



Assessing the Impact of New Ways of Working on Individual and Organisational Well-Being

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Abstract This chapter uses self-determination theory (SDT) as an organising framework to consider the impact of new ways of working (NWW) on employee well-being. We focus on the universal needs at the centre of SDT, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness, and explore how each has been impacted by NWW and the ramifications for employees' well-being. Our chapter concludes with a framework encapsulating enablers and inhibitors of employee well-being in the context of NWW.

Keywords Self-determination theory (SDT) • Autonomy • Competence • Relatedness • New ways of working (NWW)

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

New ways of working (NWW) encompass work practices that include “teleworking, nomadic working, hot-desking, working at co-working spaces, virtual working or mobile working” that are enabled by “complex information systems and virtualised organisational formations (e.g., network enterprises or internet platforms)” (Aroles et al., 2021, p. 1). In consultancy terms, NWW are often referred to as “bricks, bytes, and behaviour changes”, involving the integrated management of spatiotemporal, technological and organisational cultural changes (Kingma, 2019). NWW extend the notion of work away from traditional organisational structures and permanent employment to include, for example, crowdwork and online labour platforms (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019). NWW are also characterised by both temporal and spatial flexibility. For temporal flexibility, employers may introduce flexibility in working hours to meet customer or employee demands (Spreitzer et al., 2017). Spatial flexibility ranges from situations where employees work at home or another location one or more days each week to those where employees work remotely all the time and may even work in a different geographic location to that of their employing organisation. New spatial working arrangements, such as coworking spaces, maker-spaces, hackerspaces and fablabs (Brakel-Ahmed et al., 2020), have also emerged. These working arrangements are enabled by the extensive use of mobile and network information technologies such as the internet, smartphones and cloud computing, together with applications, such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, that enable individuals to meet in virtual spaces. In addition, firms are increasingly relying on digital technologies to configure the way in which work is accomplished with performance now increasingly monitored through advances in algorithmic management¹ (Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2021; Wang et al., 2020).

This chapter focuses on aspects of NWW that appear to have the most impact on employee well-being. Grant et al. (2007, p. 52) define work-related well-being as “the overall quality of an employee’s experience and functioning at work” and suggest it comprises three main facets: psychological, physical and social functioning. We use self-determination theory (SDT) as an organising framework through which to explore NWW and well-being. SDT encompasses a focus on both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation that impact both cognitive and social development

¹ See Chap. 4 for a more detailed discussion.

at work, including factors that facilitate or undermine people's sense of well-being and their performance (Deci & Ryan, 2012). We examine the universal needs at the centre of SDT, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness, and consider how they may mediate the impact of NWW on employee well-being. We then present a model which identifies the main enablers and inhibitors of well-being in the context of NWW. In conclusion, we examine how the Covid-19 pandemic has imposed NWW in an unanticipated way on very large numbers of employees (Kniffin et al., 2021) and the implications for both individual and organisational well-being.

2.2 NEW WAYS OF WORKING AND AUTONOMY

Autonomy is a core concept in SDT where it is viewed as a basic psychological need defined as self-governance or rule by the self and identified as crucial to well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Studies that have explored the relationship between autonomy and NWW present conflicting evidence of its impact on employee well-being. For example, remote gig workers managed through algorithmic management processes report high levels of autonomy, task variety and complexity, but they may have little choice except to work from home and to work unsociable hours to meet client demands. As a result, they experience feelings of social isolation, overwork, sleep deprivation and exhaustion, all of which have a negative impact on well-being (Wood et al., 2018).

Another study of knowledge workers (Spivack & Woodside, 2019) indicated that autonomy in choice of work location was associated with different outcomes depending on a wide range of individual-level factors including gender, age, levels of intrinsic motivation, and family and home circumstances. In this study of academics in a university in the USA, perceptions of work location autonomy were also dependent on whether academics perceived they benefitted from higher productivity and/or well-being outcomes. A recent study showed that the provision of flexible working practices increased trust in management, leading to a decrease in job-related anxiety. Job autonomy moderated the relationship between flexible working practices and trust in management, with this relationship being stronger when perceived autonomy was high (Yunus & Mostafa, 2021).

A variety of negative well-being outcomes including stress, burnout, exhaustion and increased workload (Karimikia et al., 2021) have been

linked to the extensive use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) which is core to NWW. Again, the evidence is complex in regard to the relationship between employee autonomy, ICT use and employee well-being. Some studies have shown that autonomy mitigates the impact of ICT use on negative employee outcomes (e.g., Chelsey, 2014), but a recent meta-analytic review (Karimikia et al., 2021) found that high levels of autonomy among employees exacerbated work stress among employees using ICT.

Explanations for this finding lie in the ways in which ICT systems are designed. Such systems may enforce a particular way of working or decision-making which is at odds with the methods that employees with high levels of autonomy prefer. As the technological capability of ICT systems increases, they may more frequently be used to monitor and control employee performance. When this occurs, ICT systems may emphasise aspects of work that can be quantified, rather than the perhaps more interesting or meaningful aspects of the job (Schafheitle et al., 2020). This focus may restrict choices that employees make in the methods they use or the tasks they undertake, particularly where those tasks are rewarded financially, with a negative impact on autonomy (Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2021). ICT use may also invade autonomy in personal lives. The boundaries between work and non-work may blur as ICT has a pervasive capacity to invade personal time and space so that employees find themselves working outside their normal working hours, thus reducing autonomy in their personal lives, with negative effects on their well-being, including work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion and poor sleep quality (e.g., Wang et al., 2020).

Given this evidence, it is perhaps not surprising that the term “autonomy paradox” (Mazmanian et al., 2013) is used to describe how, in situations of remote working, professionals’ reliance on mobile devices both increases and diminishes their autonomy. These devices provide flexibility and control in the short-term, but simultaneously intensify professionals’ availability to management, thus reducing their ability to disconnect from work. This notion of paradox can also be applied to flexible working arrangements more generally, with flexible working understood as fluctuating and constantly being shaped. To retain and enhance autonomy and well-being in NWW, organisations need to ensure that both they and their employees respect the boundaries between work and non-work, thus ensuring that employees retain control over their non-work lives and avoid problems with work-home conflict. Measures include ensuring that emails

or phone calls are not sent or answered outside standard working hours. Organisations also need to invest in learning and development so that employees are equipped to make informed choices over the methods they use in undertaking work tasks.

2.3 NEW WAYS OF WORKING AND COMPETENCE

Within SDT, competence involves the experience of mastery and being effective in one's activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Satisfying the three universal needs has been found to support work motivation and well-being (Van den Broeck et al., 2016), but there is some evidence that satisfying the need for competence may be the most important in the triad for supporting employee well-being. For instance, in research undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic among people mandated to work remotely, competence was most strongly predictive of well-being over autonomy and relatedness (Cantarero et al., 2021). When individuals do not feel capable and effective, they can not only feel demotivated, but their well-being is also seriously at risk (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The interactions between individuals and their environments provide them with feedback through the completion of tasks—but there is also a significant relational element to feedback that may be hampered in NWW designs.

There are numerous ways in which NWW pose a risk to fulfilment of the need for competence that are rooted in relational dimensions of the workplace, where remote employees are cut off from the naturally occurring, formal and informal relationships that form a key dimension of their work. The risk to competence is not inevitable, but, without careful planning and deliberate attempts to mitigate it, employees could find their need for competence thwarted. SDT research points to feedback as a critical driver of competence. In a major meta-analytical study, positive feedback was found to enhance intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999), while other research has linked meaningful feedback that highlights an individual's mastery of a task to a sense of competence (Hagger et al., 2015). Deci (1971) also emphasised the role of unexpected positive encouragement and feedback in driving intrinsic motivation and well-being. This type of feedback helps people to feel more competent, which is one of the key needs for personal growth. In fully remote working contexts, workers can be cut off from this valuable informal feedback. In the case of remote workers and particularly gig workers, there will be less access to infrastructural supports, such as career mentors or role models and diminished

networking, career and skill development opportunities (Ashford et al., 2018), all critical to the development of work-related skills and knowledge sharing.

Drawing on both SDT and social cognitive theory, we know that individuals derive a sense of competence through their informal interactions with—and observations of—others. Competence relies heavily on social benchmarks in the workplace and valuable learning occurs through the observation of others' successes and failures (Bledow et al., 2017). Role modelling, social comparison and vicarious experience are relational drivers of competence (Manz & Sims Jr, 1981), all of which are less accessible to individuals who work remotely. Coworking and hybrid options at least offer some opportunity for an individual to access relevant social comparatives that can support competence through access to informal learning, peer observation and “mentoring in the moment” (Johnson & Smith, 2019).

Finally, when considering competence satisfaction in NWW models, it would be remiss to overlook the roles of both digital and trust competency in reducing the potential negative impact on overall competence because of greater relational isolation. In their Digital Resilience Competency Framework, Grant and Clarke (2020) identify factors that support positive remote working experiences that promote rather than inhibit employee well-being, productivity and engagement. They identify key requirements including digital skills, trust-building skills, self-care skills, and social and emotional skills.

This points to several ways by which competency needs can be met in NWW. First, digital competency was found to protect workers who worked remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic. Individual competencies related to technology allow employees to be more productive and less stressed under remote working conditions (Tramontano et al., 2021). Second, being able to self-regulate and manage one's time, working independently as well as coping with disruptions, also support performance and well-being in remote contexts (Grant et al., 2013). Finally, relational skills are key to navigating remote working and protecting a sense of competence. In particular, trust competency refers to the ability of individuals to build trusting relationships at work (Tramontano et al., 2021). One challenge to effective remote work is the inability of managers to trust employees to get on with the job (Kniffin et al., 2021), and this lack of trust can risk employees feeling less competent. Being able to build trust across digital

platforms will enhance competence while the most ‘well-adjusted remote workers’ in Tramontano et al.’s (2021) study, who reported high levels of engagement and productivity, were characterised by high levels of trust skills.

2.4 NEW WAYS OF WORKING AND RELATEDNESS

Relatedness refers to an individual’s need to seek out mutual and meaningful connections and to experience a sense of community or a belongingness with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Loneliness, on the other hand, is “the psychological pain of perceived relational deficiencies in the workplace” (Wright & Silard, 2021, p. 1074). The experience of belongingness or loneliness may vary according to individual differences; at one extreme *sociotropy* represents an excessive desire for close interpersonal relationships and social attention, while at the other extreme, *social anhedonia* represents a marked disinterest in such relationships and attention (Wright & Silard, 2021). Social anhedonics are unlikely to experience loneliness at work because their desire for social relationships is minimal. However, individuals at the sociotropic extreme are susceptible to loneliness because their needs and expectations for relatedness at work may be excessively high. Deci and Ryan (2000, p. 71) point out that while “proximal relational supports may not be necessary for intrinsic motivation; a secure relational base does seem important”. High levels of relatedness exist in work environments characterised by genuine interest, care and friendship amongst employees (Slemp et al., 2021; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Research suggests that even routine workplace conversations, such as informal chats and “watercooler moments”, can be critical in creating a sense of community and enhancing both mental and physical well-being (Mogilner et al., 2018). Walton et al.’s (2012) experimental research also suggests that *mere belonging* (i.e., even minimal cues of social connection) can lead people to develop shared goals and motivations.

Van den Broeck et al. (2016, p. 1199) suggest that the need for relatedness is “less immediately essential for some outcomes than the needs for autonomy and competence”. For example, some people may enjoy working alone, meaning that the work itself may not satisfy their need for relatedness. Some studies suggest that professionals who engage in complex tasks requiring little interaction are happier and more productive when working remotely (Allen et al., 2014). Other evidence suggests that remote working can lead to small and positive impacts on work-life balance and employee well-being for those working remotely for less than 2.5

days per week, but anything beyond that can be harmful to workplace relationships (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Consistent with this view, it is suggested that a greater reliance on technology at work can lead to loneliness and burnout (Moss, 2018), particularly when individuals are working remotely (Charalampous et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). In a recent study on virtual working during the Covid-19 pandemic, Wang et al. (2021) identified a number of virtual work characteristics that were linked to workers' performance and well-being via challenges including loneliness. They found that social support was linked to fewer challenges during remote working and that job autonomy in particular was negatively related to loneliness. Further evidence suggests that remote workers may experience barriers to communication leading to them feeling 'out of the loop' because they do not see how their work fits with their wider team's or organisation's goals (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

One of the characteristics of work in the gig economy is that it is often carried out alone, where gig workers feel like "perpetual strangers" to other similar workers or to the clients of their work (Kunda et al., 2002, p. 250). To meet their need for relatedness, many remote and gig workers work in publicly accessible spaces such as coffee shops or public libraries, which can lack privacy and offer limited opportunities for social engagement. The emergence and growth of coworking spaces in recent years has given rise to an alternative work setting that creates a more relational work setting (e.g., community, social networks), as well as infrastructural supports (e.g., Wi-Fi, IT security) (Garrett et al., 2017). Evidence suggests that workers opt to engage in coworking not so much for the space, but because it offers a greater sense of community and creates a social experience that corresponds to their need to belong (Garrett et al., 2017). Having such a sense of community has been associated with increased psychological health and well-being (e.g., Prezza & Costantini, 1998).

To encourage a greater sense of relatedness in NWW, managers and organisations will need to engage in more supportive management practices by communicating with workers using motivational language, showing a genuine concern for workers' well-being, building trust among distributed teams and sharing information (Wang et al., 2021). In addition, remote workers should engage in informal communication with other colleagues, including use of work-related social networking platforms (e.g., Slack), to socialise informally to enhance their job satisfaction and to reduce loneliness. Given the relational constraints faced by gig workers, Ashford et al. (2018) suggest the need for such workers to craft

a relational support system that will provide a buffer against the stressors and strains of gig work and to develop relational agility—that is an ability to form, maintain and discontinue relationships productively. They suggest that these supports will not only enable gig workers to survive but will allow them to positively thrive in their work.

2.5 MANAGING NEW WAYS OF WORKING USING A SELF-DETERMINATION PERSPECTIVE

Our chapter has examined the impact of NWW on individual and organisational well-being. Using SDT as our organising framework has highlighted the relationships and interdependencies between autonomy, competence and relatedness in shaping the work experiences of employees engaged in NWW. Contrary to the view that relatedness is less essential for work outcomes (Van den Broeck et al., 2016), our review suggests that it is set to become an important bedrock that will support the needs for autonomy and competence in the new world of work. Figure 2.1

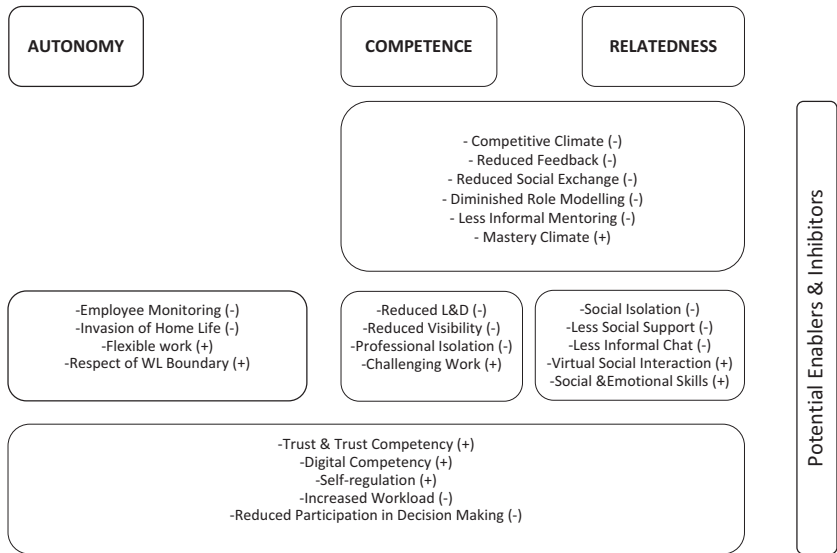


Fig. 2.1 SDT framework of enablers and inhibitors for NWW employee well-being

summarises the main enablers and inhibitors of well-being using the SDT framework and indicates the ways in which organisations can enhance well-being in NWW via the autonomy, competence and relatedness dimensions that underpin SDT.

We propose that the development of competence and relatedness will be more likely in organisations with a mastery rather than a performance culture (Wright & Silard, 2021). This is because such environments will support cooperation, knowledge sharing and learning, unlike performance cultures which will emphasise competition and social comparison. Our model highlights the complementarities that exist across all three dimensions, signalling the potential for these practices to have powerful synergies to maximise well-being.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Our chapter has highlighted the complexity of understanding the impact of NWW on well-being, a complexity heightened by the impact of Covid-19. The rapid transformation in work practices that accompanied Covid-19 was made possible by the increased digitisation and automation of workplaces and the widespread adoption of machine learning, data analytics and robotics (Nigel, 2020). For many workers this has led to a deterioration in working conditions with an intensification of work, increased monitoring, control and job insecurity (Hoddar, 2020). At the same time, there is evidence of workers responding to these challenges. For some, this means quitting their jobs and exploring more meaningful work options, resulting in labour shortages for many firms (Aroles et al., 2021). Others are engaging with NWW, for example through coworking arrangements, to enhance self-determination through “spatial self-management” (Endrissat & Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021). In whatever ways technology is used to shape the continued emergence of NWW, there will be a need to integrate supports for autonomy, competence and relatedness if employee well-being is to be sustained.

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