandemic has "forced people

to rethink their traditional ways of working, but [infection epidemics] have also provided an opportunity to change their conventional work practices" (Natomi et al., 2022, p. 2). Data from the Pew Research Center, notes that about 60% of U.S. workers can and are doing their work from home (Parker et al., 2022). Those who could be physically in their workplace but continue to choose to work from home, have shifted in their reasoning for doing so. The Pew data shows less concern about exposure to coronavirus and more preference for working from home, including due to relocation away from the office. Of those "currently work[ing] from home all or most of the time, 78% say they'd like to continue to do so after the pandemic" which is up 14% from 2020 (section 1, para. 5). Other factors are at play in understanding the population of employees who can work from home. Those with college degrees are more likely to be able to work from home, as are those with higher incomes (Parker et al., 2022). Simply put, organizations cannot assume employees will accept a return to the before times.

While COVID-19 concerns continue to be a part of the deciding factor for about half of those surveyed, the Pew data showcases that the reasons for wishing to work from home when it is not essential to do so, have shifted since the fall of 2020. The *preference* to do so is far more a part of the equation now, with 76% of those surveyed indicating they prefer to work from home even if their workplace is available to them, which is up from a 60% response rate in 2020. Childcare remains a significant part of a desire to work from home with 64% of those surveyed and working from home noting the shift to WFH "has made it easier to balance work and their personal life" (Parker et al., 2022, section 4, para. 1). Interestingly, those who are fully vaccinated and boosted report more concern about virus exposure if returning to the office. Most workers are "at least somewhat satisfied with the measures their workplace has put in place to protect them from coronavirus exposure" though only 36% are "very satisfied" (Parker et al., 2022, section 1, para. 10). Of note, "these assessments vary considerably by race and ethnicity, income and age" (Parker et al., 2022, section 7, para. 1). Organizations must pay attention to this early data to better understand a direction forward. Critically, this must also include a focus on understanding the pandemic-related gender dynamics.

Gender Dynamics

Understanding the gendered workplace is vital to moving forward ethically, if for no other reason than interest by employees. Forbes reported that only 7% of men are in favor of not returning to the office compared to 19% of women (Beheshti, 2022). More critically, however, as the International Labour Organization (2011) describes it, "women continue to suffer discrimination in almost all aspects of employment, including the jobs they can obtain, their renumeration, benefits and working conditions, and their access to decision-making positions" (p. 19). The pandemic has had the worst impact on young women, already impacted by gender inequality in pay (ILO, 2022). Of note, "the flexibility of remote work offers the opportunity to better balance domestic responsibilities with income generation, which has important ramifications when women carry a disproportionate burden of household work" (ILO, 2022, p. 31).

Awada et al. (2021) argue that "Overall, female workers, older workers, and those at higher income levels were found to be significantly more productive than their counterparts while WFH during the pandemic," allowing for creation of a "much-needed balance between work-family-home responsibilities" (p. 1183). As illuminated in news media and academic research women have "borne the brunt of the impact" of COVID-19 related job losses, including a "disproportionate number" of minorities (Jacks, 2021, p. 94). There are gender imbalances with childcare, scheduling, and other aspects of the "life" part of work-life balance (Leroy et al., 2021) even with a male and female set of partners both working from home during the pandemic (see also ILO, 2022).

This outcome is interesting, when well before the pandemic Mirchandani (2008) supposed that "teleworking women and men, it would seem, are appropriately placed to actualize the feminist vision of challenging the organization of social life into public and private spheres" (p. 89). Importantly, the teleworkers Mirchandani referenced were working from home voluntarily – or even fought for the option to do so. Most noted that it "allows them to gain greater control over the environment within which they work while managing responsibilities with less stress" and increasing

productivity while saving on commute times (p. 89). However, some form of separation is key:

Both male and female teleworkers felt that without a separation between work and non-work, their work productivity would fall. The language which they use to refer to their reasons for separating their work and family domains differs qualitatively. For men, the family is a 'temptation,' for women, a 'responsibility'; the distinction between a temptation and a responsibility lies in the location of control. Men have to exercise self-control in managing their option to do family-related activities. Women, on the other hand, also have to negotiate their responsibility in the home with their paid work obligations. (Mirchandani, 2008, p. 12)

Employer concerns come back into play as well, as "when a clear separation between work and nonwork is not made, the legitimacy and value of work is called into question" (Mirchandani, 2008, p. 103). While women are often required to defend the "legitimacy" of their work, "men face an alternative pressure; that of being perceived as doing women's work" (Mirchandani, 2008, p. 104). Understanding these dynamics is an important piece of employers structuring the future of post-pandemic work.

The willingness to view employees as people who desire to balance work and life – or at least manage both – demands attention to the functionality of flexibility for employee and employer. Employees are not just their lives and not just their work, but rather are complete beings, or what the literature often describes as "whole people" desiring to be effective and engaged both in work and life responsibilities (Dehler & Welsh, 2010; Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2013; Lund Dean et al., 2008; Miller, 2007; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). What does it look like to ethically address concerns for employees as *whole people* as the pandemic continues to shape our view of both work and life?

Moving Forward Ethically

The pandemic has necessarily impacted every aspect of life across the globe. For workers and their employees, these "lessons and changes in the workforce are likely to have long-lasting ramifications" (Nyberg et al., 2021,

p. 1968). The dynamic has shifted from one of "few if any employees can possibly work from home" to "who needs to be physically in the office and how frequently." Considerations for employers must include onboarding and productivity, but also considerations for physical space needs. Further, there are complications of agreements for employees to remain fully remote and out-of-state in some cases (Nyberg et al., 2021). As the ILO (2022) notes, those "with access to technology and higher skills, who tend to work in larger businesses, will have options to participate in remote work while those who do not, will not be able to do so. This is widening the chasm between the haves and have-nots" (ILO, 2022, p. 31). Employers who are concerned with avoiding deepening these existing concerns and challenges, should endeavor to approach flexible working arrangements ethically.

To get to this point, it is necessary to understand some basics of organizational ethics. Lowery and Duesing (2014) summarize the ethical framework neatly, "Ethics in organizations is determined by the individuals in the organization, so while contextual variables can have an impact, it is the individual employee's personal ethical framework that likely has the largest influence on individual ethical behavior" (p. 411). Some professionals, like accountants, might have a formal code of ethics, though training and instruction are also important across industries (Lowery & Duesing, 2014). Organizations that provide this training either internally or through contracting with an outside organization find a positive relationship to "perceptions of workplace ethics; thus it appears employers might be able to take proactive steps to influence their employees' views toward acceptable behavior in the workplace" (p. 416). Interestingly, spirituality also is important here as those identifying with a "a higher degree of spirituality might have more of a tendency to view ethically questionable behaviors as wrong," and thus, "may be less likely to engage in manipulative behavior at work, to conceal errors at work, to falsify reports, and to engage in other such unethical behaviors" (p. 416). Lowrey and Duesing also found that older employees tend to "become more ethical in their view of questionable workplace behaviors" which may serve as a useful mentorship tool for younger employees (p. 417).

Regardless of the organizational structure and focus on ethics, leader behavior matters here and "is believed to influence the ethical climate in

the company substantially" (Lašáková & Remišová, 2019, p. 27). Employees are watching for an "adherence to a common set of comprehensibly articulated group norms" in order to see how omit "to model, regulate, motivate and control human ethical conduct" in an organization (Lašáková & Remišová, 2019, p. 27). As we collectively have observed with scandals like those seen at Enron and AIG, employees need to feel safe in order to speak up about ethical problems. Employers endeavoring to set the correct "ethical tone" create an impact for employees' feelings of safety and to them behaving more ethically themselves (Mayer et al., 2013 as cited in Lašáková & Remišová, 2019, p. 27). Perhaps most critically in this conversation is a need to acknowledge the reality of a pandemic and coming post-pandemic world. The dynamic has already shifted – a return to "the way things were" is unlikely to be fully realized. Employees want more flexibility, and the ethical employer must make considerations – and likely concessions – to retain a satisfied workforce.

Practical Solutions for a Flexible Framework

What then should employers who choose to move forward mindfully towards more flexible arrangements for employees consider? Chang (2022) notes that some advice from Gerderman (2021) and the Harvard Business School is helpful here. Practical steps might include: (1) setting specific priorities for times when employees are in the office physically, (2) being direct and honest with employees, including about company needs (3) considering the risks of loneliness for remote employees, (4) maintaining a flexibility and willingness to look at a hybrid approach for future work arrangements, finding ways to talk about caregiving needs, and (5) showing compassion. Through the pandemic we have learned that in many ways we are all stressed out together. Employers and those tasked with leading teams must maintain sensitivity around the trauma and burnout we are collectively experiencing. This must include the emotional intelligence to lead empathetically, as well as the need to prove to employees it is safe for them to be on site in employer facilities. Organizations must strive to be fair and consistent when deciding who can work remotely and who cannot. These steps are both helpful and necessary for a United States' culture where Chang (2022) notes, "no

matter how good a back-to-office plan is, they're all a reminder that we're insistent on building a post-pandemic world that mirrors the pre-pandemic one" (para. 21). Organizations and employers must work together in considering what changes they can make for a flexible and remote arrangement to be sustainable.

Additionally, employees must be willing to consider changes at home to make flexibility feasible. This might include things like setting up a dedicated workspace to cut down on distractions and interruptions (Awada et al., 2021; Leroy et al., 2021). While employers should strive to create a culture of trust, employers and employees need to work together to figure out the balance between concerns of management that all workers are "slacking off" and the reality that some will (Kawaguchi & Motegi, 2021). Clear training around ethical working from home behaviors for managers and employees alike should be a priority (Lašáková & Remišová, 2019).

Employers and employees can work together to develop strategies for success for employees utilizing a remote work option. Lopez-Leon et al. (2020) write specifically to remote educators, but include several recommendations for working from home that are applicable to any professional, including: (1) create routines, (2) be organized, (3) have an adequate home office, (4) enhance your productivity, (5) be responsible, (6) avoid extreme multitasking, (7) facilitate communication and networking, (8) be balanced, (9) use available computer programs and platforms, and (10) learn from the challenges (pp. 372-374). The admonition to "learn from the challenges" is of vital import. Indeed Lopez et al. (2021) indicate that working to systemize what we learned during the peak of the pandemic serves to better support a need to be flexible in the future.

Managers can be trained to help employees structure their days just as they would if present on site, but in cases of remote work with a special focus on maintaining boundaries. For example, Zhang et al. (2021) argue for attention on several factors like, improved work-life boundaries, physical space, technology, training, taking regular breaks, and finding ways to make personal connections (Zhang et al., 2021, p. 805). Research from Ohio State University indicates a need to also be specific in preparing for complications

in the workforce for women. The researchers note "the pandemic did not create new gender inequalities, but it is noteworthy that it did substantially worsen existing inequalities" (Thoreau, n.d., section 2, para. 1). The report from Ohio State indicates a need for "businesses and institutions to start taking a hard look at changes they can make now to help women stay employed and to welcome them back into the workforce" (section 3, para 1). This includes a focus on policy and for organizations to "rethink how to configure their work environment to equitably accommodate and support women" (section 3, para 1). Practical changes employers can make include (1) allowing flexibility, (2) simplifying communication channels and technologies, (3) predictably scheduling meetings, (4) reconsidering the hours required for a full workday or week, including how employee productivity is measured, (5) moving away from the pressures of billable hours, (6) focusing more on hybrid/remote models for work, (7) designing work more around human behavior and less around specific locations and timeframes, (8) focusing on equitable changes, (9) ceasing caregiver bias, including in performance evaluations, and (10) focusing on retention programs (section 5). Employers need to move forward with an acceptance that "'in-person meetings' are important, but 'virtual facetime' is effective, efficient, and expanding use and value" (section 6, para. 3). Special care must be given to avoid employees with responsibilities for caregiving, including acknowledging that "the childcare system is broken, and employers must be part of the solution" (section 6, para. 4-5). Forcing employees—most often women—to ultimately choose between family and career is a broken part of our culture and one that reared its biased head again during the pandemic when mostly women took on the remote learning role for families with children learning at home (section 3). Those forced to leave the workforce should not be penalized as they return (section 6, para. 6).

Conclusion

The pandemic provided a pivotal impetus for change in remote and flexible work arrangements. Employees are demanding change, and the employers seeking to find and retain talent will need to listen to the shift in our collective acceptance of work arrangements as a culture. The impact of COVID-19 on workplace behaviors is far from fully understood, but the

visibility into push back from employees on a "return to normal," is clear. Employees desire more flexibility, increased opportunities to work from home, and a better balance from work's encroachment on life. Employers who find ways to meaningfully and thoroughly address these concerns—not just through policy, but through action—will likely find a more satisfied and engaged workforce moving forward.

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