

What was it like for you? White Collar Work in the Pandemic

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Background

- @ 2000 Organisations purportedly undergoing fundamental changes, re engineering to agile structures, post-bureaucratic
- I started a research project asking 3 questions
 - Were organisations undergoing such a process?
 - If they were, what were the implications for managers
 - Were there fundamental differences between 3 national economies, UK, USA and Japan
- So we looked at ten organisations across 3 countries (across sectors) and 250 managers

1st

Study, 2003-05

We found:-

- Organisations were restructuring but driven by continual cost cutting, downsizing, delayering and outsourcing
- This had significant implications for managers, work intensification, worse careers, job insecurity and worse work-life balance
- Not too much difference between 3 countries
- Managers coped with much longer hours by taking work home, on PCs , laptops etc. and start of smartphones e.g. Blackberries and welcomed flexibility

2nd Study 2016-19

Follow-up study

- Same organisations and some of same managers
- Results broadly similar but more intense (more DS, DL and more work)
 - BIG difference was the ubiquity and pervasiveness of sophisticated digital technology including smartphone. Very difficult to escape work, always on call, work-non work blurred, managers very cynical about it, but just had to do it to cope with work volumes and younger managers accepting of it

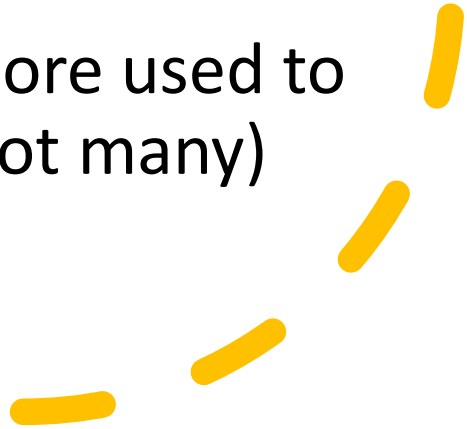
Present study, 2020: Impact of Pandemic upon Managerial Work

- So 'quick and dirty' research, went back to some of the organisations and managers from 2nd study
- 56 managers across 7 organisations in June, started off with an email or phone call, then a very simple questionnaire then a zoom call
- Mix of service & manufacturing; private, public and high and low tech and mix of managers by age and gender, important
- Very simple initial questionnaire, 4 questions; demographic; how long do you anticipate working from home; advantages, disadvantages; what do you anticipate will be the longer-term implications for where work is carried out and organized and open question

Results

- Managers partly chosen because they don't have to be at work (percentages of professional and managers high)
- Managers (in early June) did not anticipate going back to work any time soon (and probably underestimate) even in industries that make something e.g. Brewery, despite government efforts
- More of the managers' perspective of course (not organizational)

Advantages

- Big one, lack of a commute, especially for managers working in South East and larger cities, AND travelling (but may be honeymoon?), presenteeism gone (telecom and consulting)
 - And associated advantages with work-life balance (but not for carers of small children)
 - Evidence that those who were more used to home working adapted better (not many)
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Disadvantages

- Work-non work divides blurred
- Isolating (and belated appreciation of the office)
- Difficult to 'turn off'
- Work monotonous and challenging , lack of downtime, and being continuously on-call and day extended
- Communications more difficult and zoom very demanding



Disadvantages

- Unsurprisingly, childcare and home schooling were extremely challenging, working round clock to cope and at weekends, lack of a division between working and parenting (it was my kids or my job). Huge pressures on females, especially single mothers. OK schools back but isolating, childcare mixed, breakfast clubs.
- Evidence that females particularly hit, evidence that take 2nd place on having children





Organisational issues

- Clearly lower cost base
- But control issues (tech company), 'shirking from home'
- Issue of communications
- Issues of learning

Postscript: 2nd UK Study, November, 2020

- Results much same in UK as first study, although children back at school big bonus
- But isolation highlighted and sociability of work missed
- Lack of structure of working day, relentless
- Going back to work put off and considerable speculation on the future of work, many can't imagine going back FT
- But number had not met new teams, lack of learning

Japanese sample, November 2020

- 45 managers in 5 organizations
- Homeworking far less prevalent, state of emergency of a month and two organizations gone back
- Technology obviously same but legal, medical and cultural differences e.g. smaller houses
- Excuse to outsource work in AuditCo



Conclusion

- Environmental (stand on North Road in rush hour)
- Levelling up and rejuvenating communities (for example, in south Wales)
- Liberating for home workers
- Emergence of hybrid model with some office work and third spaces

This is Wilson. He is now working from home 😊



Thanks for Listening

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