

**United Against COVID-19?
A Mixed-Methods Study
Examining the Impact of the
Global Pandemic Crisis on
Work Life and Workplace Connections**

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Abstract

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was a crisis that caused a radical change in the way organisations and their employees could operate on a global scale. This research investigates the impact of the pandemic on employees' experiences of work as their in-person interaction was reduced and, at times, eliminated. There were two major areas of the work experience that were disrupted. Firstly, the pandemic forced an unprecedented, sudden transition into remote work for non-essential workers; more specifically, changing from formal, co-located work to working from home. This surfaced the importance of work environment factors that had been previously taken for granted such as work-life boundaries, appropriate technology, sufficient office space, and easy access and communication with co-workers and managers. The implications of remote work also affected employees on an individual level, including impacts on personal well-being and work-life balance. Secondly, the disruption caused by the sudden transition into remote work affected trust in workplace connections; this was also attributed to the general stress and anxiety that comes with experiencing a crisis. So, the related concepts of organisational support and organisational culture played a critical role in maintaining and developing organisational relationships. As such, this study explored these two areas of employee work life and workplace connections in further detail.

This study used a mixed-methods approach, a pragmatic paradigm, and a concurrent triangulation research design to analyse secondary data collected using a cross-sectional survey. The postgraduate student researcher was given access to the survey, which was conducted in May 2020 while employees were working remotely during New Zealand's first lockdown. Of the prioritised qualitative results, two types of themes emerged after using codebook thematic analysis: contextual and remote work experience themes. The two contextual themes situated participants in the present-time, existing circumstances: the era of a global pandemic and the organisation's existing familial culture. The four remote work experience themes were underpinned by the contextual themes and pertained to participants' actual experiences: removing in-person interactions, the toll of technology, the element of humanity in trust, and questioning where loyalties lie. To support these qualitative themes, relevant quantitative factors were analysed using descriptive statistics and correlations, which revealed two salient component types: work lifestyle and relational components.

The disruption caused by COVID-19 impacted participants' lifestyles and workplace connections immensely. By integrating the findings from these qualitative themes and quantitative factors, this study depicted discoveries around enablement and equipment, communication, collective synergy, understanding during crisis and loyalty in organisational relationships. These integrated findings corroborated existing academic research regarding relevant topics such as crisis management, organisational support, collaboration, organisational culture, and trust. The overarching practical implication of this study emphasised the need and value, to employees and employers alike, of being empathetic and compassionate, understanding that we are all human and that people are imperfect. Empathy and compassion are especially important to consider in times of crisis, where people are just genuinely trying to do their best in difficult circumstances, and the consequences of not demonstrating empathy and compassion may result in undesirable, disruptive behaviour.

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List of Abbreviations

AUT	Auckland University of Technology
AUTEC	Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
COVID-19	coronavirus
ICT	information and communication technology
MMR	mixed-methods research
NZ	New Zealand
RQ	research question/s
RWE	remote work experience
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
WFH	work/working from home

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature X
Nicole Camacho

Date 1st August 2022

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“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name goes all the glory for your unfailing love and faithfulness.”

Psalms 115:1 (NLT)

Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was obtained from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee for both 1) the original research project on the 17th September 2019, and 2) the amendment for the brief 'snapshot' survey on the 16th April 2020, ethics application number 19/338. Both these approvals can be found in the Appendices (see Appendix A and Appendix B).

Chapter 1. Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic caused substantial disruption to people's lives, and this is still being felt worldwide today. Such significant change entails having to deal with a whole new set of limitations around how to conduct work; for example, government restrictions like lockdowns, travel restrictions, health and safety procedures of social distancing, and wearing masks (Henrickson, 2020; Lee, 2021; New Zealand Government, 2022; Waizenegger et al., 2020). The pandemic opened a whole new way of life that most were not anticipating and, therefore, were unprepared for (Andersen & Kelliher, 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020). The work-related, societal impacts were widespread: those who were studying had their career aspirations disrupted, some existing workers were forced into retiring early, and some lost their jobs altogether (for example, those in the tourism and hospitality industries) (Guzzo et al., 2021). From individuals' perspectives, there were financial implications, lifestyle changes, commute restrictions, and technological complications (Andersen & Kelliher, 2020). From an organisational perspective, some implications included major workforce restructuring and fluctuations in working hours across a range of industries both essential (e.g., healthcare) and non-essential (e.g., retail) (Henrickson, 2020). In New Zealand (NZ), a country which has been commended for exemplary early handling of the pandemic, the response to COVID-19 developed in a distinctive way in comparison to other countries' responses (Henrickson, 2020). The particular governmental response of NZ thus impacted the way in which organisations operated; one of the main work implications being the forced transition into remote working.

Prior to COVID-19, the notion of remote working was only researched in the context that it was an active choice and not a forced shift into a restricted way of working without preparation (Andersen & Kelliher, 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020). Remote working is an established, well-explored topic that was gaining attention even before COVID-19. This was due to social trends demanding greater control in flexibility, and society's advancement and dependency on technology; for example, the internet, increased use of computers, availability of fast internet connections, and information and communication technology (ICT) allowing synchronous and asynchronous communication (Golden et al., 2008; Hunter, 2019; Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012; Wang et al., 2021). However, subject to availability, level of trust in employees, type of work, experience or tenure, and employers'

discretion, remote working pre-COVID was perceived more as a privileged perk than a standard available work option (Wang et al., 2021). In saying this, many of these previous remote work trends have since changed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As many organisations resorted to remote working as the only practical option for the sake of continuity, both academic and media attention on this topic skyrocketed since the coming of COVID-19 (Charalampous et al., 2019; Green et al., 2020). Two areas that were majorly impacted pertained to employees' work life under COVID-19 and their workplace connections. Again, although related concepts such as the role of the work environment, organisational relationships and trust are well-established and researched both academically and in practice, COVID-19 presented a unique situation (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Lee, 2021). The disruption of the pandemic left little space for employees to adjust to the consequences of such change properly, and even less space for organisations to suitably cater to these work aspects and to the well-being of their people (e.g., around remote working) (Andersen & Kelliher, 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020).

There are risks in conducting research whilst a situation is ongoing, including research becoming out-of-date or irrelevant due to new circumstances developing, or any analysis being short-sighted in the bigger picture of the crisis (Henrickson, 2020). However, the relevance and pressing need for more information about the implications of COVID-19 as it develops makes the research pertinent. Additionally, this research area is not only relevant in today's society but also can be applicable in future situations where global disruptions or crises may affect organisations' operations. To date, research on the massive organisational change caused by COVID-19 identified negative implications such as workaholism, existing workplace conflict spilling over to remote working, difficulties in creating synergetic virtual teams, lack of effective communication, and lack of trust (Nurse et al., 2020; Soomar, 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2020). This thesis will delve into these implications in more detail, as well as explore how such implications affected workplace connections between employees as co-workers, employees and their supervisors, and employees' perceptions of their links to the wider organisation.

1.1 Research objective

The objective of this research is to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on employees' experience of work by focusing on employees at one predominantly

office-based organisation. To reach this objective, this study poses the following overarching research question (RQ):

RQ1: How has the global disruption of COVID-19 impacted employee work life and workplace connections?

This broad RQ is explored further by increasing the focus on the two related concepts of shifting from a distinct, formal work environment into remote work, and its impact on trust in organisational relationships. Therefore, the RQ is broken down into sub-questions:

Sub-RQ1a: How did employees' transition from a distinct, formal work environment to home-based remote working affect their work experience during COVID-19?

Sub-RQ1b: How did employees' experience of home-based remote work during COVID-19 impact organisational relationships?

1.2 Thesis overview

This thesis comprises five chapters in total. Subsequent to this introductory chapter outlining the study's focus, I then delve into Chapter Two, which is a literature review that draws on existing academic literature and describes relevant concepts. This chapter also reiterates the research's importance by exposing the gap in literature around the context-specific global disruption of COVID-19 and its effect on workplace connections. I explore the general topic of home-based remote work pre-COVID, before narrowing the focus on the unique work-life circumstances of the crisis which induced mandatory home-based remote work. This leads to how organisational culture was relevant during disruption, after which I define what workplace relationships mean in this study and the role of trust. I then draw on more existing research to cover the different ways an organisation could offer support to their employees and foster employee loyalty.

In Chapter Three, I describe the method employed to conduct this research. I present and justify my choice to use a mixed-method approach within a pragmatic paradigm. I also outline the ethical considerations associated with this research, the type of analysis utilised in alignment with the research approach and then draw on literature on ways to establish research trustworthiness and rigour.

In Chapter Four, I present the results and a basic joint display that clearly illustrates the summed qualitative themes and quantitative factors discerned from the data. These are organised into two categories, the employee work life category and the organisational relationships category, as per the two sub-RQs. I begin the chapter with the qualitative results and describe the themes and sub-themes found in the data using thematic analysis. Following this, I depict and analyse the quantitative factors that are organised into work lifestyle components and relational components.

Chapter Five marks the discussion and conclusion of the thesis. Here, I present a second, expanded joint display which summarises how each finding answers the sub-RQs and overall RQ, and then proceed to integrate these qualitative themes and the quantitative factors. I then present the contributions of the research, which amalgamates the integrated results with the academic concepts drawn on in Chapter Two. Finally, I evaluate the practical implications, strengths, limitations, and areas of future research for the study, before presenting the conclusion.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

In this chapter, I discuss existing academic literature relevant to the topics in this study. By doing so, I establish a baseline conceptual foundation to provide theoretical and empirical context to my study and later apply this to my data results and analyses.

Firstly, I introduce the concept of organisational change, explain that crises are a class of change and give context to the specifics of the COVID-19 global disruption. Secondly, I explore the notion of remote working where I present the general scope of remote working pre-COVID, investigate remote working in COVID-19 circumstances, and identify a salient consequence of remote working, technostress. Finally, I go into detail about organisational culture and relationships by looking at the behavioural concept of trust.

2.1 Organisational change

Change is inevitable, ubiquitous, and widely considered the only constant factor in the world of business and for the individuals within it (Brazzale et al., 2022; Daly et al., 2003; Elving, 2005; Smith, 2011). Organisations must constantly change in order to adapt and survive within today's unpredictable economy and changing society (Braben & Morris, 2020; Edmonds, 2011). Change is an established concept, and the dynamics of change and its effective management in an organisational setting have gained increasing attention in research (Diefenbach, 2007; Nelson, 2003).

Organisational change can be defined as any variation which impacts an organisation or affects the conduct of work, shifting from what is considered normal into a new intended improvement (Braben & Morris, 2020; Nelson, 2003). This variation can not only be a physical alteration in work life, but it might also affect employee behaviour, interpersonal relationships, and overall organisational culture as a consequence (Pomare et al., 2019). Organisational change can come in many forms: continuously, incrementally, abruptly, adaptively, as anticipated, or completely unexpectedly (Smith, 2011). However, since the world is ever-changing, most organisational change is primarily anticipated, and the process of undergoing such change is generally planned (Alas & Gao, 2012; Daly et al., 2003; Elving, 2005; Smith, 2011). Justifications for such change are often for strategic purposes, like workforce restructuring, adaptive purposes, such as opportunities for mergers or acquisitions, or

obligatory purposes, such as adjusting to government legislation amendments (Braben & Morris, 2020; Edmonds, 2011). Without change, an organisation may find stagnancy disadvantageous (Smith, 2011). Failure to develop existing practices can reduce competitive standing, credibility with stakeholders, and workforce motivation, as well as run the risk of increased labour turnover (Edmonds, 2011).

In saying this, change can incite a variety of reactions with differing levels of energy or commitment; namely, the two ends of the spectrum being resistance or support (Braben & Morris, 2020; Diefenbach, 2007; Edmonds, 2011). The intensity of the reactions to change is also often affected by the amount of change; with those experiencing great amounts of change being more likely to express negative resistance, and the frustration and anxiety that come with it (Brazzale et al., 2022). Resistance is when people believe that change is the enemy and will therefore fight it in order to remain in the current norm; these people are called resistors (Diefenbach, 2007). Resistors are commonly fuelled by fear and are capable of delaying or eliminating the possibility for organisational change (Braben & Morris, 2020; Edmonds, 2011). This is because resistors believe that the risks associated with change, and the lack of guaranteed benefits, outweigh the risk of stagnation. Moreover, variations of fear, like uncertainty and lack of job security, lead to a cascade of adverse outcomes for an organisation; for example, degraded morale and the creation of rumours are likely to negatively influence change effectivity (Elving, 2005). However, the notion that change is less about the hope of future improvement and more about the idea of a dangerous present should be used to swing resistors to the support side of the reaction spectrum (Diefenbach, 2007). Braben and Morris (2020) also suggest that providing the proactive opportunity to voice concerns and feedback throughout the change process may aid in subduing resistors and reaffirming supporters.

From an organisation's perspective, support from the parties involved is the ideal reaction to organisational change (Braben & Morris, 2020). Gaining such support is often determined by influential leaders (both formal and informal) who promote the change, and thus, help others to better accept the change (Braben & Morris, 2020). Leaders who show evidence of caring about the change succeeding, as well as caring about those impacted, can cause a positive shift in employees' perception and reaction, as change may not have been perceived as a good thing from employees' perspective (Braben & Morris, 2020). Such leaders show care by making themselves actively available to direct reports, and providing the guidance needed to keep the change under

control and their team well-adjusted (Braben & Morris, 2020). This is crucial because, as the polar opposite, overcoming resistance allows for people themselves to be changed; this is equally as important, particularly for future situations where a better reaction to change is critical and where resilience can play a key role (Diefenbach, 2007). While the logistics of organisational change are important, transforming the way people react into a positive, proactive backing is of substantial organisational benefit (Diefenbach, 2007).

Overall, the reactions to change are often based on the organisation's justification, management and resulting consequences of the change (By, 2005; Elving, 2005). The success of a change is determined by the degree to which organisations can identify their goals for change and effectively manage the process to achieve these goals (By, 2005; Smith, 2011). And yet, there is no exact, straightforward approach to change management that will meet everyone's needs (By, 2005; Edmonds, 2011; Smith, 2011). Typically, organisational change can be anticipated, managed, and intentionally implemented (Abo-Murad et al., 2019). However, most organisational change is unlike the unavoidable, significant, and context-specific impacts caused by COVID-19 (Abo-Murad et al., 2019). Therefore, standard change management techniques may not apply to the changes required in the face of a global disruption; this idea is explored further in the next sub-section.

2.1.1 Understanding crises as a class of organisational change

As outlined previously, the concept of organisational change is primarily an anticipated, active choice that transitions an organisation from point A to point B, where point B is viewed as providing a more beneficial future for the organisation (Alas & Gao, 2012). However, the particular case of COVID-19 comes under the wide umbrella of organisational change, and is specifically classified as a crisis; a change which is mostly unexpected and oftentimes, extreme in its implications (Knowles et al., 2019). According to Knowles et al. (2019), a crisis can be defined as a radical, unpredictable disruption in which, if not handled effectively, organisations can suffer from a damaged reputation, significant financial loss and, in more intense cases, loss of life. These events have other interchangeable terms in research, such as disasters or emergencies; however, they all refer to low probability, high-impact incidents that endanger an organisation's continuity (Abo-Murad et al., 2019). A crisis is characterised by a situation in which rapid developments require fast decision-making and, thus, more

specialised change management (Alas & Gao, 2012; Vargo & Seville, 2011). Since handling these characteristics of crises requires more specific management than generic organisational change management, literature refers to the concept of crisis management (Alas & Gao, 2012; Vargo & Seville, 2011).

Crisis management is when an organisation responds to crises by effectively preparing resources and other necessary contingencies to protect its operations, stakeholders and even the general public from the crisis' threats (Vargo & Seville, 2011). There is also an added emphasis on organisational recovery in the aftermath of the crisis events (Vargo & Seville, 2011). The main differentiation between standard change management and crisis management is their goals and focuses; change management focuses on opportunities and strives to make the organisation thrive whilst crisis management focuses on the threats to the organisation and prioritises survival (Vargo & Seville, 2011). There are a plethora of frameworks and techniques for crisis management; for example, Knowles et al. (2019) identify the themes of prioritisation, allocation of resources, communication and stakeholder management as being critical areas for effectively managing crises. Additionally, Vargo and Seville (2011) summarise the key facilitators to effective crisis management as leadership, culture, decision-making and situation awareness, all of which are encapsulated by the importance of planning and adapting. While many more key ideas are presented in academic literature, there are certain common factors that researchers recognise play a critical role in both generic organisational change and crisis management (Smith, 2011). The themes that remain consistent in relevant research are communication, organisational culture and, subsequent to both of these, trust; all of which have a strong influence on management effectiveness (Braben & Morris, 2020; Daly et al., 2003; Lee, 2021; Reissner, 2011).

Therefore, instead of evaluating how the COVID-19 disruption was managed in comparison to a particular academic framework, the generalised determinants of management efficacy – communication, culture and trust – can be justified as fitting indicators of successful organisational survival and adaption following the consequences of the pandemic. Supplementarily, these same three values are vital in overcoming the challenges of remote working (Phillips, 2020), which will be discussed further in the *Remote working* section. The importance of successful and effective communication will be discussed below, while organisational culture and trust will be investigated later in the *Literature Review* chapter.

Communication

Practising effective communication with those affected by change is essential in preventing or reducing resistance, and gaining respect from employees and, thus, their support (Edmonds, 2011; Elving, 2005). Achieving this reduction in resistance and increase in support is likely to produce higher change efficacy (Elving, 2005). In Smith's (2011) research, the key factors conducive to successful communication were honesty and transparency, accuracy and clarity, timeliness, two-way reciprocation, and multi-mode communication. The findings from Smith's (2011) research showed that leaders who implemented these principles into their communication maintained healthy relationships with employees, who were themselves more receptive. According to Reissner (2011), a common notion in organisational change theory is that change can be constructively understood through narrative storytelling. This is when all communication regarding change consistently tells a story that reflects the organisation's existing identity and is effectively dispersed to the parties involved (Langer & Thorup, 2006). Storytelling allows storytellers to find a meaningful narrative within change to better process the difference between their expectations versus the reality of change (Reissner, 2011). Therefore, successful change storytelling is not when these stories are simply told top-down, but actually when all employees have been given the opportunity to contribute and feedback into the story, ultimately creating a holistic interpretation of the change (Diefenbach, 2007; Langer & Thorup, 2006).

Without clear, inclusive communication, employees' level of uncertainty will grow and may develop into the negative behaviour of the resisters, as mentioned previously, damaging change efficacy (Elving, 2005). Pomare et al. (2019) support this, emphasising the importance of managing uncertainty by making communication clear, effective and as informative as possible. This is especially applicable to the context in which this study is set. Obligatory nationwide remote working removed the physical aspect of communication, which thus, created an obstacle for clear message interpretation and limited the ability to clarify understanding since those affected were no longer physically co-located (Phillips, 2020). Therefore, the need for effective communication is vital in ensuring everyone involved is informed during change and has a shared understanding of what they are striving towards and why (Phillips, 2020).

2.1.2 The global disruption of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis; distinguishable by its radical impact on the way organisations operate, and the immediate, unexpected changes incurred (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Lee, 2021). Recognising and acknowledging this makes it easier to comprehend the forced shift into a restricted way of working without preparation (Andersen & Kelliher, 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020). Moreover, COVID-19 is a particularly unique crisis, as there have never before been massive, simultaneous, global impacts from a crisis (e.g., the shift into remote work practices) that have affected the wider economy and society; these circumstances cannot be likened to other crisis implications such as natural disasters or even other pandemics (Allen et al., 2020; Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Duek & Fliss, 2020). Overall, the COVID-19 disruption incited high levels of stress, anxiety and uncertainty in the short- and long-term future on a global scale (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Lee, 2021). As numerous events occurred during the pandemic, the focus will remain on key incidents concerning NZ and the participants of this study. More specifically, how participants managed remote work in NZ during the pandemic and the implications that affected their work lifestyle.

COVID-19 is a highly infectious respiratory disease that was first discovered in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019 (World Health Organisation, 2022). The first COVID-19 case that arrived in NZ was recorded on the 28th February 2020 (Henrickson, 2020), and less than two weeks later, the increasing spread and severity of the virus led the World Health Organisation to declare it a global pandemic on the 11th March 2020 (World Health Organisation, 2022). Succeeding this, the NZ government acted quickly by introducing a four-tiered national Alert Level system on 21st March 2020 with varying goals in response to the COVID-19 outbreak: Level One (Prepare), Level Two (Reduce), Level Three (Restrict) and Level Four (Lockdown) (New Zealand Government, 2022). Two days later, Alert Level Three was implemented, and then at 11:59 p.m. on the 25th March 2020, NZ was forced into the highest Alert Level Four restriction (Henrickson, 2020). This marked the first nationwide lockdown that mandated the entire population to remain at home and that fully restricted peoples' association with anyone outside of their household bubble (Henrickson, 2020). Alert Level Four lasted for just over a month until it changed to Alert Level Three restrictions at 11:59 p.m. on the 27th April 2020 (New Zealand Government, 2022). This was the final major national enforcement that occurred before the data used in this study were collected in May 2020.

The extreme changes caused by the COVID-19 crisis meant that several measures had to be implemented into society's customary behaviour (Molino et al., 2020). Both Alert Levels experienced by participants of this study involved government-mandated home quarantine (New Zealand Government, 2022). The border was closed, travel was restricted, and when there was a need to go out, new lifestyle norms included enforced wearing of face masks, social distancing and contact tracing (Henrickson, 2020; Lee, 2021; New Zealand Government, 2022; Waizenegger et al., 2020). At this time, no vaccine for COVID-19 existed, so these protocols provided the best chance for people to avoid the virus (New Zealand Government, 2022). Additionally, since the virus was relatively new and had severe negative health implications, most people followed these rules stringently and approached life with heightened caution; those who violated Alert Level Four restrictions were monitored by police enforcement and, at times, prosecuted (Henrickson, 2020).

Having a comprehensive understanding of this context is critical for this research as its specificity in the data analysis phase is crucially linked back to the unique challenges that COVID-19 presented. Unlike other cases of organisational change, this drastic transformation not only applied to work settings but lifestyle settings as well, which radically created disorder and stress like no other change in policy or work process could (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Lee, 2021). This is why the classification of COVID-19 as a crisis, a more specific class of organisational change, is so fitting.

Research to date on the massive organisational change caused by COVID-19 identified problems such as workaholism, existing workplace conflict spilling over to remote working, difficulties in creating synergetic virtual teams, lack of effective communication, lack of trust, and threats to security and privacy (Nurse et al., 2021; Soomar, 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2020). Many of these consequences can be attributed to one of the biggest implications of COVID-19: the forced shift into remote working. As a result of most organisations needing a complete overhaul of operations, their focus in doing so moved towards the reprioritisation of human health and safety to abide by government mandates (Green et al., 2020; Molino et al., 2020). This meant that remote working was many organisations' only viable option to continue operating during the COVID-19 pandemic (Green et al., 2020; Molino et al., 2020).

2.2 Remote working

2.2.1 The general scope of remote working before COVID-19

The practice of remote working has many definitions and variations – teleworking, telecommuting, home working, mobile working, e-working, or working from home (WFH) – all of which come under the same umbrella of flexible work outside the usual formal, physical work environment (Charalampous et al., 2019; Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). For clarification, the terms remote working and WFH will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis; they are defined equally as conducting one's work responsibilities at home, as opposed to the normal office setting, while maintaining a connection with the organisation via ICT (Molino et al., 2020; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018). Remote working is an established, well-researched topic in academic research, and has gained increasing attention due to social trends focused around demanding greater flexibility and the technological advancement of society (Golden et al., 2008; Hunter, 2019; Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). This increased attention has skyrocketed since the coming of COVID-19, with researchers paying consideration to the specificity of the pandemic's context.

Pre-COVID findings show that about two-thirds of NZ employees had little to no previous experience of remote working (Stats NZ, 2019). The minority of employees that had experienced WFH before the pandemic were managers or more senior employees, knowledge-based workers whose work and communication were largely ICT-based, and those in the age range of 35-39 years old (Green et al., 2017; Green et al., 2020; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018; Stats NZ, 2019). These statistics show that the rare opportunity to be offered remote work was subject to availability, level of trust in senior employees, type of work, employee experience or tenure, and management discretion; the statistics are also tied into the pre-COVID conception of remote working being a privileged perk more than a standard work option (Wang et al., 2021).

The perception of WFH as an uncommon flexibility perk was largely envied for the work-life balance benefits it could provide employees and the attached appealing autonomy (Green et al., 2020; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018). From an employee's perspective, other benefits of remote working include more personal time, removal of commute time and stress, more time to fulfil family obligations, increased job motivation from feeling trusted to work remotely, a quieter, more personalised work

environment for greater productivity, and overall improvement of work-life balance (Hunter, 2019; Isac et al., 2021; Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018; Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). Remote working also proved to be a particularly desirable work option for employees with families (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). In practice, those with infants and toddlers, children to prepare for school, or elderly family members found that the flexibility WFH provides was extremely convenient compared to committing to office life (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). This factor, however, is two-fold and will be further discussed below when exploring work and home boundaries.

As for employers' pre-COVID perspective, benefits from offering remote work included savings in office-related costs, and the opportunity to boost employee morale and motivation (Lupton & Hayes, 2000). In fact, Martin and MacDonnell (2012) found a minor, positive relationship between remote working and various organisational outcomes; these outcomes were increased productivity, greater employee retention, stronger organisational commitment and loyalty, and improved employee performance levels (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). Rupietta and Beckmann's (2018) findings corroborate this by associating remote workers' increased productivity as a direct outcome of a less distracting, more individually-tailored work environment. The concept of remote working's relational implications between employees and employers will be discussed further in the *Organisational culture and relationships* section.

Yet much to scholars' surprise, despite the numerous perceived benefits, many employers pre-COVID refrained from giving workers the option to WFH or found little need for it (Hunter, 2019; Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). Pre-COVID studies show that many managers questioned in the line of research required evidence of remote working effectivity for them to even consider offering it to their employees (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). Various reasons for this have been posited, most revolving around the fact that those in supervisory roles relied heavily on seeing employees onsite in a distinct, formal work environment for proof of productivity (Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Soomar, 2020). The lack of monitoring ability while WFH required particularly high levels of trust in employees, that they would still conduct work with the same efficiency as they would in the office (Jeske, 2021; Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Wang et al., 2021). Simultaneously, Jeske (2021) acknowledges that there is a fine line between monitoring for the sake of work output accountability and the overly invasive feeling of being micromanaged that could make or break employee-

supervisor relationships. Even just the perception of micromanagement can majorly decrease employee morale, trust and productivity, particularly impacting problem-solving abilities and efficiency when trying to make decisions under the pressure of scrutiny (Jeske, 2021).

According to Isac et al. (2021), time-management, scheduling, and productivity-related issues were also contributing factors to organisations' resistance to offering remote work pre-COVID. Isac et al. (2021) found that, from an organisation's perspective, the structured approach to employees' time-management and work organisation schedules were directly linked to physical workspaces onsite and provided resources; for example, meeting rooms housing employee brainstorming sessions or printers having a large enough capacity to handle high volume jobs. This is related to the fact that it is primarily the organisations' responsibility to prepare, regulate and accommodate employees' work lifestyle (Isac et al., 2021). Therefore, offering remote work was not common practice since managers found it difficult to trust employees to maintain high levels of self-discipline and organisation skills that matched or exceeded company-set productivity (Isac et al., 2021). Additionally, managers' resistance to offering remote work can also be attributed to their perception of it being expensive to implement (Lupton & Hayes, 2000). Offering the WFH option incurred the expenses of having to provide remote workers sufficient ICT and resources to be able to work effectively from home (Lupton & Hayes, 2000). This was problematic as WFH was already highly stigmatised for being too disruptive to standard working practices to be worth it (Lupton & Hayes, 2000).

Another major shortcoming of remote working was the obvious lack of physical interaction, in which collaboration from a distance remained substantially more difficult than in-person interaction (Hunter, 2019; Kraut et al., 2002). This is because, while collaboration was still a necessity for remote workers, both employee-employee and employee-supervisor interaction was of less quality and quantity than that in the office (Kraut et al., 2002). Having employees untethered from the formal workplace environment also risked the possibility of a decrease in professional confidence, effectivity, work-specific knowledge and context, and interpersonal communication skills (Golden et al., 2008). Furthermore, reductions in the amount of face-to-face interaction with colleagues had the potential to create obstacles in communication that lacked the sense of connectedness, social support, and spontaneity that usually came with sharing a formal physical workspace (Golden et al., 2008; Phillips, 2020).

Isac et al. (2021) also point out that to be human is also to be a social entity, and an individual's work life is no exception. Remote working cannot wholly fulfil employees' need for social satisfaction and the quality of connection required to build a strong, natural rapport and trust within teams (Isac et al., 2021; Phillips, 2020). This limitation, risking both social and professional relationships with colleagues and supervisors, has proved taxing and posed a serious threat to interpersonal activity (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Golden et al., 2008). While today's technology-progressive society has communication-enhancing resources that can reduce the negative impact of such disadvantage, it does not remove it; no means of technological equipment can yet replace the unique, organic element of communication that has only been satisfied by face-to-face interaction (Golden et al., 2008; Isac et al., 2021). This is explored later under *Collaboration*.

The last major issue both employers and employees found with remote working was the lack of work-life dissociation experienced when moving professional responsibilities into a personal environment; the boundaries between work and home becoming blurred in the face of remote working (Rigotti et al., 2020). According to Allen et al. (2020), the distinction of having separate, designated spaces and times for different areas of life is a defining device individuals use to accommodate their various life roles. This is when people are given the ability to act in ways consistent with the needs and preferences of what their role entails; for example, associating being a parent while at home preparing a child's lunch or remaining professional from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in an office setting (Allen et al., 2020). Remote working blurred these traditional boundaries and, thus, risked one element of life spilling into another, such as family disruptions affecting work or vice-versa (Rigotti et al., 2020). Lack of boundary management also involved taking work-related items into non-work, personal spaces, making it difficult for remote workers to maintain their different life roles (Allen et al., 2020). These implications can lead to exhaustive consequences such as the appearance of 24/7 availability and workaholism (Rigotti et al., 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2020), which was intensified in light of remote working under COVID-19 circumstances; this will be explored in more detail in the next section.

Overall, offering the option of remote working can be simultaneously constraining and highly advantageous for both employee and employer (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). However, WFH had not yet been investigated through the lens of a forced circumstance or explored on a global, inter-industry scale such as with COVID-

19 (Allen et al., 2020; Andersen & Kelliher, 2020; Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Nurse et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). The concept of remote working has also never been implemented so abruptly, from being an occasional privilege offered to a select few, to becoming the new normal practically overnight (Wang et al., 2021).

2.2.2 Remote working during COVID-19

Generic pre-COVID remote work trends shifted when the pandemic hit and non-essential workers transitioned into WFH; these had more context-specific implications, some of the benefits and drawbacks even being intensified in light of the COVID-19 crisis (Nurse et al., 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020). Although remote working during COVID-19 supported continuity, employee well-being (at least in terms of protection from the virus), and was the only practical option next to closure, it is important to explore the consequences of remote working during a global disruption (Charalampous et al., 2019; Green et al., 2020). Therefore, the unique circumstances presented by COVID-19 no longer posed the question of whether or not to implement remote working; instead, organisations were forced to shift their focus to how to support employees to get the most out of the remote work experience (RWE) (Wang et al., 2021).

New norms around work lifestyle

For most NZ employees, the stringent restrictions around the Alert Level lockdowns completely eliminated any chance of physical interaction with colleagues; contrasting the infrequent practice of WFH pre-COVID which still allowed at least the option of coming into the office (Green et al., 2017; Henrickson, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). This had several repercussions creating a knock-on effect of new norms around the work lifestyle. Firstly, the near-total removal of physical interaction meant that interpersonal relations were not only affected and restricted in people's professional lives but social ones too (Wang et al., 2021). This was not just attributed to remote working; the mandated quarantine lifestyle meant that any interaction outside the house was minimised, and the few opportunities to leave home for essential activity were constrained by social distancing protocols and mask-wearing (Henrickson, 2020; Lee, 2021). This lack of authentic face-to-face interaction created loneliness that differentiated the COVID-19 RWE from pre-COVID times, as remote workers had never felt such a degree of isolation before (Wang et al., 2021). This was even more detrimental as, in a potentially traumatic time of crisis, face-to-face, physical interaction

was arguably more critical in sustaining and supporting relationships than ever (Green et al., 2017).

Many researchers also found that the lack of physical interpersonal activity could indirectly damage employees' productivity levels, mental health, ability to ask work-related questions, or create social bonds at work (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021; Waizenegger et al., 2020). This amplified feelings of loneliness and emphasised the need for relational connection and support whilst WFH during COVID-19. While organisations could set up additional online meetings to convene in a more informal social setting, it was extremely difficult to replicate circumstances in which authentic social interaction could occur (Green et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Moreover, attempting such support by creating more opportunities to meet online risked adding to the extensive virtual meeting fatigue already experienced by remote workers both pre-COVID and during (Waizenegger et al., 2020). The concept of social support contributing to interpersonal relationships is explored further in the *Organisational culture and relationships* section.

Another element factoring into this need for interpersonal connection was the change of physical workspace; while inevitably a part of WFH, never before had peoples' relational activity been environmentally constrained to only their household and essential activity (Waizenegger et al., 2020). The WFH benefit of removing the commute aspect of work did have a positive implication, in that it removed any lingering effects of a bad commute on a working day (Gerpott et al., 2022). However, being physically restricted to home space, no matter how big, had negative implications, particularly on work-life boundaries; as mentioned previously, blurred work-life boundaries were a part of the RWE even before COVID-19 (Allen et al., 2020; Rigotti et al., 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2020). Since this particular crisis amplified remote working practices to a global level, the burdens of workaholism and over-accessibility were found to be severely damaging to remote workers (Allen et al., 2020; Rigotti et al., 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2020). This contradicted the original pre-COVID benefit of WFH being highly flexible and offering work autonomy (Green et al., 2020; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018).

According to Spagnoli et al. (2020), workaholism is when one works excessively and compulsively, becoming consumed by one's perception of productivity without regard for work-life boundaries. Workaholism is related to presenteeism, which

is the perception of constant, 24/7 availability; the implementation of quarantine mandates raised this expectation of always being accessible through technology and having to meet faster turnaround times on tasks (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021). Constant reachability via technology during COVID-19 often resulted in employees feeling like organisational demands exceeded standard working hours and workload (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Molino et al., 2020). This is because the pressures of work inadvertently created a perception where employees believed their value to the organisation was dependent on always being available (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Molino et al., 2020). This presenteeism ended up challenging employees' mental and physical capacities and subsequently causing fatigue (Molino et al., 2020).

Many studies illustrated that employees experienced strong feelings of guilt during lockdown due to presenteeism, so much so that they found it difficult to stop working, take breaks, distinguish work hours and finish their work day (Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Satpathy et al., 2021). While some employees were comfortable removing such boundaries between the personal and professional, those who preferred segmentation suffered greatly during COVID-19 (Green et al., 2020). This was particularly true in cases where employees had multiple household members to share their physical workspace, ICTs, and internet access with, and thus, had to deal with the reduced ability to conduct work effectively and the invasion of privacy (Andersen & Kelliher, 2020; Ayyagari et al., 2011). The removal of work-life boundaries resulting in workaholism and over-accessibility was made possible in large part by technology (Ayyagari et al., 2011).

2.2.3 Technostress

There has been increased dependence on the use of ICT since its advantages of speed, portability, and reliability have proven increasingly useful in the last few decades (Molino et al., 2020; Satpathy et al., 2021). This ICT dependence is particularly relevant in work settings where outcomes include increased efficiency and productivity (Molino et al., 2020; Satpathy et al., 2021). Even before COVID-19, the involvement of ICTs in WFH practices was significant as it was the main medium by which remote workers corresponded with others while at home (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). Now, the continuous and increased use of technology has since amplified implications; namely, technostress (Molino et al., 2020; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Spagnoli et al., 2020; Suh & Lee, 2017; Tarafdar et al., 2007).

To better differentiate technostress, general work-related stress can be defined as an individual's feelings of frustration when unable to fulfil multiple tasks or responsibilities that can often clash (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Tarafdar et al., 2007). Excessive amounts of any type of stress can translate into detrimental health and well-being repercussions such as physical illness, fatigue and mental health concerns that precede absenteeism, labour turnover and overall decreased job performance (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Satpathy et al., 2021). As an extension of this concept, technostress is the name given to the anxiety experienced as a result of using technology, and therefore covers the physical, social and cognitive implications of endeavouring to handle technology's constant evolution (Nimrod, 2022; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Satpathy et al., 2021). Technostress can include seemingly menial issues such as poor internet connectivity, poor processing speeds, frequent system upgrades, virtual meeting difficulties, and staff intranet and database access issues (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Spagnoli et al., 2020). Whilst such technologies were created to offer flexibility and autonomy in conducting tasks, they have also had a paradoxical consequence of adding even more job stressors (Tarafdar et al., 2007).

Technostress can be attributed to the growing dependence on ICT, the knowledge gap between technologically savvy users and those who lack ICT confidence, and modern ICT changing the way society works altogether (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Satpathy et al., 2021). These attributes emphasise the importance of understanding technostress, particularly in the context of COVID-19, and how it has amplified the negative outcomes of remote working (Molino et al., 2020; Nimrod, 2022; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Satpathy et al., 2021; Spagnoli et al., 2020; Suh & Lee, 2017; Tarafdar et al., 2007). According to Ragu-Nathan et al.'s (2008) seminal research in this area, their conceptual model for understanding technostress simplifies this into two areas: technostress creators and technostress inhibitors.

Technostress creators, or techno-stressors, include the previously mentioned constant connectivity, information overload, rapid change, constant updating of ICT and excessive multitasking (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Satpathy et al., 2021; Tarafdar et al., 2007). Additionally, other researchers identified technostress issues such as role ambiguity and invasion of privacy, in which organisational demands and work overload spill over into employee decision-making as they struggle to determine which tasks to prioritise and discuss securely (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Suh & Lee, 2017; Tarafdar et al., 2007). These factors were shown to generally increase strain

and technostress amongst regular ICT users, particularly whilst remote working (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Suh & Lee, 2017). Ultimately, techno-stressors cause anxiety due to ICT's complexity and frequency of change, which typically involves steep learning curves, increased effort in navigation, an imbalanced workload, and frustrating technical difficulties (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008).

Contrasting with techno-stressors, technostress inhibitors reduce and minimise technostress; from an organisation's perspective, inhibitors may include providing technical support via ICT-focused staff, actively involving employees in technological decisions, and above all, having effective communication (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). Technostress inhibitors are vital in relieving pressure and remote work expectations, and, in a time of global crisis, employees were in dire need of such support (Nimrod, 2022). However, it is also important to note that the level of technostress varied amongst remote workers during COVID-19; this depended on individuals' education and upbringing, age, sex, and existing technological knowledge and confidence (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). Therefore, offering the appropriate support to minimise technostress was crucial while WFH during COVID-19; this concept of support is discussed further in the *Organisational culture and relationships* section.

Finally, in line with technology not being able to deliver the unique communicative aspect of face-to-face interaction, the quality of collaboration via ICT was particularly difficult to sustain during COVID-19 (Kraut et al., 2002; Isac et al., 2021; Phillips, 2020).

Collaboration

The obstacles found in remote working were primarily attributed to the difficulties of engaging in quality collaboration via ICT, a constraint highly emphasised when observing virtual meeting behaviour during COVID-19 (Hunter, 2019; Kraut et al., 2002). According to Kraut et al. (2002), the concepts of physical proximity, effective communication, and the use of ICTs as a medium are all interlinked in successful remote collaboration. Each opportunity to physically interact with co-workers allows employees the chance to create social and professional bonds and participate in collective activities (Kraut et al., 2002). Physical proximity during the lockdown was not possible; this made high-quality communication difficult for remote workers to achieve because, unlike the office environment in which communication is free flowing with those close by, having everyone in different locations was taxing

(Kraut et al., 2002). This is largely ascribed to the lack of non-verbal, paralinguistic features of physical communication, including micro facial expressions, body language and intonations (Golden et al., 2008; Kraut et al., 2002; Phillips, 2020). Therefore, although virtual meetings via ICTs were the only way to maintain communication while remote working, these non-verbal paralinguistics were either made redundant, ineffective or rendered unreadable through ICT, thus, impacting collaboration (Golden et al., 2008; Kraut et al., 2002; Phillips, 2020).

According to Karl et al. (2022), a meeting can provide an environment that facilitates collaboration, healthy creativity, problem-solving discussion, and decision-making dialogue; many of these being aided by the kinesics of physical communication (Kraut et al., 2002). Without these non-verbal cues, work meeting etiquette during lockdown changed completely; an example of this was the politics around turning video cameras on or off during meetings (Hacker et al., 2020; Karl et al., 2022). Studies show that employees found it difficult to collaborate effectively without colleagues turning on their cameras in virtual meetings (Hacker et al., 2020; Karl et al., 2022). It was perceived as disrespectful to others and showed a lack of effort in engaging in discussion (Hacker et al., 2020; Karl et al., 2022). Moreover, without visual confirmation of collaboration, it promoted a nature of multitasking in which employees appeared to be present in meetings but were actually continuing on with other tasks (Karl et al., 2022). Some employees who only turned on their cameras when necessary proved multitasking was good in keeping up productivity levels whilst also remaining present at meetings; this shows a positive outcome validating the lack of video (Karl et al., 2022). However, other valid reasons for employees not turning on their cameras included household members being distracting in the background, limited bandwidth and technology capabilities, personal discomfort seeing themselves while talking, or the overall invasion of work-life boundaries (Hacker et al., 2020; Karl et al., 2022). Additionally, the disapproval of video and lack of quality collaboration was also attributed to Zoom fatigue, which is the over-exertion of employees with virtual meetings that were either too frequent or too long (Hacker et al., 2020; Karl et al., 2022). Zoom fatigue was a widespread outcome of moving to remote working during COVID-19 that caused great mental exhaustion and damaged employees' ability to engage fully; hence, why some did not want to turn on their cameras at all (Hacker et al., 2020; Karl et al., 2022).

The shift into a fully remote work lifestyle was not all detrimental to collaboration. As a legitimate, feasible means of communication, the fact that ICT enabled working under lockdown circumstances in itself was of huge relief to organisations (Duek & Fliss, 2020). Addressing the challenges posed by COVID-19 was made possible via remote working whilst also being cost-effective in maximising the use of existing ICTs that may have otherwise been unused in an office (Duek & Fliss, 2020). Also, by maintaining a form of contact through ICT, Golden et al. (2008) found that remote workers felt the damaging effects of professional isolation significantly reduced. This was due to the increased access to each other and their organisation in comparison to full-fledged isolation, which enhanced transparency in communication and led to strengthened interpersonal bonds (Golden et al., 2008). However, ultimately, these effects were also majorly dependent on an organisation's culture and the strength of employee relationships whilst under lockdown (Al-Khrabsheh et al., 2022).

2.3 Organisational culture and relationships

Organisational culture refers to the collective morals, beliefs, and values regarding business operations that are embodied by employees' behaviour and attributed to an organisation's overall identity (Al-Khrabsheh et al., 2022). Investigating the degree to which organisational culture and crisis management enable effectiveness is important as weakness in one can negatively affect the other; for example, a weak, unsuitable organisational culture can produce workforce frustration and disruption if the company values and beliefs do not align with the crisis management (Al-Khrabsheh et al., 2022). A strong organisational culture can institute desirable employee behaviour, which in turn offers them professional identity, enhances social stability, and reinforces their organisational commitment (Al-Khrabsheh et al., 2022). The foundation of a strong organisational culture constitutes strong workplace relationships, which are the directional affiliations between employees, and employees and their organisation (Al-Khrabsheh et al., 2022; Restubog & Bordia, 2006). Employee-organisation relationships are highly dependent on how employees perceive an organisation's relatability and, in turn, the organisation's reciprocal treatment towards workers (Restubog & Bordia, 2006). Therefore, cultivating strong workplace relationships and thus, a strong organisational culture is pivotal in a state of organisational change in which these relationships and company culture can be tested (Abo-Murad et al., 2019; Pomare et al., 2019).

Regarding crises situations, these can trigger organisational cultures to have reactive, impulsive responses, which aid in situations where fast decision-making is required but such rapid response may be ineffectual in the long-term (Abo-Murad et al., 2019). Alternatively, crises can encourage organisational cultures to embrace the inevitability, unpredictability, and complexity of change, which allows for constant opportunity to review change management; however, overdependence on crisis planning or prevention is also ineffectual (Abo-Murad et al., 2019). Instead, an organisational culture needs a balance of both reactive and proactive to practice effective crisis management (Abo-Murad et al., 2019; Smith, 2011). To cultivate this ideal concept of a balanced reactive and proactive organisational culture during crises, it is crucial for organisations to cultivate strong workplace relationships and interpersonal bonds (Abo-Murad et al., 2019; Pomare et al., 2019). Elving (2005) found two generic areas linked to such strong relational bonds found in any strong organisational culture: trust and loyalty. This will be investigated in further detail in the upcoming sections. However, to give an example of a type of organisational culture which has uniquely strong relational bonds, the concept of workplace familism is explored (Restubog & Bordia, 2006; Won et al., 2021).

Workplace familism refers to an organisational environment in which employees go beyond professional respect for those in authority and demonstrate a sense of enhanced loyalty (Restubog & Bordia, 2006; Won et al., 2021). This is often attributed to superiors being perceived as parent-like figures who take care of, guide, nurture and protect direct reports in both a professional and personal sense (Restubog & Bordia, 2006; Won et al., 2021). The characteristic of familism that sets it apart from other strong organisational cultures is that the loyalty exhibited in such relationships prioritises the welfare of the other without the expectation of repayment (Won et al., 2021). According to Restubog et al. (2013), high workplace familism alleviated feelings of hurt when the organisation, supervisors or team deviated from acceptable, professional behaviour. While employees with high familism still felt aggrieved, their response showed more tolerance of error and did not revert to workplace deviance (Restubog et al., 2013). Contrastingly, those with low levels of workplace familism who, when provoked, felt like the psychological contract was breached, showed evidence of resorting to workplace deviance (Restubog et al., 2013). The level of workplace familism and whether its effect is positive or negative is largely determined by the factors of trust and loyalty found by Elving (2005) as mentioned earlier.

2.3.1 Trust

Trust is the fundamental core of all long-term relationships (Aristana et al., 2022; Lambert, 2020; Men et al., 2021; Mishra & Morrissey, 2000). Trust involves a willingness to collaborate and rely on an individual or entities of various sizes, often with mutual interests, believing that they will behave in good faith (Dani et al., 2006; Men et al., 2021). According to Dani et al. (2006), the level of trust is influenced by time-based familiarity, shared experiences and goals, the degree of communication, and a demonstration of honourable behaviour from both parties. Without trust, interpersonal bonds are weak and can often lead to flawed communication and, thus, increased conflict (Mishra & Morrissey, 2000). In the workplace, the main and critical affiliations that might involve trust are the employee-organisation relationships, which encompass two similar but distinct classifications (Restubog & Bordia, 2006). The first is the direct relationship employees have with supervisors and those in management, and the second is employees' relationship with the organisation as a whole entity (Restubog & Bordia, 2006). The employee-supervisor relationship will be explored later in this section, while the employee-organisation relationship will be investigated separately in *Organisational support and employee loyalty*.

According to Elving (2005), trust guides responses and behaviour in ambiguous situations. In a time when the challenges of a global disruption were burdensome on employees' personal and professional lives, undergoing a crisis revealed organisations' level of workplace trust, as circumstances either worsened or strengthened relational bonds (Gillespie et al., 2020; Lambert, 2020). This is due to employees and employers attempting to collaborate and work towards similar goals of survival during the pandemic (Gillespie et al., 2020; Lambert, 2020). Through the lens of COVID-19, trust was highly sought-after to support organisational culture and survival (Gillespie et al., 2020; Guzzo et al., 2021; Lambert, 2020; Lee, 2021). An organisation's trustworthiness during such a time could be found in the way they operated; this included their decision-making processes, transparency in communication, encouragement of free idea expression, provision of a safe space for sharing discrete information, and offers of organisational support (Ellwardt et al., 2012; Lee, 2021; Mishra & Morrissey, 2000).

On the other hand, employees desperately needed assurances that trust during a crisis was a two-way reciprocation from their employers, which proved to be difficult at times (Gillespie et al., 2020). Organisational leaders were required to rapidly make

difficult, large-scale decisions without the usual time to gather employees' feedback before implementing change (Gillespie et al., 2020). Although these decisions were made for the sake of the organisation's survival, they still negatively impacted workforce job satisfaction, job performance, employee relations, and interpersonal trust (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021). The heightened uncertainty and stress of COVID-19 implications on work worsened interpersonal bonds, particularly with consequences like reduced hours, redundancies, and remote working monitoring software at play (Gillespie et al., 2020).

Regarding the employee-supervisor relationship, as mentioned previously, one of the biggest issues with the mandatory, large-scale transition into remote working during COVID-19 was monitoring (Jeske, 2021). For managers, keeping direct reports accountable for their productivity was tricky as they risked the misunderstanding of moving from demonstrating trust and interest in their work to instead reflecting micromanagement of their tasks (Jeske, 2021). The upward, generalised trust in managers can also be easily influenced by employees' predisposition and cognitive biases, and the ideological culture of an organisation (Ellwardt et al., 2012). To determine employees' feelings of trust or mistrust in managers, the way employees perceive and speak about the way their managers handle crises can be observed (Ellwardt et al., 2012). Employees who spread positive narratives through informal mediums reveal their trust in management; employees behaving with incivility and who spread negative gossip show a clear perceived distrust in management (Ellwardt et al., 2012). As managers are the face of the organisation from their direct reports' perspective, managerial behaviour will also impact the employee-organisation relationships (Guzzo et al., 2021; Restubog & Bordia, 2006). This makes actions such as micromanagement during COVID-19-induced remote working particularly damaging to employee trust (Lee, 2021). Instead, what remote workers appreciated more was authentic care, expressions of empathy, continuous two-way communication, and offers of support during crises (Lee, 2021). This notion is carried forward to the employee-organisation relationship, which implies that organisations which offer thoughtful, intentional support during crises will not only augment trust in relational bonds but also nurture employee loyalty (Aristana et al., 2022; Lee, 2021).

Organisational support and employee loyalty

Support can come in a variety of forms: organisational (providing for employees' work needs and success), managerial (communication, trust in direct reports and a degree of autonomy), or social (relational, quality interactions with co-workers) (Lee, 2021). All these types of support aid in effectively preserving employees' psychological safety, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging (Lee, 2021). Organisational support is founded on demonstrating genuine care for employees' intrinsic needs by providing tangible and intangible resources, positive encouragement, and maintaining transparent communication; particularly by giving employees the ability to have a voice that will be heard by senior leadership (Lee, 2021; Men et al., 2021). In the context of the COVID-19 RWE, organisational support was more critical in areas such as technology, conflict resolution and social isolation (Charalampous et al., 2019; Gillespie et al., 2020; Molino et al., 2020; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). An example of this was presented earlier, with some organisations during COVID-19 offering additional informal, social Zoom meetings for employees to maintain interpersonal bonds and support each other in the time of crisis (Hacker et al., 2020). Guzzo et al. (2021) stipulate that the effectiveness of crisis communication, and thus, perception of organisational support during COVID-19, was highly reliant on the focus of what organisations shared with employees. A business-focused message gave the impression that employees needed to prioritise their work in order to remain valuable to the organisation (Guzzo et al., 2021). In contrast, an employee wellness-focused message showed that workers' health and safety were important to the organisation (Guzzo et al., 2021). These factors that influence employees' perception of organisational priorities will have a major impact on the trust they place in their organisation, as well as their loyalty (Aristana et al., 2022; Gillespie et al., 2020).

Employee loyalty is the product of a successful, positive employee-organisation collaboration in which the employee feels supported and satisfied, and high levels of trust are present between both parties (Aristana et al., 2022). Employee loyalty is greatly related to trust and organisational support as both aspects cultivate a positive moral norm within the workforce, which forms an inherent organisational commitment where employees willingly want to remain loyal to an organisation (Aristana et al., 2022). Additionally, Aristana et al. (2022) found positive correlations between employee satisfaction, support, and loyalty. To illustrate, Lee (2021) observed that the employees of organisations that did not explicitly express care, empathy or support during COVID-

19 claimed to also have experienced fear, anxiety, and insecurity from the crisis, which harmed their ability to do their job. Relatedly, Lee (2021) found that when employees were provided with emotional support during COVID-19 and were entrusted to work autonomously from home, they experienced a sense of happiness, comfort, and reciprocated trust (Lee, 2021). Therefore, ultimately, trust and organisational support cultivate employee relationships and loyalty (Aristana et al., 2022), which determine organisational culture (Al-Khrabsheh et al., 2022), and, overall, influence crisis management efficacy (Gillespie et al., 2020; Elving, 2005).

It is also important to note that retaining trust during any change is not a perfect process; both leaders and direct reports are likely to make mistakes along the way (Gillespie et al., 2020). To truly accept and manage the inevitable circumstances of crises, it is important to comprehend that behaving with integrity, authenticity, and humanity is most likely what will truly maintain trust during a disruption as challenging as a global pandemic (Gillespie et al., 2020).

2.4 Chapter summary

In summary, I used this chapter to demonstrate a comprehensive theoretical understanding by outlining the relevant concepts related to my research. These academic concepts will be later applied to my upcoming data results and analyses to answer my RQ and sub-RQs.

I began with a broad overview of defining organisational change and how COVID-19 may be more specifically classified as a crisis change. Throughout research, several academic frameworks have been proposed for effective crisis management, however, there exist generalised themes across these: communication, organisational culture and, subsequently, trust (Braben & Morris, 2020; Daly et al., 2003; Lee, 2021; Reissner, 2011).

I then reviewed the general scope of literature on remote working, showing that remote working pre-COVID was uncommon, with around two-thirds of NZ employees having had little to no experience remote working (Stats NZ, 2019; Wang et al., 2021). While pre-COVID remote working was perceived as desirable for employee work-life balance and autonomy, it also required high levels of trust from an organisation, in that employees would maintain productivity without physical monitoring (Green et al., 2020; Jeske, 2021; Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018; Wang et al.,

2021). The implications of remote working were amplified once COVID-19 hit, where new lockdown norms included a significant reduction in physical interaction, a complete change in the working environment for the foreseeable future, and being subject to workaholism and presenteeism (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Molino et al., 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). These implications were intensified further by the effects of technostress, which had a consequential impact on employees' communication, collaboration, and engagement in work-related meetings (Karl et al., 2022; Molino et al., 2020; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Spagnoli et al., 2020).

I then explored the concept of organisational culture and relationships, delving into the notions of trust, organisational support, and employee loyalty. These factors were found to be inherently linked in determining how an organisation reacts to a crisis (Al-Khrabsheh et al., 2022; Aristana et al., 2022; Gillespie et al., 2020; Elving, 2005). I concluded with an important point acknowledging that tolerance towards human error was a necessity in managing inevitable circumstances, as is acting with integrity, authenticity, and humanity, particularly in the context of COVID-19 (Gillespie et al., 2020).

In the next chapter, I present and justify the research method selected for this study, outline the ethical considerations relating to my study and demonstrate how I conducted my research responsibly.

Chapter 3. Methods

In this chapter, I present a detailed overview of the research design and philosophical perspective employed whilst conducting this study. This is important in effectively answering this study's RQ and sub-RQs which are around the impact of COVID-19 on employees' work life, and how the transition into home-based remote working affected workplace connections. I first depict the research's objectives before describing the research approach I utilised: a mixed-methods approach lead by qualitative research and employing codebook thematic analysis. I then express the ethical considerations accounted for when conducting the research, before investigating the concept of research trustworthiness and how this study abides by trustworthy principles.

3.1 Research approach

To be able to answer a research question effectively, it is important to consider one's underpinning philosophical perspective and belief system around knowledge and reality (Crotty, 1998). An individual's philosophy must be accompanied by a compatible research paradigm, which is the thought process and the interpretive way in which a researcher perceives the world (Davies & Fisher, 2018). A research paradigm comprises of an ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). These elements encompass the assumed nature and perception of reality, beliefs on how valid knowledge can be generated, understood and utilised, the process of research and the means by which data are collected and analysed (Crotty, 1998; Davies & Fisher, 2018; Wahyuni, 2012). This choice is informed by personal values and beliefs, the intended audience of the study, and the nature of the research area (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Tubey et al., 2015). The type of paradigm employed can govern what question(s) are asked in research and determine how a study is conducted (Davies & Fisher, 2018).

The topics covered in this research are complex, subjective and difficult to fully comprehend using traditional, individual research approaches, especially with the evolving situation of COVID-19. For example, the sub-RQ1a explores the nature of remote working, which is a concept that is still developing as organisations endeavour to accommodate today's varying government-enforced rules and travel limitations (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Additionally, the sub-RQ1b investigates more abstract

themes of organisational relationships and trust, both of which are concepts that are difficult to explicitly define and effectively capture (Morrison, 2005; Schinoff et al., 2020). To illustrate, the definition of what classifies as a workplace relationship or stipulation of when a friendship bond is first made will vary between respondents (Morrison, 2005; Schinoff et al., 2020). Therefore, to better integrate what themes are found in the data with what academic literature has already established, I determined that this study requires a thorough analysis that mixed-methods research (MMR) can provide (McKim, 2017).

An MMR approach implicates the use of abductive reasoning, which has elements of deductive and inductive reasoning in making logical inferences and constructing theories from them; it also takes observations from experiences in the hopes of finding the best prediction of truth and reality (Mitchell, 2018). I also acknowledge the complexities of the process of finding key, coherent threads in MMR, in which Sanscartier (2020) suggests using a craft attitude to fully engage with the empirical complications of social phenomena research. This entails following three steps: 1) remaining open to uncertainty in emergent research design, 2) adapting to any tensions found within results to inform and not hinder analysis, and 3) utilising storytelling as a means of immersing oneself in the research objectives (Sanscartier, 2020). I employ this craft attitude in my research in order to provide faithful accounts of the messiness of reality (Sanscartier, 2020), particularly in regard to the COVID-specific contextual variables relating to the data.

Using this thoroughly descriptive approach follows a pragmatic perspective (Mitchell, 2018), allowing me to explore the many facets related to this topic; this is further discussed in the *Research paradigm* sub-section. This is significant because, although many of the survey constructs covered are specific to the organisation and COVID-19, acknowledging diverse perspectives and interpretations will help achieve my research objectives.

3.1.1 Mixed-methods research

The increased use and popularity of MMR has led it to be deemed the “third major research approach” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). The main principles of MMR are that it combines both qualitative and quantitative research into one design, usually giving priority to one over the other either concurrently or sequentially (Creswell et al., 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie,

2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Over time, this eclectic research approach has been defined by many academics; however, for this study, the formal definition of MMR is the combination of qualitative and quantitative research strategies, techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into one study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). According to Feilzer (2010), MMR allows researchers to explore phenomena that may require thorough investigation and analysis, thus, justifying the use of two research methods. However, selecting this research approach is dependent on a researcher's philosophical orientation (Migiro & Magangi, 2011) and the research question, purpose and context (McKenna et al., 2020; Venkatesh et al., 2013). These factors have all been accounted for in the following justification of utilising MMR for this study.

Employing MMR has many strengths, especially in comparison to solely qualitative or quantitative research (Venkatesh et al., 2013). In fact, it can be argued that MMR can explore and answer research questions that other research designs and individual methodologies cannot (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Şahin & Öztürk, 2019). Some academics claim that while qualitative research questions are classified as exploratory, and quantitative research questions as confirmatory, using MMR enables a researcher to resolve both simultaneously to conveniently verify and generate theory in the same study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). To illustrate, a study employing only qualitative or quantitative research will have much narrower research questions in comparison to MMR being able to answer broader, more comprehensive ranges of research questions due to the lack of methodological confinement (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Researchers who utilise MMR can also cross-examine data interpretations to enrich understanding and analysis of a particular phenomenon and, therefore, make more robust inferences in their research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2013). This allows a study's findings to be substantiated and integrated to provide evidence that strengthens the researcher's insights, understandings and conclusions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). During the study, a researcher can return to their qualitative findings to gain a more informed understanding of what the data are portraying in the larger contextual scope (Malina et al., 2011). Similarly, statistical analyses can be referred to and re-analysed using the perspective gained from qualitative data to ascertain whether comparable confirming evidence is found (Malina et al., 2011). This advantage also allows researchers to investigate a greater diversity of views of a phenomenon (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003), which strengthens the reasoning

and justification of methodological choice for this study. Employing MMR also means researchers can draw from the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches and minimise the weaknesses of what a conventional, individual approach might limit them to (Mitchell, 2018). Thus, MMR can provide more robust evidence for the results it produces, as both qualitative and quantitative findings are converged and corroborated (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

However, according to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011), MMR should only be used when the complexity of the research questions or the topics being covered requires the considerable effort that MMR entails. This is mainly due to the added workload of learning and undergoing two types of research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Migiro & Magangi, 2011). This can require more researchers to be added to the project team, additional financing to fund the added data collection method and extra time to complete the project to an adequate standard; this is where I, as a researcher, have had to put in more effort (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Migiro & Magangi, 2011). Since MMR also has philosophical details and issues needing work, there are supplementary difficulties in aspects such as paradigm mixing, appropriate methods of analysis and resolving discrepancies between findings (Creswell et al., 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) also identify that the freedom of MMR also consequently results in confusion, controversy and creation of gaps between the quality of data and the quality of the inferences and analysis of said data; this could pose a threat to the perceived validity of a study. However, Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) argue that those who write from a paradigmatic perspective fail to see that utilising MMR is less about specificity in research structure and is more concerned about what philosophical assumptions are brought into the research by a researcher. This is further explored in the *Research paradigm* sub-section.

For this study, MMR is justifiable because a phenomenon as specific as the COVID-19 pandemic is a case that requires the comprehensive evaluation that MMR can provide. As previously mentioned, MMR provides the freedom and opportunity for researchers to investigate and present more diverse, different views of a single phenomenon; or in this case, the exploration of employees' various perspectives of the way they and their organisation handled the global disruption of COVID-19 (Feilzer, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). This selection of MMR is further justified by the fact that, since the data are secondary and already collected, the issue of requiring extra

time and effort to complete the research is significantly less than research employing MMR with primary data collection methods.

To reiterate, the choice of research approach is dependent on the researcher's philosophical orientation, in both ontological and epistemological perceptions (Migiro & Magangi, 2011). My natural research inclination is towards (but not exclusive to) qualitative approaches such as relativist and subjectivist perspectives; therefore, this study will appropriately be led by qualitative research. I utilise a concurrent triangulation research design, which is mainly suited to studies requiring confirmation, cross-validation or corroboration of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Creswell et al., 2003; Mitchell, 2018). This design offsets the weaknesses of one research method with the strengths of the other research method (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Creswell et al., 2003; Mitchell, 2018). A concurrent triangulated design is one of the most popular designs for MMR that collects both qualitative and quantitative data separately but complementarily for the same topic at the same time (Almeida, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Creswell et al., 2003). However, although the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data are separate in the first phase of research, the interpretation phase integrates the results of the two methods; the reality being that one data type would be given priority over the other (Creswell et al., 2003; Almeida, 2018). This amalgamated interpretation can either consolidate a study's claims or provide an explanation for the lack of knowledge convergence (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Creswell et al., 2003).

For this study, priority is given to qualitative approaches, based on the research topics requiring prominence in detailed, contextualised information and the secondary support of studying quantifiable variables (Creswell et al., 2003). Prioritising qualitative over quantitative also better satisfies the subjective, contextual aspects that are the main makeup of this study's RQ and sub-RQs. While it is anticipated that this study will discuss a range of relevant quantifiable constructs, I believe that the themes found in the respondents' experiences during lockdown will be better presented with more emphasis on the qualitative results over the quantitative findings. In saying this, this study will still benefit from both types of data, due to the support evidence quantitative findings can provide.

3.1.2 Research paradigm

Morgan (2014) emphasises that paradigms are the individual ways of understanding the reality of the world and how this reality can be translated into academic research (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). There have been extensive theoretical arguments over what paradigmatic perspective is considered an appropriate match to MMR (Greene & Caracelli, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). This is mainly due to differing opinions regarding the importance and suitability of ontological and epistemological stances in MMR (Greene & Caracelli, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). As stipulated in Feilzer (2010), the very principle of MMR integrating two different research strategies fails to naturally conform to conventional positivist, post-positivist, interpretivist or critical inquiry paradigms. Thus, the focus moves to pragmatism, a paradigm that attempts to neutralise philosophical dogmatism and scepticism by viewing knowledge as having the potential to be both psychologically constructed and also based on reality and real-life world experiences (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Pragmatism does not rely on the traditional metaphysical assumptions about ontology and epistemology, like other paradigms that deem the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods incompatible (Morgan, 2014; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Instead, pragmatism deviates from older, outdated philosophical arguments to radicalise itself as an alternative research paradigm (Morgan, 2014; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). This makes it a more flexible and adaptable paradigm that views the present truth as provisional and, therefore, subject to change over time (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It also deems theories as instrumentally malleable with the potential to develop or have varying degrees of truth and validity (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Greene and Caracelli (2003) expand on these ideas by claiming that pragmatists experience a lack of theoretical duty to a specified framework; this fits with MMR, which often results in the exploration of broader concepts, sometimes going beyond a single discipline, into interdisciplinary research contexts. For this study, that may imply that the results inform more than just the COVID-19 global disruption, but future global disruptions as well. Overall, pragmatism categorically reflects the eclectic nature of MMR by validating the fact that different, even conflicting ideas are all constructive methods of comprehending reality (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2014). Pragmatism prioritises the research question and the need to answer it over the need to select an appropriate research method (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

The prospective idea of mixing qualitative and quantitative research is to achieve a combined method that is superior to mono-method approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, the versatility offered by MMR and pragmatism has disadvantages too. Although such research approaches are individually beneficial in their fluidity, diversity and applicability, this flexibility also forms the root of the argument around pragmatism as an appropriate match to MMR (Morgan, 2014). Researchers can utilise pragmatism as a way to circumvent some traditional philosophical concerns (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). An example of this is when researchers are vague in their explanation of what is meant by data usefulness and workability in MMR to focus more on the applicability of the study's findings (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The fact that pragmatism prioritises practicality over structured theory can result in weaker logical arguments; and even this practicality can be questioned since MMR implications are more likely to promote incremental change (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

On balance, despite these shortcomings, the benefit of pragmatism's philosophical adaptability and complementary nature to MMR far outweighs the drawbacks (Mitchell, 2018). Pragmatism allows an approach that fits the research issue, such as the use of qualitative and quantitative research methods, thus providing an extra level of investigative freedom to utilise diverse ideas and methodologies (Feilzer, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). An additional determining factor in justifying the choice to use a pragmatic paradigm in MMR is the level of the study's complexity; this is appropriate for this study as it is rooted in multi-faceted contextual circumstances and complex behavioural concepts (Greene & Caracelli, 2003).

Although this study prioritises qualitative data and analysis, the quantitative aspects that account for complementary variables provide numerical objectivity that support the qualitative themes and analysis. This will assist in demonstrating research rigour and overall trustworthiness of the claims made in this study, which will be discussed further in the *Research data trustworthiness* section.

3.2 Ethical considerations

As a researcher, I believe that there is importance in abiding by ethical guidelines and carefully considering issues associated with conducting research. Similarly, in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

(AUTECH) Code of Conduct for Research, it is of utmost importance to Auckland University of Technology (AUT) to ensure that researchers uphold the highest ethical standards (AUT, 2019). Acknowledging that this study utilises secondary data, and that the nature of MMR uses more than one research approach, the motives and intentions for data collection need to be carefully considered to establish high levels of research integrity and ethics (McKenna et al., 2020). The need for reliable ethical considerations is also further reflected in the motives and intentions stipulated in the AUTECH Code of Conduct for Research. The ethical considerations attached to this study will be discussed in this section.

This study draws on data collected by researchers, including the supervisor of this study, in a larger, longitudinal research project examining an organisation moving to activity-based work as they also moved to a new office; the original AUTECH application being approved on 17th September 2019 (see Appendix A). However, due to the timing of COVID-19 and its impact on the organisation during data collection, a ‘snapshot’ survey was created and implemented. This ‘snapshot’ survey doubled as a potential data source to observe the new perspective of participants also having to deal with the difficulties presented by COVID-19 and the transition between office work and remote working as per the government lockdown restrictions. Hence, this study investigates this change, and the ethics application was amended to include postgraduate students as researchers on this project, which was approved on 16th April 2020 (see Appendix B). Therefore, I, as a postgraduate student researcher, was allowed access to this ‘snapshot’ survey data and was able to develop my own research questions and research design from it.

The AUTECH Code of Conduct for Research stipulates that the general framework, principles and ideas it abides by focuses on a recognition of human and civil rights, freedom of enquiry and societal openness, and adheres to the values postulated in the Treaty of Waitangi (AUT, 2019). This means that the common factor found in any AUT research is that all parties involved and affected by the research must be respectful of rights-based knowledge discovery for the sake of advancing or developing comprehension of science, technology and humanities in NZ (AUT, 2019). Furthermore, Polonsky and Waller (2019) claim that research ethics is more than simply filling out application forms; it is ensuring that research is not only conducted in a way that does not cause any harm, but also that the ideas developed from the data are communicated authentically. This also involves considering how one might interpret the

information, meaning a study's results must be presented accurately to reflect relevant literature and the perspectives of the research participants (Polonsky & Waller, 2019). These are important ideals considered in the core values of the AUTECH Code of Conduct for Research. As mentioned previously, the ethical considerations attached to secondary data collection are similar but distinct to those attributed to conventional primary research. While the fundamental ethical principles remain the same across the two, Tripathy (2013) distinguishes a growing concern around technological advancements posing a threat to data confidentiality and security; particularly with increasing accessibility in data sharing, data compilation and storage, the latter including cloud storage.

The data are secondary, meaning that the ethical considerations attached to its collection was entrusted to those who collected it before me. However, as a researcher utilising the data, I had the responsibility to ensure the secondary data was treated ethically. With such responsibility, I enforced several safeguarding measures to make certain that no human or civil rights were violated in the duration of the study. Firstly, in regard to the original study, obtaining the voluntary consent of the respondents was paramount as per AUTECH requirements. Voluntary participation is when researchers provide potential participants sufficient information regarding the research being conducted, with regard to purpose and outcomes, before requesting participants' consent to partake in the study (Hoser & Nitschke, 2010). It is critical that consent is obtained without coercion or deception (Polonsky & Waller, 2019). This means all participants, potential or otherwise, must fully comprehend that they are under no obligation to partake in the research and that there will be no negative consequences if they choose not to participate (Polonsky & Waller, 2019). In this study, employees were given this choice as the Qualtrics survey link was distributed with the stipulation that participation was non-compulsory, with the research being conducted independently by AUT researchers. Employees of the organisation received an invitation to participate via email or on the staff intranet, including information on the research aims, data collection, use, assurances of privacy and research accessibility, as per the ethical consideration of voluntary participation. Potential participants were also informed of the possibility of future postgraduate students of the named researchers using the anonymous data for their research. Additionally, the survey email used AUT branding to emphasise independence from the organisation, with the academic researchers' details provided, thus minimising the risk of any misunderstanding in regard to potential

coercion or deception on our part. Subsequently, further information on the study was provided both in the initial email and at the beginning of the survey itself, meaning completing the anonymous survey implied the participant gave informed, voluntary consent.

Another ethical consideration is anonymity, which is when research participants' identities and personal information remain undisclosed and protected during data collection, storage, and interpretation (Walford, 2005). Data were collected anonymously via a third-party platform (Qualtrics) and no individually identifying details were collected in the survey. Additionally, I protected the anonymous data I had access to by storing it on my password-protected laptop. Since some data were still accessible via my email, I also made sure to delete any files I downloaded on the other devices I accessed the data from. As an added measure, my email account is also password-protected. Ensuring anonymity is also applicable to the identifiability of the organisation participating in this study; I avoided this by using generalised terminology in my write-up when referring to the organisation in question.

I also took great care in not discussing the research data with anyone other than the appropriate involved parties, including my academic supervisor and the other researchers on the project team. This leads to the matter of confidentiality, which is to protect the information collected for research purposes by ensuring it is not disclosed to others (Walford, 2005). Confidentiality is a more complex issue, as many academics concur that ensuring true, complete privacy is impossible in research (Walford, 2005; Wiles et al., 2008). To keep the totality of participant responses private is defeating the purpose of data collection, so it is difficult for researchers to draw a definitive stance on where to stop sharing information (Walford, 2005). For this study, privacy and confidentiality were strictly observed as neither the researchers nor the organisation could identify individual responses regardless of the level of accessibility. Even though the data are anonymised, I also made sure to create a pseudonym for the organisation in question, in which I chose the name "YouFirst" to refer to them without giving away their identity. Throughout my thesis, I made sure to only refer to them as "the organisation" or "YouFirst". This decision was influenced by Wiles et al. (2008), who suggested that researchers wanting to present data that required source specification could use pseudonyms to maintain participant anonymity. Moreover, I intentionally omitted any personal information of respondents, with notable research-related exceptions being the use of broad sociodemographic statistics to describe the sample.

This adheres to the AUTECH Code of Conduct for Research by only revealing very generic information (e.g., broad age ranges).

3.3 Participants

The participants of this study are employees across different divisions, departments and hierarchical levels of an NZ organisation, YouFirst, that experienced a transition in their work environment; moving from a physical, open-plan workspace to remote working due to a nationwide lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were collected using Qualtrics, with 504 respondents completing a cross-sectional survey in May 2020 while employees were working remotely during NZ's first lockdown.

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents ($n = 504$). There was more female representation than male, the most common age ranges from 30 to 49 years old, and European New Zealanders represented just over half of the sample.

Table 1*Demographic characteristics of study sample*

Demographic Characteristic	Selections	Number of Participants	% *
Gender	Female	319	63.3%
	Male	130	25.8%
	Did not answer	55	10.9%
Age	Younger than 29 years	90	17.9%
	30-39 years	132	26.2%
	40-49 years	119	23.6%
	50-59 years	83	16.5%
	60+ years	26	5.2%
	Did not answer	54	10.7%
Ethnicity	European New Zealander	276	54.8%
	Asian	44	8.7%
	Indian	31	6.2%
	Māori	29	5.8%
	Pacifica	18	3.6%
	European	15	3.0%
	Mixed	9	1.8%
	South African	5	1.0%
	Did not answer	75	14.9%

Note. * Rounded to one decimal point.

Data from the survey show that the majority of the participants are based in Auckland (64.9%), with a minority based in Hamilton (18.7%), and the rest spread across NZ (7.6%). Moreover, most respondents reported being permanent employees in either a full-time or part-time capacity (77.8%), and the rest stated they were limited or fixed-term workers on a full-time or part-time contract (8.5%).

Table 2 illustrates the respondents' tenure at the organisation, which shows that over half of the sample had worked at YouFirst for five years or less.

Table 2*Organisation tenure of study sample*

Number of Years Worked	Number of Participants	% *
1 year or less	136	27.0%
2-5 years	119	23.6%
6-10 years	86	17.1%
11-15 years	49	9.7%
16-20 years	28	5.6%
21+ years	29	5.8%
Did not answer	57	11.3%

Note. * Rounded to one decimal point.

Table 3 shows respondents' job roles in the duration of remote working, with almost 40% being involved in member services ($n = 504$).

Table 3*Job roles of study sample*

Job Role	Number of Participants	% *
Member services - other	111	22.0%
Member services - contact centre	90	17.9%
Sales	72	14.3%
Digital platforms	59	11.7%
Partnerships	42	8.3%
People and strategy	31	6.2%
Finance, risk and analytics	19	3.8%
Marketing and customer experience	17	3.4%
Leadership and legal	8	1.6%
Did not answer	55	10.9%

Note. * Rounded to one decimal point.

These demographic factors all provide context to my analyses, particularly when I present my results later in the thesis.

3.4 Procedures

Originally, the overarching research focus was on how the organisation could adopt more flexible working arrangements while moving offices, to make better use of resources and to match the physical workplace environment to ways of working. The researchers did not anticipate the disruption of COVID-19; therefore, an amendment was made to adapt the study to account for COVID-19 and the employees' experience with remote working and team trust during a global pandemic. This amendment also approved the inclusion of postgraduate students, where I was able to develop this research from the 'snapshot' survey.

This 'snapshot' survey focused questions on employees' flexibility/remote work, physical work environment, change management and communication, well-being and trust, and generic demographics (for sample description purposes). The 'snapshot' survey included both open- and closed-ended questions, utilising a combination of multiple-choice, short answer and, most prominently, Likert scale type questions to understand how participants were feeling during this time of significant organisational change. The study's survey can be found in Appendix C.

This study is heavily rooted in qualitative topics that may prove difficult to measure; some topics will be directly quantifiable (e.g., the number of respondents who worked remotely prior to lockdown), some topics not directly quantifiable but measurable in standard ways (e.g., the respondents level of stress), and some topics only measurable via subjective self-assessment (e.g., respondents' various concepts of trust within a team setting and how it has been affected while working at home) (Harpe, 2015). Therefore, the following two sections will describe how both the quantitative and qualitative data of this MMR were collected, measured, and analysed.

3.4.1 Qualitative questions

As mentioned, the survey included four, qualitative, open-ended questions. The first three questions were in the physical environment and open-ended questions block of the survey, and all pertained to the RWE. In each case, the question asked respondents "Please write a few sentences to outline the experiences you may have regarding remote work (working from home)", prompting responses on participants' (1) concerns and negative experiences, (2) what they most appreciated or enjoyed about their experience, and (3) anything else pertaining to their RWE and what work might

look like in the near future. The fourth qualitative, open-ended question was located in the well-being and trust section of the survey, where a short preamble was provided to give context and establish a shared understanding of teamwork before the question was presented. The reasons for providing this short preamble were firstly to ensure participants had equal interpretation of the questions and could respond accordingly. The second reason was to try and make participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences, as the fundamental question inquired about the behaviour of team members and experiences of trust being influenced, whether that be positive or negative; such recounts could have been difficult to disclose.

Overall, these questions allowed participants to describe their personal opinions within context and were used to collect the qualitative data of this study. The responses were analysed using codebook thematic analysis, which will be discussed in the *Qualitative data analysis* sub-section.

3.4.2 Quantitative measures

In this section, I will outline how each construct of the survey was measured; starting firstly with the qualitative questions, and then presenting the quantitative measures, outlining the relevant response scales and reliability information of each.

Sections of the survey

Flexibility/remote work

The three questions in this section of the survey focused on how participants' felt about remote working both pre-lockdown and their current opinions. This section used multiple-choice and 10-point Likert scale questions (0 = extremely negative to 10 = extremely positive).

Physical work environment and open-ended questions

The thirteen questions in this section of the survey focused on where participants worked, how well equipped their workspaces were, the contribution of the organisation to said equipment and the consequent effects on participants' ability to conduct their jobs. As the largest section of the survey, a more detailed query prompted several 10-point Likert scale questions around participants' level of distraction (0 = almost no distraction to 10 = a great deal of distraction), privacy (0 = almost no privacy, it is a communal space in my home, used frequently by others to 10 = a completely private

space), workspace satisfaction (0 = not at all satisfied to 10 = extremely satisfied), and provided ICT enablement (0 = poorly enabled, numerous ICT issues to 10 = fully enabled, no ICT issues). This section also used multiple-choice, open-ended and two 5-point Likert scale questions (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The first 5-point Likert scale question measured employees' physical workspace suitability and was based on the conceptualisations offered by Cable and DeRue's (2002) research that explore need-supply fit and demand-ability fit of physical workspaces. This question included six items (e.g., "I have access to the types of workspaces I need to work efficiently"). Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .93$. The second 5-point Likert scale question investigated employees' collaboration during COVID-19; four items were drawn from Morrison and Stahlmann-Brown's (2021) and Morrison and Macky's (2017) research on collaboration. These scales included items such as "While remote working, I am able to work with my co-workers to collectively solve problems" and "While remote working, people share their knowledge and ideas freely". Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .86$.

Change management and communication

This section of the survey contained only two questions: one about respondents' work location, and the other about the way the organisation communicated and managed the change brought about by COVID-19. The first question was multiple-choice, while the second question was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The three items in this second question were written specifically for the 'snapshot' survey as no measures relating to COVID-19 circumstances existed at this time (e.g., "I am regularly informed about work-related changes that are occurring as a result of the lock-down"). Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .89$.

Well-being and trust

This section of the survey comprised four questions, including an open-ended question, two 10-point Likert scale questions about stress levels (0 = no stress to 10 = extremely stressed) and overall job satisfaction (0 = very dissatisfied to 10 = very satisfied), and a 5-point Likert scale about team trust (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Team trust was measured using items adopted from Costa and Anderson's (2011) 21-item scale (e.g., "In this team, we work in a climate of cooperation"). Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .82$.

3.5 Data analysis

This study analyses this qualitative ‘snapshot’ survey data using thematic analysis alongside an analysis of associated quantitative variables, consistent with a mixed-methods approach.

3.5.1 Qualitative data analysis

For the qualitative aspect of this study, I chose to utilise thematic analysis; a fitting method that is particularly beneficial in research settings that involves multiple researchers and analysing large amounts of qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2017). It is an interpretive analytic method that recognises patterns in codes and identifies themes that emerge from a data set to create categories ready for analysis (Roberts et al., 2019). Thematic analysis is incredibly versatile as it can be used across a range of epistemologies, methods, methodologies and research topics (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for experiential interpretation and investigating multiple perceptions of a phenomenon; in this case, participants’ perspectives on the transition from an open-plan office to remote working during the global disruption of COVID-19 (Herzog et al., 2019; Terry et al., 2017). For thematic analysis to be effective, researchers must maintain an interactive involvement and interpretation beyond simply counting specific words or phrases (Guest et al., 2012). Instead, researchers must comprehend and extract both the implicit and explicit ideas expressed in the data, that is, themes (Guest et al., 2012). According to Braun et al. (2019), there are three schools of thematic analysis: coding reliability, reflexive thematic analysis and codebook thematic analysis. For this study, I have chosen to utilise codebook thematic analysis, which is a balanced blend of the other schools of thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019). Codebook thematic analysis is both structured in adhering to a predetermined codebook and utilising the holistic qualitative philosophy of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019).

Codebook thematic analysis is the optimal choice for this study as it matches the overall research approach of MMR and pragmatism. As mentioned previously, one of the disadvantages of MMR is the concern that it is time-consuming, especially in comparison to solely qualitative or quantitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Migiro & Magangi, 2011). Utilising codebook thematic analysis saves a researcher some time as the natural formation of predetermined codes during initial data analysis provides a conceptual foundation for a researcher to draw on later to develop

the codes into themes. Codebook thematic analysis also complements the flexibility of MMR by having freedom in data interpretation and not being completely theoretically informed in its framework, unlike other schools of thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019). As a researcher, I feel it is appropriate to be open to what the data present and codebook thematic analysis gives me the balance of both structure in coding and freedom in interpretation.

Researchers who wish to utilise thematic analysis effectively must go beyond simply identifying intrinsically recurrent ideas (King & Brooks, 2018; Neuendorf, 2018). Researchers must coherently organise and structure such ideas to constructively present reasoned themes found in the data (King & Brooks, 2018; Neuendorf, 2018). Although Braun and Clarke (2006) have stipulated that there is no definitive method, they propose a six-step, recursive process to conducting thematic analysis. I adhered to these steps as much as possible whilst conducting my qualitative analysis. First, a researcher must shift their focus from data collection, or their methods, to an analytical mindset focused on data familiarisation (Braun et al., 2019). This involves engaging with the ideas presented in the data but only making informal, initial observations; not yet constructing any formal labels (Braun et al., 2019). This leads to the second step of the creation of preliminary codes (noting that codes are not the same as full-blown themes); instead, being the raw ideas extracted from the data translated into their most basic form (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019; Terry et al., 2017). The third step is where themes emerge, allowing researchers to classify the basic codes formed in step two into broader, more developed units/categories in preparation for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019; Terry et al., 2017).

Fourthly, the list of potential themes is then reviewed to better collate, refine, regroup, subcategorise and overall edit the list to best reflect what is present in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). This step also allows researchers to organise how the themes fit together and create a story arc for the research narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). This can involve brainstorming a thematic map to make logical, systematic sense, set clear distinctions between similar themes and justify potential subcategories of themes that require further expansion (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Following this, step five entails the formal and detailed definition, naming and analysis of themes, both individually and in relation to each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). This is where researchers can benefit from creating a thematic map to ensure that themes are not too simple or complex and to provide

evidence of their relevance to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). The last step involves the categorical analysis and write-up of the report by supplying supporting extracts from the data to exemplify ideas, providing an overview of the research narrative, and going further than simply describing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). This is where the developed analysis of themes is presented as a conclusive argument that responds to the study's overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017).

3.5.2 Quantitative data analysis

To quantitatively analyse the survey data, I used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and Microsoft Excel to process, edit and present the statistical data and appropriate graphs. My method of quantitative data analysis mainly involved descriptive statistics, accompanied by the examination of correlations to inform and support the qualitative data results.

In the initial processing of the quantitative data, I recognised that I needed to be vigilant about classifying outliers, which are points of data that differentiate from the majority and thus, have a disproportionate influence on analyses (Aguinis et al., 2013). Aguinis et al. (2013) supports this by saying that the identification, rationale and resulting courses of action upon the handling of outliers must be descriptively disclosed for the sake of transparency in research; this is the purpose of this section. For most of my quantitative variables, identifying outliers was relatively simple as they were few and easy to correct manually using SPSS. However, some variables demonstrated evidence of slightly bimodal or non-normal distribution, meaning the distribution was not bell-shaped, skewed or showed uneven kurtosis (Field, 2013). I determined that these variables contained what Aguinis et al. (2013) classify as interesting outliers, which are data points that seem far from the majority data but have the potential to better inform research. In support of the idea of transparency in research, I chose to include these interesting outliers in my analysis instead of editing them, as they are more likely to better inform my results (Aguinis et al., 2013).

I also examine the correlations between the quantitative variables of this study. While correlations do not support causal association between variables, they do reveal their relationships and strength of association, which can further inform the study's findings (Cohen, 1988; Vogt et al., 2014). I describe the evaluation of correlations in further detail later in the *Quantitative results* section in the *Results* chapter.

3.6 Research data trustworthiness

The overall objective of any research is to ascertain the relationship between knowledge and practice by proving its rigour, validity and reliability, which are all aspects that pertain to the quality and trustworthiness of a study (Roberts et al., 2019). Roberts et al. (2019) propose that trustworthiness can be proved through the thorough description of the data collection and analyses processes used in conducting a study, as I have aimed to do in this chapter. Trustworthiness is a concept that can often be overlooked by researchers which thus, creates complexities in later theoretical and practical replication or extension of the results, especially in MMR (Roberts et al., 2019). Therefore, to avoid this issue, in this section I will first examine what trustworthiness is in MMR. I will then present the theoretical framework used to measure the trustworthiness of this study and the temporal stages showing how the study analyses support the ideas presented.

3.6.1 Trustworthiness in mixed-methods research

Due to MMR combining complementary strengths and reducing corresponding weaknesses in qualitative and quantitative research, integrating and supporting the validity of a study's results is more complex than that of a sole research method (Giddings & Grant, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Most research will inevitably involve making inferences, however, since MMR's combination of methods address both exploratory and confirmatory questions, MMR can also have meta-inferences, which go beyond solely qualitative or quantitative inferences (O'Cathain, 2010). Meta-inferences are those holistically drawn and developed from integrating the inferences made from the qualitative and quantitative strands of an MMR study (O'Cathain, 2010). Dealing with both inferences and meta-inferences makes it challenging to condense trustworthiness into one generalised concept for MMR. Thus, trustworthiness in MMR depends on both the qualitative and quantitative components a researcher collates and the way in which they analyse the data.

The issue of trustworthiness in MMR is also largely attributed to the numerous academic terms used to describe this concept such as validity, reliability, rigour, credibility, quality, legitimation, and inference quality (O'Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). There has been notable difficulty in creating a synonymous language that can accurately depict the concept which researchers strive towards (O'Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006;

Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). This is primarily due to the differences in standards of solely quantitative or qualitative research, with this difficulty further accentuated by the implications of MMR combining two research methods (O’Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). This terminology issue illustrates the need for a comprehensive framework to encompass the ideals related to proving research trustworthiness for a particular research study; to make sense of and provide clarity on what a study classifies as trustworthy; and to reconcile the issues of differing standards in qualitative and quantitative research when using MMR (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008).

For this study, I will refer to the collective trustworthiness criteria of validity, reliability, rigour, credibility, quality, legitimation and inference quality which, in combination, support research trustworthiness. To outline the criteria that would need to be met as evidence of trustworthiness, I will be drawing on ideas from seminal MMR research, namely, O’Cathain’s Quality Framework for Mixed Methods Research. This is an inclusive model by O’Cathain (2010), who drew from the contributions of other core MMR academics to create a temporally-based framework to assess the trustworthiness of a study. This study will focus more on the domains of quality, which is a theoretical concept by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2008) and Caracelli and Riggin (1994) that presents a list of potential criteria that can be used to determine the quality of research and sorts them into appropriate domains showing the multidimensional interrelationships between criteria. I have chosen to emphasise the domains of quality mainly due to their generalisability and pertinence to the methods that were applied to demonstrate this study’s trustworthiness.

However, before presenting the discussion of this model, one must understand that although providing a framework for research trustworthiness accommodates multiple academic perspectives, it does not solve any of the issues identified (O’Cathain, 2010). Instead, its value in promoting trustworthiness lies in the guidance it gives to researchers when conducting a study (O’Cathain, 2010). Utilising the framework establishes a common language for all stakeholders involved in the research, and provides directions for future research development (O’Cathain, 2010). For this study, demonstrating trustworthiness with O’Cathain’s (2010) framework gives readers a better understanding of each action taken to demonstrate trustworthiness at each temporal stage of research. Since this study employs MMR and pragmatism, a research approach known to have some philosophical issues, this should help assuage any

concern over the trustworthiness of the results presented. In the following sections, I demonstrate how trustworthiness was sought in the temporal phases of this study using O’Cathain’s Quality Framework for Mixed Methods Research.

3.6.2 Planning and design

The research phase involves the domain of planning and design quality (Caracelli & Riggin, 1994; O’Cathain, 2010). These are the justifications underpinning the research approach, taking into account the concepts of transparency, rationality, feasibility, suitability and strength of each research design selection (O’Cathain, 2010). For this study, this means that my selection of MMR and use of a pragmatic paradigm must be justified and logical. It also means my choice of a concurrent triangulated design must show substance and strength, complementing the research approach and fitting with other aspects of the study; in particular, my secondary data. This is what I have already depicted in this chapter, to explain and justify the reasons behind my research approach choices.

3.6.3 Data collection and analysis

The domain of data quality applies to the data collection and analysis phase (Caracelli & Riggin, 1994; O’Cathain, 2010). This undertaking is concerned with how the data are obtained to ensure transparency, fidelity, adequacy in sampling and adequacy in analysis (O’Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). This requires the full disclosure of the study’s research method and its execution, including sampling details (O’Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). These particulars must demonstrate that: 1) the participants are reliable sources of information, 2) their responses align with the justified research approach, and 3) the data are analysed in a way that can be appropriately integrated with literature (O’Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Applying these concepts to this study involves describing how the secondary data were obtained in detail (as in the *Ethical considerations*, *Participants*, *Procedures*, and *Data analysis* and sections above). Regarding sampling, the survey required at least a 50% response rate to be viable; participants at the organisation studied returned an 84% response rate, exceeding the minimum requirement, which thus provides security in sampling adequacy. As explained previously, the adequacy in data analysis was established in the choice of codebook thematic analysis, and the rigour in analytic interpretation is certified through triangulation, as implemented in the research design. Triangulation is the convergence of multiple data results to ensure the findings

are valid and concur with each other, effectively supporting the claims of the study (Creswell, 2014; Farmer et al., 2006). Although triangulation is more commonly used in integrating multiple qualitative methods, it has also been used in MMR to integrate qualitative and quantitative findings; being particularly effective for concurrent research designs (Farmer et al., 2006; Heslehurst et al., 2015). My study achieves triangulation by prioritising the qualitative research (the open-ended survey responses), identifying potential themes within that data and cross validating the themes with quantitative research.

3.6.4 Data interpretation

The data interpretation phase concerns the domains of interpretive rigour and inference transferability, which encompass a myriad of trustworthiness concepts (O’Cathain, 2010). In this study, I mainly focused on ensuring consistency in theory and interpretation, correspondence and efficacy fitting with the MMR approach employed (Caracelli & Riggin, 1994; O’Cathain, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). As the data are secondary and do not require a collection phase, I have more time to check for consistency between what is being said in the literature and the results. This is again in line with the concept of triangulation, that is testing the consistency of results from different methods; a key concept in validating trustworthiness, especially when using MMR (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Migiro & Magangi, 2011). Moreover, to ensure my interpretations are consistent, I also need to be mindful of the extent to which my interpretations correspond with the purpose and objectives of my research (O’Cathain, 2010). This means carefully wording my RQ and sub-RQs so that the themes I identify and explore will satisfy the initial research purpose (Venkatesh et al., 2013). It also means that in inference transferability, I must ensure that the study remains general enough so that the results and implications can be applicable to future situations (O’Cathain, 2010). In this case, there is a risk of ideas presented in the study being exclusive to COVID-19 and not global disruptions organisations may be facing in the future. I mitigate this issue by establishing both a COVID-19 specific implications section and a generalised global disruption section in my *Discussion and Conclusion* chapter.

3.6.5 Reporting and write-up

The domain of reporting quality comprises of availability and transparency factors during the reporting and write-up phase of research (Caracelli & Riggin, 1994;

O’Cathain, 2010). These factors are especially relevant to MMR because of how expensive and complex it is compared to individual research methods (O’Cathain, 2010). Moreover, since writing up two research methods is a more significant workload, making sure the key aspects of the study are clearly and explicitly reported is more challenging for MMR researchers to maintain transparency (O’Cathain, 2010). This study observes this domain’s factors by utilising anonymised quotes from responses to prove the themes presented are evident in the participants’ answers, without also revealing their identities as per the ethical considerations.

3.6.6 Synthesisability and utility

Finally, the domain of synthesisability and utility is pertinent in the final stages of research, where a study’s applicability in the real world is questioned (Caracelli & Riggin, 1994; O’Cathain, 2010). These terms relate to the determination of a study’s usability as an indicator of trustworthiness and ensuring that the results presented are of sufficient quality for inclusion in other structured or systematic reviews; this may be challenging for the present study (O’Cathain, 2010). The level of difficulty in proving trustworthiness is dependent on whether or not the results will make an immediate or future impact. Implications of a study that inform current circumstances are likely to be newsworthy and circulated widely, and studies that contribute to newer, growing research areas will have different implications (O’Cathain, 2010). This study is particularly distinct in having to account for both short- and long-term impacts, as COVID-19 is still occurring. Moreover, research on COVID-19 as a global disruption has the potential to inform future global disruptions such as in the case of previous pandemics informing newer ones. This makes the usability potential high but the synthesisability of the research more complex. For this reason, I must ensure that the *Practical implications* section in the *Discussion and Conclusion* chapter of this study is clearly outlined. I do this by including both a COVID-19 specific section and a generalised global disruption section in my *Discussion and Conclusion* chapter; a similar mitigating action that overlaps with what was previously mentioned regarding inference transferability in the data collection and analysis phase.

3.7 Chapter summary

In summary, I used this chapter to justify the selection of the research approach pathway used to conduct this study. This research utilised MMR, a pragmatic paradigm and a concurrent triangulation research design, giving priority to qualitative data over

quantitative. These selections were rationalised by the need for investigative freedom, the complexity of the study's multi-faceted contextual circumstances and behavioural concepts, the secondary data collection method, and the benefit of cross-validating findings and analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Creswell et al., 2003; Feilzer, 2010; Greene & Caracelli, 2003; Mitchell, 2018; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003)

I also acknowledged the ethical considerations attached to this study and how the research approach accords with the AUTC Code of Conduct for Research. This included attention to ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation of respondents, the privacy of the data collected and security in data storage (Hoser & Nitschke, 2010; Polonsky & Waller, 2019; Tripathy, 2013; Walford, 2005; Wiles et al., 2008). I then established codebook thematic analysis as an appropriate approach to investigating the qualitative data, and deemed the analysis of descriptive statistics and correlations suitable for examining the quantitative data.

Finally, I explored how trustworthiness could be ensured on a stage-by-stage basis. This acknowledged domains of quality (data quality, interpretive rigour, inference transferability, reporting quality, synthesisability and utility) as per the collective ideals of seminal MMR academics (Caracelli & Riggin, 1994; O'Cathain, 2010). I also demonstrated how these ideals were accounted for and applied in this study to ensure research stakeholders could trust the findings presented.

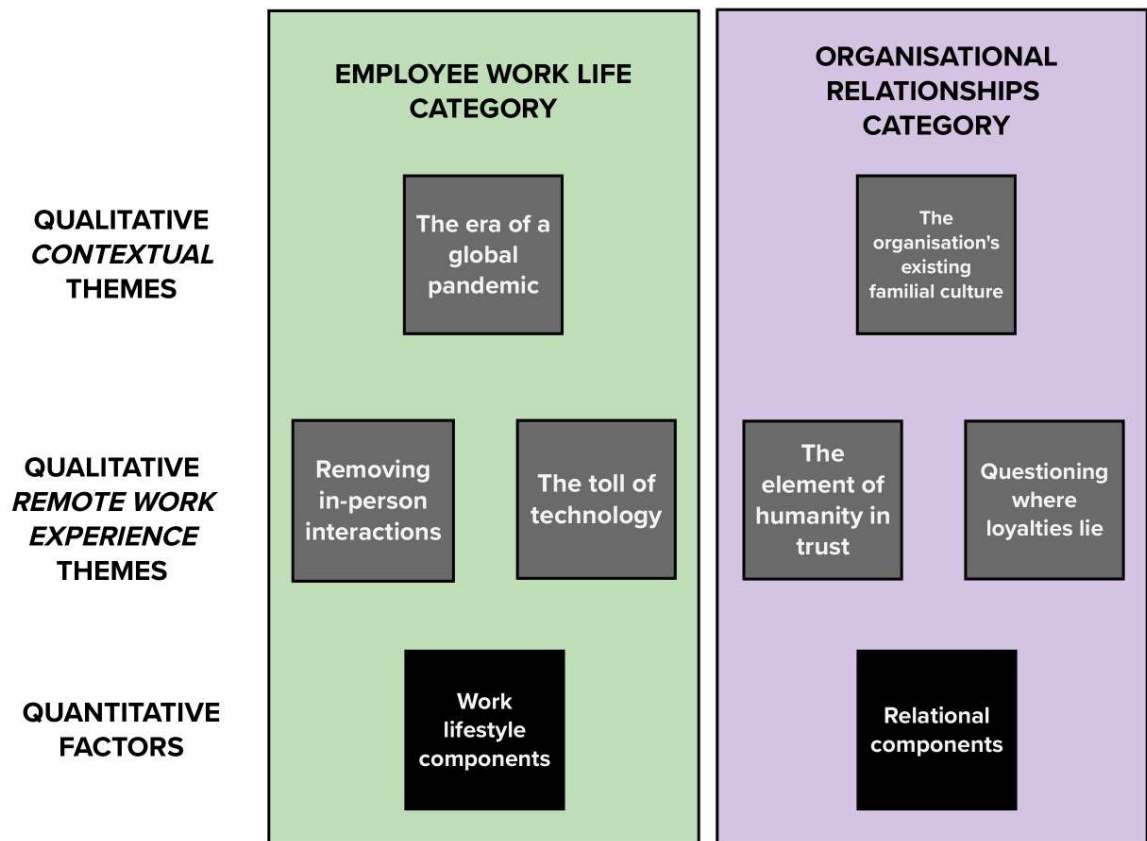
In the next chapter, I expound on said findings; first showing the qualitative results before portraying the quantitative results to set the chapter up with the main, prioritised data and themes first before supporting it with statistical context. Organising the results in this way will provide a reliable, contextual foundation that emphasises the study's MMR pathway of qualitative priority over quantitative.

Chapter 4. Results

As the complexity of MMR can often make the integration of findings hard to keep track of, Plano Clark (2019) suggests that presenting a visual tool, namely, a joint display, will aid in communicating the analytic thinking behind researchers' amalgamated interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data. The idea is that joint displays should effectively convey the logic of the study despite its complexities, embodied by simplistic graphic design presentation for ease of comprehension (Plano Clark, 2019). Heeding this, Figure 1 gives a basic, coherent overview of the qualitative and quantitative results of this study.

Figure 1

Basic joint display of themes and factors from MMR results



In accordance with my research design selections, the qualitative results will be presented first as the dominant, thematically informative data results before presenting the supporting quantitative descriptive analyses and correlations.

4.1 Qualitative results

The prioritised qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis as per my research design selection. I identified six themes in the data; two of which relate to the context that underpinned the results, and four of which pertain to the participants' experiences themselves. I present the two contextual themes first as they situate participants in the circumstances present at the time, and providing these as the background context shows the major influence they had over the RWE themes. I then present the four RWE themes to elucidate more of what was experienced in relation to answering the sub-RQs.

4.1.1 Contextual themes

Contextual theme one: The era of a global pandemic – “COVID presents unique challenges...”

An important contextual condition underpinning the results was the considerable repercussions, both positive and negative, caused by a major global disruption. Although COVID-19 had many implications, the main one situating employees' responses was remote working and the consequent shift in the physical work environment caused by government-enforced WFH directives. The negative consequences of remote working proved to be more evident and diverse in the data than the positive comments.

The foremost difficulty was the lack of work-life dissociation. Notably, participants found it incredibly challenging to make clear boundaries between work life and home life. Evidently, the previous separate physical locations for work and home provided a freer space to shift from professional to personal in a way that remote working could not offer. This led to issues such as overworking and guilt around low productivity levels.

“I work in my bedroom so working from home, I started associating my bedroom into my workspace rather than a room where I can relax and unwind.”

“It's been very busy, and I am working longer hours and feel very pressured. It's hard to switch off when work is at home. B4 the physical act of logging out and leaving the office and the commute home allowed you to disconnect and wind down. It seemed easier to be in work mode then mum mode. Now it feels like the two are merged and compete for your time and thoughts all the time. I am sure it will

settle down it's just an adjustment and I need to put some boundaries in place."

"...I also have to be conscious about stopping work when I'm finished for the day, instead of continuing on and working more than I should be."

Other major problems identified were equipment-related and space-related issues hindering the ability of employees to work efficiently.

"Only when we started actually working from home did realisation dawn on us that we lacked this (e.g., docking station) and that (wireless mouse or wireless keyboard) to reduce the need for multiple ports on the outdated laptop. So, we make do with what we have, or have to send emails to have them delivered to our house. It's not the same experience like working from the office, where all hardware is easily available and accessible."

"...We are a family of 4, and each is employed. Thanks to COVID, all are working from home. Each one occupies on corner of the living room. Speaking on Microsoft teams is a challenge as we have to whisper to avoid disturbing the other 3..."

Transitioning to remote working was of particular concern to YouFirst because they had just started trialling an open-plan office environment, which presented a greater level of risk for employees to contract a virus as easily transmittable as COVID-19. This led to heightened caution and anxiety around threats to physical health; many participants questioned future office safety, which in turn also affected their present-time work perceptions and mentalities.

"I'm not sure exactly how I feel about it, obviously I have concerns for my own and my family's safety as this pandemic is something very new and we keep learning new things about it and it is a very sneaky virus. I feel apprehensive about venturing back to the office..."

"Even though I am happy working from home, I have become mentally isolated in that the thought of going back to interacting with people feels challenging and raises concerns about health safety when mixing with people. This is not healthy and is hopefully a temporary, transitional feeling..."

In addition to the drastic work environment transition, actions as extreme as government-mandated lockdowns, and major changes to overall work life, there was also a lot of anxiety over the pandemic in general. This was evident in the concern expressed by participants in their initial reactions to COVID-19 and their opinions on moving forward.

“...COVID (and subsequently working from home) fell on us (me) like a ton of bricks. We did not realise (full impact) what would be required to work from home...”

“...This has been a shake up, I'm feeling really conscious and uncertain about how we live our lives going forward, what will go back to normal in terms of how we move about the world and what we will change.”

However, as for the advantages found in the RWE, many participants noted that the savings in time, stress and money positively impacted their overall lifestyle. This was of importance as the aspects named were inevitably attached to a standard, physical, pre-COVID work routine.

“Having my commute time cut from 90-120 mins per day to 60 seconds, plus no costs for petrol, travel, parking & CBD lunches has been genuinely life-changing...”

“...I find it far less stressful than having to get ready and go into an office environment frequently. My days don't start with a sense of being rushed out the door, which helps me to think more clearly about the work I have to do, as I'm not managing unrelated/residual stress from that kind of routine.”

Additionally, a notable sub-theme found in the data was employees' increase in control. Many participants appreciated having the independence and power to maintain a healthier work-life balance. This mostly encompassed control over their time, such as increased flexibility, more time to exercise, more time for family, minor control over when to start and finish work, the ability to prepare a home-cooked meal whenever they wanted, and the time to do house chores and non-work-related activities. Other control aspects included managing personal workspace environment preferences and the lack of need for business wear.

“I feel like I am in control of my own time to a greater extent.”

“Flexibility with the kids at home as well – I could work around the family's needs e.g., helping with their school Zoom meetings.”

“Being in the comfort of my own space with my surrounding, no rules around what can and can't be on your desk and how you go about being comfortable while working.”

“...The ability to control my own environment/temp/brightness/noise & messiness...”

“...I'm eating healthier and exercising as I have more time to make food as well exercise before work...”

From a professional standpoint, remote working also provided efficiency-related advantages like fewer interruptions, distractions and noise from co-workers or general office environment stressors, and increased productivity and focus. This led to the reduction of overall stress, which many participants appreciated during a time of considerable uncertainty.

“I prefer working from home. I have less distractions (in the office it can be a nightmare with distractions - I have to keep headphones in all day to block out the noise and chatter)... At the risk of sounding dramatic, I find that I can work in a peaceful environment - I can have my lavender oil diffuser going and not worry about it affecting anyone else.”

“...I think it has made me more productive (than I thought I would be) as there are no office interruptions, driving to meetings, getting off track with other jobs.”

In fact, in light of the disorder COVID-19 had brought upon others, many were just appreciative of being able to work during lockdown at all.

“Being given the opportunity to even work from home, period, has been great! I feel blessed seeing as there were so many people not being able to work, or worse not having a job due to the lockdown.”

“I've appreciated being able to still work and have a job through lockdown! Being able to provide for my family during this unprecedented time was great...”

So, while the implications of COVID-19 presented salient and detrimental drawbacks affecting participants' workspace environment, work lifestyle and mental health, some of the benefits of remote working helped ease the impact of the global disruption. The main downsides as outlined by participants were the lack of work-life boundaries, equipment and space issues, and anxiety around health and well-being. However, removing commute costs and stress, having increased autonomy, and eliminating office environment distractions were the upsides to an otherwise scary situation.

Contextual theme two: The organisation's existing familial culture – “*They are not just my colleagues, they are my work family and I do not say that lightly.*”

The other contextual element that emerged from employees at YouFirst was the presence of an existing family-like culture that cultivated emotional employee-employee and employee-organisation connections that, in turn, encouraged high levels of trust. Participants alluded to the strong workplace culture, recognising a distinct

team-working attitude that may not be present in other organisations. This connection and unity were so evident that a participant compared the bond to one of family.

“...My team is amazing - we trust each other and support each other. They are not just my colleagues, they are my work family and I do not say that lightly. I cannot give you one example of when I have trusted my team - I always 100% trust them...”

In response to the question asking about a time when trust was enforced or abused, a participant stated:

“There is a culture of trust and we value this, so I firmly believe it is not abused.”

Evidently, this did not change for employees when COVID-19 hit:

“...I have felt valued a member of staff as I feel [YouFirst] has gone to great lengths to ensure we are all safe and still able to continue working from home...”

“I find the business works very well under immense pressure, in times like this it just reinforces the great culture and teamwork here...”

Interestingly, some employees expressed fear of losing this valued workplace culture once COVID-19 lockdowns were lifted, especially in anticipation that remote working could possibly become the “new norm”.

“I think that over time the strong work culture of [YouFirst] will dissipate if a large proportion of the workforce continue to work mostly from home. It has worked effectively through lockdown due to the strong existing connections between colleagues, but this won't always be the case.”

This likening of organisational culture to that of family contributed considerably to participants' stronger feelings of trust or mistrust. To illustrate, in the same way that families often experience trust, participants displayed more intense emotive reactions to when their co-workers' behaviour affected such trust.

Ultimately, the two themes outlined above provide the context of the data analysis, underpinning the RWE themes found in the responses. Of these two themes above, the era of a global pandemic influenced all of the RWE themes whereas the organisation's existing familial culture directly tied into the questioning where loyalties lie theme. Overall, acknowledging these two themes as contextual and not established work themes is critical when analysing the results as there is a distinguished difference

between both categories. Whilst the following RWE themes are more specific in regard to participants' perception of WFH during lockdown, these contextual themes were broader factors establishing the participants' circumstances that played a role in their overall work experience.

4.1.2 Remote work experience themes

The following four themes, being underpinned by the contextual themes described above, are organised to tell a coherent story of participants' work experience reality. The first two RWE themes pertain to sub-RQ1a regarding employees' transition to a different, home-based physical work environment and the last two RWE themes apply to sub-RQ1b regarding trust in organisational relationships.

RWE Theme one: Removing in-person interactions – “...*Virtual/ phone meetings can be an alternative, but they cannot replace the face-to-face connections...*”

The contextual factor of COVID-19 posing salient physical health risks, aided by the extensive capabilities of today's technology, allowed the transition to WFH to become possible. However, there was a substantial impact made by the removal of in-person interaction; two extremes of either increased effort to intentionally communicate or a severe lack of communication, consequently affected levels of trust. This deprivation of human interaction was one of the most concerning issues identified by participants as they experienced remote working during a global pandemic.

Impact on interpersonal relationships

The majority of participants clearly distinguished their innate need for some form of interpersonal interaction, as noted that its absence negatively affected work life, and in several cases, employee well-being in general.

“...The absence of any face-to-face contact with humans took a real mental toll, that often manifested itself as an inability to do any work...”

Although technological communication mediums were effective, many observed that there was something about the act of physical interaction that better satisfied participants' social needs. Even those who did not usually favour social interactions felt an inherent desire to simply see their colleagues and co-workers.

“...Missing seeing my colleagues in real life rather than just on a video screen...”

“It's hard not seeing your colleagues. I keep to myself a lot at work and am quite introverted, but I still miss seeing everyone anyway.”

In some cases, the lack of the physical aspect of communication limited peoples' social circles, such as this participant:

“...I also find that I interact with a smaller number of people - just those who I am directly working with. It is much harder to keep up the wider, informal relationships (the corridor/kitchen conversations, coffees etc that might not have a specific work purpose to them)...”

And yet, an unspoken understanding was present between participants; that, although these human needs were not being met, the level of emergency and risks attached to COVID-19 meant that the situation was out of their control.

“...I guess missing the people interaction has also been a little hard but understandable during this time.”

“I have felt physically isolated from my teammates since working from home and have felt quite lonely. However, this is not a fault of [YouFirst], and is definitely a side-effect of the lockdown...”

This alienating experience also influenced connections to the organisation and internal teams. Participants pointed out that the spontaneity in organic, face-to-face conversations was significantly reduced during COVID-19. This affected the satisfaction of both their professional social needs (healthy work-related discussions) and their personal social needs (social camaraderie and rapport).

“...Conversations that used to happen organically in passing are now more likely to involve a meeting... Previously the team sat together, and information flowed by 'osmosis' e.g., people who weren't in the conversation might overhear and help by sharing critical information about the issue.”

“...information is not as free-flowing as when in the office sometimes that hinders the ability to work effectively, and feelings of isolation can impact focus and feelings of sense of belonging.”

“Personally, social connectivity is very important to me and meeting and socialising with colleagues in the office is a very crucial part of my workday. Now that aspect is taken away, I do not feel as connected to my organisation...The open discussions and bouncing off ideas with colleagues in the same workspace is now nil.”

Supplementary to the lack of physicality, virtual communication proved to take a toll in itself. Communication via ICTs had repercussions such as difficulty in gauging

kinesics and body language, poor virtual meeting etiquette, and ultimately, virtual meeting exhaustion.

“Certain types of meetings, especially very conceptual brainstorming sessions are very hard without body language. Video meetings don't meet this need and some things just need to be done face to face to be fully effective...”

“Virtual meetings are actually quite tiring - I am pretty wrecked at the end of the day. You stay in touch with many people but have really lost contact with a lot - this is an issue for sustaining a team culture and connectedness.”

“A slight lag in voice over Teams or Skype means that I feel like I talk over people. I also find that some people like the stage and are not mindful of others who would like to talk, but time runs out.”

Overcoming limitations with intentional communication

However, in a time of global disruption, the effort put into intentional communication seemed to have improved, more than before lockdown. Participants noted a clearer, streamlined version of professional comms in the organisation.

“...Meetings are much more focused and get to the action points faster...”

“...I also noticed that communication is simpler (which members of my team have also commented on)...”

Regarding informal social activity, several participants actually noticed a general increase in purposeful communication within their teams, noticing more people reaching out in concern, having virtual coffees with co-workers, and overall improving team connections. This also provided a sense of unity and support, as many participants felt encouraged by teammates who kept in touch despite the elimination of physical interaction.

“...I'm also finding that my team are actually communicating more and the support we're giving each other has totally improved from when we were in the office and right next to each other!”

“...My team (up and down) have been in constant communication and are feeling really well supported and connected.”

“...while I do feel physically isolated, my team is a lot closer than we were and it is almost easier to help one another.”

“I have most enjoyed that my team can socialise more freely and for the first time ever we can participate in Friday social 'Zoom drinks'”

from the comfort of our living rooms without the concern of not being able to participate due to driving or picking up children from day-care etc. etc. We have definitely not lost touch because of our physical distancing.”

Ultimately, participants’ responses demonstrated that removing in-person interactions had detrimental communication-related repercussions, particularly on interpersonal relationships. These issues included aspects such as the lack of discussion spontaneity and ability to read body language, which affected both professional and personal social activity within the workplace. However, responses also revealed positive implications as participants overcame such communication-related issues by displaying intentionality. This was seen in the responses that showed that participants sought to be there for each other during COVID-19 through any means of communication, displaying care in the time of crisis. This concept aligns with the contextual theme of the organisation’s existing familial culture, and the upcoming theme of the element of humanity in trust.

RWE Theme two: The toll of technology – “...Tech issues can be a serious drain.”

As a notable contributor to the RWE, the toll of technology was relevant to explore following the removal of in-person interactions. Nowadays, technology plays an obvious and substantial role in everyday life, and relying on it is a norm in this technology-progressive society. The COVID-19-induced transition from a separate office work environment to WFH made this dependability on technology even more evident. However, participants appreciated they were even able to meet at all considering the circumstances.

“...The technology we have such as Skype, WhatsApp, phone, email allows me to interact with my colleagues when working remotely...”

Nonetheless, participant’s concerns around ICT-related issues during remote working dominated the responses; the main ones being technostress, significant screen time, and technological handicaps hindering work ability.

Technostress

Participants commonly noted that remote working made them dependent on technology, which included having to perform normal work-related tasks using ICTs. Since these tasks were much easier to complete via physical interaction or working onsite, this left participants requiring excessive workarounds that were, in comparison to office life, unnecessarily time-consuming.

“...requires a lot of extra process steps to perform normal tasks...”

This resulted in high levels of technostress, which added to the already high levels of stress and frustration caused by COVID-19.

“...The access to some of the services/products I use to do my job are complicated now as [I] have to use work arounds... I am finding this very stressful and time consuming and [it] is impacting my productivity.”

“System issues have plagued my days...”

In some cases, the effect of technostress spilt over from participants' professional lives into their personal lives, impacting their family life and well-being.

“...Because it's taking longer to get the work done remotely, I have less quality time with my family...”

“This has been a period of rapid change, and this has left some people feeling very overwhelmed and unable to cope with minor inconveniences (e.g., entering a password twice instead of once to get into a system)...”

Some participants noted how encountering technological issues were to be expected; this directly links to the empathetic understanding present in the upcoming theme of the element of humanity in trust. Similarly, other participants also acknowledged that the organisation was still “teething” in some areas, which allowed for some exemptions or at least slight tolerance towards techno-stressors.

“...Teething problems... and various small things like that, but on the whole it has gone smoothly...”

Several participants expressed appreciation for their ICT support staff coping with the larger workload when lockdown occurred.

“Appreciate IT getting wrinkles ironed out quickly with the lockdown happening so quickly...”

However, complaints about ICT issues prevailed. These included recounts of repetitious logins, system update interferences, the inaccessibility of ICT support and long waits for assistance, and employees constantly being kicked out of virtual meetings. Participants even found that the sheer number of communication platforms was too many to handle, causing inefficiencies.

“...Too many channels - Teams/ Skype/ Email/ WhatsApp/ Messenger/ Facetime/ Phone... juggling all of these can be a nightmare...”

These ICT issues all had a major impact on employees’ ability to work effectively as many spent a lot of their work hours simply trying to solve their ICT issues as a precursor to completing their work, causing unwelcome frustration and technostress.

The implications of significant screen time

An added element of technostress was the significant screen time required for remote working. A frequent observation made by participants was that WFH led to a sedentary lifestyle, with longer hours spent in front of a screen in comparison to office work.

“...I don’t move as much... no walking to the printer, to my car, the loo, a meeting room, going out for lunch.”

“Significant screen time/meetings. Struggle with headset and being wired and not being able to move from the desk for long periods.”

Although the increased time for exercise was previously mentioned, only a few participants anticipated the physical consequences of remote working, and thus, failed to properly accommodate for long periods of inactivity. This led to various body pains and injuries mostly tracing back to ergonomic issues; some causes included overuse of technology, inadequate existing equipment and furniture, and lack of access to better equipment and furniture. This created physical problems such as eye strain, poor posture, headaches, and back, shoulder and neck pain.

“The chair and table I have are not made for sitting at for long periods and have contributed to back pain...”

“...I am currently using my TV screen which is not ideal and can be blurry to read, straining my eyes and causing headaches.”

Another major impact of significant screen time during remote working was the substantial increase in employee accessibility. Since WFH was compulsory during lockdown, the knowledge that people would constantly be on a screen for work was mistaken for constant accessibility. Although the ability to communicate during lockdown was made possible by technology, many found the accessibility to be both a blessing and a burden. Problematic issues were at both ends of the spectrum; from over-

accessibility, excessive meetings, and lack of distinction between work hours and personal time, to under-accessibility and perceived intentional inaccessibility.

“...Too many meetings - as soon as there is a gap in the diary it gets filled especially at lunch time when we need to take a break...”

“Booking of meetings seems to take less consideration of others time and workload...”

“...Another element to this is when working remotely [team members] do not answer calls even when their status/ calendar indicates that they should be available.”

The stark contrast of office-based work having set working hours made these consequences more burdensome on participants.

“...e-mail volume/chat has increased, teams contacting leaders outside of "office hours" has increased...”

“...I stay logged on longer than I normally would - I normally have a time of day I leave the office. Now I am also using MS Teams and Outlook on my phone I still get distracted even when I've turned the PC off...”

Technological “handicaps” creating imbalance

Due to inequities in participants’ level of skill, and access to varying qualities of technological equipment during COVID-19, there existed a technology-related capability imbalance. This was where participants found that they or their teammates were more technologically savvy or more equipped with better-functioning resources than others were. The imbalance across the remote workforce produced complications in the ability to communicate and complete work.

Some participants felt handicapped and hindered by their lack of capability and lack of technological know-how. These participants claimed that this damaged their RWE just because they were unable to perform tasks that seemed simpler to others who were technologically savvy.

“...not everyone is computer minded (need simple instructions).”

“...it is very frustrating when people think that task is simple, but for you, it's not simple and takes hours to complete.”

As for technological resources and equipment, this issue encompassed several aspects of technology: video capabilities, the mute function, Wi-Fi, and varied

communication platforms, all of which were likely to require excessive workarounds, as mentioned previously.

“...Even in video calls, most people I talk to don't have a camera, so it is no different than a phone call, which makes establishing connections harder...”

“...Meetings are harder virtually as people have to mute and this lessens the meeting vibe...”

“Not everyone having the same technical constraints or having the same system set up at home. Meaning some people can perform tasks simply where others have to make multiple steps.”

“Rollout of Teams was not complete so some people have different capabilities than others (web vs desktop client)...”

This even initiated distrust in co-workers' level of participation, as the following participant outlined their suspicion of another team member's input in meetings:

“It tends to get a bit sketchy when having a virtual team meeting and everyone is online as you can see but one person isn't verbally affirming anything during conversation and then you wonder if they signed in and then disappeared off somewhere else and when questioned they say they didn't realise they were on mute the whole time and wondered why everyone was talking over them...”

Moreover, this distrust also affected those in supervisory roles. The following participant expressed their recurrent concern for their subordinates using technology handicaps to justify their lack of engagement in discussions:

“...As a leader, I battle constantly to keep my team connected to the rest of the organisation and I think they will use it as an excuse to just retreat further into their shells. I would like P&S to set some specific rules for all departments, clearly outlining things like...if your skype, internet isn't working, then you must come into the office, it's not ok to blame IS for everything...”

RWE Theme three: The element of humanity in trust – “...People are human, so they do make mistakes sometimes, so I try to keep that in mind.”

As noted both within the theme of removing in-person interactions and the toll of technology, participants were cognisant of the element of humanity whilst sharing the collective duress of experiencing COVID-19. This understanding and empathy for colleagues was fundamental, as many responses related to the fact that people are not perfect, everyone was dealing with their own situations, mistakes could be made and, especially during the time of COVID-19, they often were. Gauging the abstract concept

of trust was based on two factors. Firstly, whether existing perceptions of trust were attributed to specific, individual events or a build-up of certain behaviours; and secondly, the level of acknowledgement and acceptance of the imperfection of humanity. Ultimately, the responses reflected that the distress incited by COVID-19 encouraged a heightened willingness to support and unite together to overcome obstacles, more so than in pre-COVID times.

“...I feel like everyone has come together more... and worked together more as a team rather than it being so segregated - everyone wants to help one another more than before lockdown...”

Basing trust on meeting professional expectations pre-COVID

In the data, the theme of humanity was observed in the way participants trusted or mistrusted each other pre-COVID; the evidence suggests participants based this on whether or not colleagues met their own standards and expectations.

A key professional expectation of colleagues was following through on what was promised. Other expectations also included completing tasks with a certain level of independence, handling oneself with maturity, managing work responsibilities, and asking for help when needed. If their co-workers did not meet these performance expectations, participants' natural response was a reduction of patience and overall trust in each other's professional capabilities.

“I have had instances with co-workers where they would promise they would do something, but fail to do so, on multiple occasions without communication. This has eroded the trust I had with them.”

“The only behaviour that influenced my distrust is when someone struggled to perform their job (lacking in capability for the very complex project involved in). My distrust wasn't in that person but in the quality of their inputs given that person wasn't a good match for the type of project...”

Participants staking trust on professional expectations thus influenced team-working abilities and unity; this was particularly important to YouFirst, as much of their work was completed in teams.

However, interestingly, some participants did not feel any need to rely on their team at all, which may speak to participants having varied expectations of their peers.

“I pretty much work alone, I'm part of a team, but I really don't rely on anyone else to get on & do my job...”

Moreover, some participants displayed circumspection in the trust they placed in their colleagues. The following participant stipulated that they were a generally trusting person, but who also showed evidence of wariness around who they trust and constant evaluation of whether they deserved their trust:

“...I am generally quite trusting, until you give me a reason to not trust you, and then I will usually struggle to trust you!”

This demonstration of iterating between trust and mistrust in a cyclical manner showed that participants’ level of trust was either influenced by a single event or was a build-up of trustworthy or untrustworthy behaviours; this led to trust being constantly exhausted or restored. A key example of this was outlined by a participant who experienced this cycle with their team leader, who showed initial mistrust before accepting eventual trust:

“During the early days, the Team Leader was a bit suspicious on people's ability to deliver. So, lots of micromanagement was in play, making it uncomfortable to work. At times, things were being checked and counter checked. Over time, this has now changed to an extent, as the same Team Leader has observed each team member closely and realised that all are working diligently and honestly and to their full extent. Recently, the same Team Leader has been sending eCards to Team Members acknowledging great work.”

Whilst this theme was rooted in participants’ pre-COVID behaviour, their responses to colleagues not meeting expectations during COVID-19 adapted to reflect the empathy so desperately needed in a time of global disruption.

Discovering the increased need for humanity during COVID-19

The pandemic gave participants the opportunity to think more deeply about how they lived their lives, and even step back from purely selfish thoughts. In a time when humankind was finding common ground against the COVID-19 virus, participants showed a higher level of care that was brought on by mutual understanding and unity in their struggle. Participants demonstrated added concern for co-workers’ bubbles, extended family and friends; all of which reflected the increased need for feelings drawn from the sense of humanity during COVID-19. This was exemplified in the data which showed an emphasis on humanity inciting a higher level of empathy. Participants expressed such empathy after seeing people in their more “normal” states; for example, the lack of work attire and observing peoples’ domestic environments.

“...Seeing other people in their "normal" without their work face on, it makes us all far more empathetic.”

This led to participants finding commonalities with each other that allowed them to engage in a deeper level of understanding; it also led them to be more accepting of mistakes. Particularly, participants noticed that there was more tolerance for technical difficulties, with an added understanding that not everyone is technologically savvy, and that the fault should not be pinned on each other.

“...Because everyone seems to be having a few glitches or disruptions to their days it has been comforting for me that the 100% is not an expectation....”

“I find that people are forgiving if I do have technical difficulties so that helps alleviate concern.”

It even extended past internal, organisational empathy, as one participant claimed they witnessed such patience and understanding from clients:

“Users were really patient and understood the gap of support scope.”

RWE Theme four: Questioning where loyalties lie – “*I am conscious (as when we were working in the office) that people may have... competing/conflicting priorities...*”

Although empathy and understanding were high during the time of major uncertainty, the element that embodied trust and its direction in organisational relationships the most was loyalty. Under the duress of COVID-19, peoples’ loyalties emerged and became evident in the aspects of life they prioritised; whether that be in the organisation, their superiors, their team, or themselves and their personal priorities. This prioritisation thus revealed where people’s loyalties lay and consequentially, exposed how participants’ trust in their organisational relationships was tested during COVID-19. Some participants gave examples of individual events that demonstrated clear directional loyalty within the organisational hierarchy; upwards to superiors, downwards to subordinates and laterally between equal team members. Other participants merely alluded to broader, behavioural factors that contributed to the trust or mistrust they placed in people. This directional trust shows the nature of participants’ prioritisation and loyalty during COVID-19.

Loyalty to the organisation

Participants' loyalty to the organisation was influenced by the contextual theme of YouFirst's distinct familial culture. Participants indicated that this culture had predominantly, but not exclusively, cultivated more positive perceptions of the organisation than negative ones, suggesting that levels of loyalty were high amongst employees across various ranks. Participants' level of loyalty was likely influenced by multiple factors such as the organisation's values and whether they were adhered to in employee or team behaviour.

"...a company that embraces "With Heart" at the core of our values."

"...We foster a culture of openness, honesty and trustworthiness... we conduct ourselves with these values (among many others) at heart on a daily basis."

Other contributing factors included the organisation's leadership and the example they set, and the amount of effort put into transparent communication, particularly in the transition into remote working. Ultimately, it was the way the organisation prioritised their employees, including employees' well-being and safety, that earned reciprocal trust and loyalty from employees.

"Great clear communication from the business, regular checks in to see how we are tracking /coping and taking feedback on board on how they can support us via our wellbeing programme and promoting this very well."

This emphasis on care for people left many employees feeling supported and "blessed" to work for such a considerate organisation, especially during lockdown.

"I think [YouFirst] has done a fantastic job setting up everyone to work from home in such a short period of time. The leadership, teamwork, communication has been awesome. Very very blessed to work for this company during this difficult time."

"[YouFirst] really did an amazing job both from an emotional and technical perspective. I was blown away by the level of care. It motivated me to make WFH work so that [YouFirst] could be successful. I feel very lucky that I was working for [the organisation] during this period."

"The support I have received from [YouFirst]! IT support, team leader support just having an empathetic understanding employer has made a huge difference to me and working remotely!"

The majority felt comfortable investing their loyalty into the organisation; if not wholly, then at least in part. Some participants voiced their trust in the organisation, commending YouFirst for keeping them safe during COVID-19 and entrusting that their change management style will benefit their future work regime.

“Having complete trust and faith in the leadership of [the organisation] even more so over this stressful time...”

“...I trust that [the organisation] will put safe measures in place for us (physical distancing, hand washing measures etc.) to work together while we still are in Covid alert levels.”

In saying this, there were some reservations about putting full faith into the organisation due to the leadership’s communication implying a business-oriented focus as opposed to a people-oriented focus. This, in turn, incited strong feelings of wariness and a loss of trust.

“Some of the leadership conversation seems to be curated or aimed at moving back to the office and identifying those that may not be that supportive, it feels like there is an undertone of "compliance" being applied.”

“It appeared leadership has wanted business to run as usual and did not take into consideration the impacts of the situation on people’s mental health and wellbeing... there has not been much consideration for peoples’ personal lives or situations. While the business does need to run, this seems to have been put first and been made more important than anything else.”

However, the responses demonstrating mistrust in their organisation were few. All of these factors contributed to the mixed feelings of employees’ loyalty to the organisation and were subsequently impacted by the previously mentioned contextual theme of the era of a global pandemic.

Loyalty to superiors

Participants expressed more mixed emotions regarding their relationships with their superiors than that of the prevailing positivity displayed in their loyalty to the organisation. While participants’ negative perceptions of their relationship with superiors were more diverse, their positive perceptions were more consistent. More specifically, participants’ positive perceptions identified superiors’ patterns of support, trust in direct report’s work ethic, evidence of care, and understanding.

“Generally, my leaders take an active interest in our wellbeing that we have what we need to work, and I feel well supported.”

“Visible and tangible care, from authentic leaders is incredibly important.”

“The flexibility of working at home with children and the trust both TM's have with me and I with them, they both understand this and are flexible with how we as employees can work with children and events that happened during lock down - IE: kid moments when you as a parent need time out, space or just to be able to have time out to deal with other things at home. They are both amazing, trustworthy and very supportive! If they weren't this wouldn't have been such an enjoyable, easy process.”

Whilst such positive perceptions were more consistent, the various issues highlighted in employee-supervisor relationships could not be ignored. Several sources of tension centred around poor managerial behaviour; these included the lack of support in individual career development goals, dishonesty, and minimal intervention in conflicts. Additionally, some direct reports admitted to an upward fear of seeking help from their superiors due to cases of belittlement and spurning.

“I don't trust my manager to have my back when it comes to my development or getting me involved in things that I am truly wanting to grow in... workload is never shifted to support development goals...”

“...I have not had a one-on-one since the lockdown with my leader - this makes me question when I can trust my leader to have my back when I really need. If I need something, I now question whether I really need it and hesitate to ask for help or to reach out as I feel like a burden or a nuisance. My leader will often say things like (just sending this to you as requested while in a meeting) implying that I have interrupted a meeting and that they don't really have time...”

This lack of support was exemplified further by the lack of effort put into investigating issues within teams.

“A complaint was laid against me and my leader did not ask me for my side of the story. Assumptions were made and were shared with other leaders which I felt to be unfair and unjust... My leader had always claimed to be professional and open to direct communication, but their actions were the direct contrast of their words. It made me very guarded and demoralised, and I just felt that my loyalty and hard work was betrayed.”

Moreover, participants insinuated that some of their managers lacked faith in them, displaying a need for visibility of progress and micromanagement.

“Dealing with some managers who operate to the "if I can't see you then you are obviously slacking off"”

“...the management style where my Scrum Master tends to be a micromanager.”

These varied responses show that, although there was some form of upward trust present during the era of COVID-19, the perception of employee loyalty to their superiors was a mix of both positive and negative opinions.

Loyalty to team

Regarding team trust, participants described both positive and negative experiences as well; however, wholehearted trust in their team and co-workers was predominant and outweighed the untrustworthy behaviour. This can be exemplified by a radical event that one participant recounted:

“...the trust built up between us has allowed us to speak openly about how we feel on things or how we are feeling in the present moment... one colleague called to discuss that they were feeling overwhelmed with their workload and expectations from their manager. We talked it through, and I offered to help with getting them through the peak so they could find better ways to manage going forward. The trust was so high they were in tears on the phone and felt very vulnerable but comfortable to be having the conversation.”

From participants’ professional perspectives, they based their fundamental trust in finding confidence in each other’s skills and capabilities, team-working abilities, supportive nature in helping and sharing the workload, following through on promised actions, and strong work ethic.

“Trust has never been an issue in my team, both the wider business group and my squad are capable, competent and super smart people who I can trust and that trust me. We work hard and deliver on our promises...”

Additionally, the aspects of reciprocity, tenure and overcoming obstacles together (inclusive of the COVID-19 disruption) reinforced the trust participants placed in their team.

“...we work in a team where TRUST is a big thing for anyone of us. WE value our work ethics in anything we do - we have been here for quite a long time, so I think it is evident on that.”

“There was some urgent task to be finished with [a] lot of unknowns. But then everyone in the team jumped into it and the successful completion of the task consolidated my trust on my team.”

Moreover, emotive shows of support and communication contributed to the trust people placed in their teammates. This involved openness and honesty, showing genuine care and concern for each other, and reaching out in regular discussions and check ins.

“...we are able to be ourselves in meetings, if I need to challenge something I can openly and I can support others’ initiatives even if they aren’t popular at the time.”

“My team moves quickly as an agile project team, so there are constant check-ins. Hearing people reporting back on doing what they said they would do constantly builds my trust in them, to the point now where I know they will do what they say they will do.”

However, similar to the sub-theme of loyalty to superiors, participants also reported more diverse negative experiences with their co-workers that reduced trust. The leading issues were the lack of follow-through on actions, repetitions of untrustworthy conduct, the need to pick up each other’s slack, and the unnecessary follow-up when team members did not complete tasks.

“I found I distrusted someone when they didn’t follow through on tasks they said they would complete multiple times... meaning I (or other team members) have to pick up the slack at the last minute...”

“...I have to spend more of my time keeping track of things I shouldn’t need to be keeping track [of], because I can’t rely on the other person... Then chase the person via face-to-face, phone or email to try get an outcome or response to something I’ve already requested.”

There was also a minor, underlying theme of “high-school”-like behaviour that spilt over into the RWE during COVID-19. These few events involved gossip, spreading rumours, exclusivity, manipulation, betrayal, and the formation of informal cliques.

“...there were “team” meetings happening that I had not been included on and was not made aware of. I was in the exact same role as 3 of my colleagues who were included, but I was not. This was happening regularly...”

“There is a lot of very “high-school clique” type behaviour that I now get to avoid by working from home... At work I would often worry about who to sit with during breaks because there is a definite hierarchy of “cool people”. And I did feel ostracised for some time... and didn’t feel like people really liked me (which I also got verbal confirmation of).”

Thus, participants' loyalty to their team was mainly determined by the way colleagues conducted themselves professionally and whether their behaviour was deemed trustworthy by personal standards. This led to these results of mixed levels of trust within the workforce.

Loyalty to personal priorities

Ultimately, of all the relational directions with the potential to demonstrate loyalty, loyalty to oneself, and those near and dear, was the most consistent in the data in comparison to allegiance to other organisational relationships. This was not exclusively a positive or negative finding; but more about participants' prioritising what they considered to be their highest need and how that exceeded any loyalty to work relationships.

When answering the survey questions, participants predominantly focused on themselves and the specific experiences they were going through. This is because the implications of COVID-19 forced many people to temporarily condense their life focus to personal priorities. This prioritisation was largely based on COVID-19's impact on personal well-being during the RWE. One of the factors that increased participants' awareness around, and thus, prioritisation of, themselves was the autonomy experienced from remote work. The increased control over their work lifestyle helped participants feel somewhat empowered during a time of crisis, where independence and control were highly valued.

"...I feel like I have more time for me."

"Made me more focused on looking after myself..."

Moreover, interestingly participants' physical well-being was largely influenced by their work environment.

"...I have noticed that my headaches (I suffer from migraines regularly) have almost disappeared without the fluorescent lights..."

Participants particularly appreciated the increased freedom to exercise that WFH offered during a time of quarantine.

"I enjoy being able to exercise at lunchtime (when I can get a break) and being able to walk around the semi-rural area where I live, rather than the city..."

“...I’m going for a walk before work in the morning and I feel much more awake and ready to start the day... I have noticed my heart rate has dropped since working from home, which I believe is a combination of less commuting stress and having more time for exercising.”

As previously mentioned, this loyalty was not only limited to the factors affecting individuals but also accounted for those they considered near and dear. This was inclusive of participants’ family commitments such as childcare responsibilities and schooling, obligations in caring for the elderly, and added caution for those within their bubbles who were particularly at-risk.

“...there is the extra pressure of having a toddler at home and trying to fit in work hours around caring for a child.”

“...having to juggle my family commitments having a mixture of very young and older children...”

“...I have elderly parents with me and if I get in contact with COVID-19 virus my parents might get affected. Feel safe in my own bubble at this stage.”

Therefore, this loyalty to themselves, family and other loved ones was the leading direction in which people invested during COVID-19.

Overall, this qualitative analysis showed two types of themes: contextual and RWE themes. The two contextual themes of the era of a global pandemic and the organisation’s existing familial culture were underpinning ideas that situated participants’ circumstances and thus, provided a background to the RWE themes. The RWE themes illustrated key ideas represented in participants’ responses regarding the RWE and demonstrated the way employees navigated the COVID-19 global disruption and attached implications. The RWE themes were removing in-person interactions, the toll of technology, the element of humanity in trust, and questioning where loyalties lie. All of these themes will now be explored relative to the quantitative survey results using descriptive statistics and correlations.

4.2 Quantitative results

The following quantitative results expound on the analysis of the study variables’ descriptive statistics and correlations. Table 4 summarises the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the quantitative variables, which are important

to consider in quantitative data analysis as they indicate the nature and strength of the relationships between pairs of relevant variables (Vogt et al., 2014).

Correlations are represented as r values and range from +1.0 to -1.0 (Vogt et al., 2014). The sign of an r value indicates how one variable changes with respect to another variable, and the magnitude of the r value indicates the strength of a relationship (Cohen, 1988). A positive r value indicates that variables have a direct relationship, meaning the increase or decrease of one occurs alongside the respective increase or decrease of the other (Vogt et al., 2014). However, a negative r value indicates that the variables have an inverse relationship, meaning the increase of one occurs alongside the opposing decrease of the other (Vogt et al., 2014). Cohen (1988) stipulated that such conventions for interpreting r values were determined by the differences between the ranges of r values; weak correlations being lower than $r = .30$, moderate correlations being between $r = .30$ and $r = .50$, and strong correlations being higher than $r = .50$. It is important to note that while these correlations do not indicate a causal relationship between variables, their existence and strength can still aid in creating a clearer narrative of the experiential ‘snapshot’ of the study (Cohen, 1988; Vogt et al., 2014). While the following Table 4 shows the various descriptive statistics and correlations analysed in this study, only those bearing relevance will be presented and examined.

Table 4*Descriptive statistics and correlations*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Overall job satisfaction	7.95	1.61											
2. Attitude to remote work prior	7.53	2.20	.09 [*]										
3. Attitude to remote work now	8.41	1.58	.36 ^{**}	.40 ^{**}									
4. Distraction	3.27	2.86	-.08	-.03	-.12 ^{**}								
5. Privacy	7.99	2.73	.12 [*]	.11 [*]	.20 ^{**}	-.22 ^{**}							
6. Satisfaction with workspace	8.03	1.70	.27 ^{**}	.26 ^{**}	.51 ^{**}	-.32 ^{**}	.44 ^{**}						
7. Workspace suitability	4.12	.82	.28 ^{**}	.18 ^{**}	.39 ^{**}	-.18 ^{**}	.36 ^{**}	.64 ^{**}					
8. Stress	5.13	2.33	-.35 ^{**}	-.02	-.26 ^{**}	.15 ^{**}	-.11 [*]	-.24 ^{**}	-.22 ^{**}				
9. ICT enablement	8.13	1.52	.28 ^{**}	.16 ^{**}	.27 ^{**}	-.03	.23 ^{**}	.24 ^{**}	.28 ^{**}	-.16 ^{**}			
10. Communication and change management	4.70	.63	.25 ^{**}	.08	.11 [*]	.02	.04	.14 ^{**}	.35 ^{**}	-.03	.20 ^{**}		
11. Collaboration	4.08	.80	.30 ^{**}	.17 ^{**}	.47 ^{**}	-.06	.08	.29 ^{**}	.44 ^{**}	-.17 ^{**}	.27 ^{**}	.40 ^{**}	
12. Team trust	3.82	.52	.25 ^{**}	.05	.19 ^{**}	-.02	.14 ^{**}	.19 ^{**}	.30 ^{**}	-.11 [*]	.21 ^{**}	.39 ^{**}	.41 ^{**}

Note. * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed); ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); N = 440 - 482

Bar and pie graphs are presented in Appendix D to illustrate the distributions of participants' responses to the variables examined to help better understand these quantitative results.

The following two sections describe the quantitative variables, in which such analysis builds into the qualitative themes presented earlier. As mentioned in the *Methods* chapter, it should be noted that for all 10-point Likert scale questions, these were taken as varying general values as per the participants' perception; for all 5-point Likert scales, these were presented as 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, with the midpoint of the scale being 3 = neither agree nor disagree.

4.2.1 Work lifestyle components

This first set of components pertained to the exploration of participants' work lifestyles in the context of COVID-19. To better understand participants' experience, it was useful to first look at their overall job satisfaction at the time. Job satisfaction had a high mean ($M = 7.95$) and a fairly narrow range of responses ($SD = 1.61$). This shows that participants were relatively content with their jobs and what their work entailed, with well over half (59.5%) of participants selecting 8 or above on the 10-point scale. Job satisfaction showed a moderate, positive correlation ($r = .36, p < .001$) with attitude to remote work now. This shows that participants had high job satisfaction levels alongside a more positive attitude to remote working at the time the data were collected. Thus, on average, employees at YouFirst found that, despite the drawbacks associated with a negative RWE, they remained satisfied with their overall work experience during COVID-19.

To understand the impacts of the global disruption of COVID-19, it is important to note that, prior to COVID-19, over a third (37%) of participants did not have any experience with remote working whatsoever, while a small minority worked remotely either most of the time or almost always (10%). Although most participants lacked experience with remote working prior to the lockdown, their attitude towards remote working underwent a minor change from before to during lockdown. While evidence of such a change was not explicit, this observation was made using the information provided by two separate survey questions: one asking about participants' WFH feelings pre-COVID and another asking about their current WFH feelings. Participants reported a mainly positive attitude towards the concept of remote working before lockdown; the mean above the scale midpoint ($M = 7.53$) and a wide range of responses

($SD = 2.20$). However, even while experiencing remote working under such disruptive circumstances, participants responded differently to the second question about present-time WFH feelings; the two variables were moderately, positively correlated ($r = .40, p < .001$). Participants' attitudes shifted slightly into an even more positive perception of WFH; the mean shifted higher up the scale ($M = 8.41$) and the range of responses reduced ($SD = 1.58$) in comparison to pre-COVID perceptions. These results showed, post-hoc, employees' pre-COVID perceptions of remote working were fairly positive, with a variation of responses across participants, and, once experiencing remote working, their attitudes towards remote working were more positive, with less variation. Since the survey was taken at a time when a large proportion (37%) of the participants experienced remote working for the first time, this slight shift in attitude may imply that remote working was better than they had previously expected.

Next, the basic aspects of participants' physical workspace environment were investigated. Firstly, the transition from an office-based environment to a home-based environment meant a change in both the room and area in which participants worked. Prior to COVID-19, 82% of participants reported that their physical workspace was mainly in an open-plan office setting; whether that be at their own office space, assigned desk, or activity-based working. Only 6% of participants reported working at home and even less (1.6%) worked on the road. In contrast, at the point at which the data were collected, participants had moved their work-life settings completely into their houses; workspaces included their home office (29.4%), bedroom (24.2%), dining room (17.7%), lounge/living room (14.1%), and other places around the house (4.8%). Although there was considerable variation in in-house location, the furniture they worked on was predominantly at a desk or table (87.1%), with a small number working on their lap (1.8%), at a counter or bench (1.2%), or other, unspecified areas (1.0%). These statistics may explain some of the responses outlined in the contextual theme of the era of a global pandemic, where participants described the difficulties associated with defining the boundaries of work life and home life, and the ergonomic consequences of the change in physical location.

Following on from such results exploring participants' physical workspace, two boundary issues were also measured: distraction and privacy. Firstly, the level of distraction whilst WFH had a mean below the scale midpoint ($M = 3.27$) and showed a wide range of responses ($SD = 2.86$). This denotes that the level of distraction was relatively low, although participants' experiences were quite varied. The level of

distraction showed a moderate, negative correlation with satisfaction with workspace ($r = -.32, p < .001$), meaning that higher levels of distraction were associated with lower levels of participants' satisfaction with their workplace. These results align with participants' level of privacy at home, which had a high mean above the scale midpoint ($M = 7.99$), and a similarly wide range of responses ($SD = 2.73$). This indicated that, on average, participants were satisfied with their workspace's level of privacy, with less than 5% of participants reporting little to no privacy. The privacy variable had two moderate, positive correlations; one with workspace suitability ($r = .36, p < .001$), and the other with overall employee satisfaction with their workspace ($r = .44, p < .001$). This indicates that high levels of privacy were experienced by employees who also reported higher suitability and satisfaction with their workspaces. These results show that both boundary issues were associated with participants' perception of workspace suitability and general satisfaction with their workspace during remote working.

The average responses to the 5-point Likert scale question about physical workspace suitability had a high mean ($M = 4.12$) and a relative distribution of scale point responses ($SD = .82$). This variable is better examined in association with participants' general level of satisfaction with their workspace, due to the strong, positive, significant correlation ($r = .64, p < .001$) showing that higher levels of workspace suitability occurred alongside higher levels of workspace satisfaction. The variable measuring participants' overall workspace satisfaction was measured on a 10-point scale and had a high mean ($M = 8.03$) and a narrow distribution of scale point responses ($SD = 1.70$). Thus, most participants were very satisfied with their workspace. Additionally, both workspace suitability and satisfaction were shown to have correlations with participants' attitudes to remote work now. Workspace suitability had a moderate, positive correlation ($r = .39, p < .001$), whilst workspace satisfaction had a strong, positive, significant correlation ($r = .51, p < .001$) with attitude to remote work now. This indicated that both variables regarding participants' workspace were associated with employee attitude to remote working during lockdown.

Although levels of distraction, privacy and workspace satisfaction indicate that most participants were relatively content with their physical, professional surroundings, participants' stress levels showed a different picture. Participants' stress levels had a mean just above the scale midpoint ($M = 5.13$) and varied considerably ($SD = 2.33$). This wide distribution of stress levels indicates that the RWE was not wholly positive nor wholly negative. Acknowledging that distraction and privacy levels are not the only

contributing factors to stress, the stress levels that participants reported revealed the complexity of their experience remote working. There was a moderate, negative correlation ($r = -.35, p < .001$) between stress and overall job satisfaction, showing that an increase in participants' stress levels simultaneously transpired with a decrease in overall job satisfaction. This also reflects the mental strain experienced by participants as a result of WFH in COVID-19 times, and the level of how such strain corresponded with participants' job satisfaction.

Following on from stress levels and matching the finding of technostress being a detrimental yet inevitable outcome of participants' RWE, it was also important to explore whether or not participants felt enabled by the technological resources provided to them. The participants' perception of technological resource enablement results showed the mean above the scale midpoint ($M = 8.13$) and a fairly narrow range of responses ($SD = 1.52$). Thus, on average, participants reported positive feelings of ICT being enabling. As technology played a key role in the RWE during COVID-19, this positive finding is likely to have aided in the relief of technostress.

4.2.2 Relational components

This second set of components related to the impact of the transition into remote work on workplace relationships; this included the variables of communication and change management, collaboration and team trust. The concepts of communication, collaboration and trust are extremely difficult to quantify as they are abstract concepts with no explicit statistical gauge. However, the following three variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale which demonstrated note-worthy results that help to inform sub-RQ1b around organisational relationships.

Firstly, participants were asked about the communication they received from YouFirst regarding the organisational change and how they perceived the management of such change. Participants' responses for this communication and change management variable had a high mean above the scale midpoint ($M = 4.70$) and a narrow distribution ($SD = .63$). The average and consistent experience participants reported was of positivity toward YouFirst's change management, meaning employees felt quite satisfied with the way YouFirst handled the COVID-19 disruption. This communication variable also had a moderate, positive correlation ($r = .35, p < .001$) with workspace suitability, indicating that higher levels of communication occurred alongside a better

perception of workspace suitability; this is explained by participants being provided suitable workspace equipment to ensure such communication during the RWE.

Collaboration also had a high mean above the scale midpoint ($M = 4.08$) but a slightly wider range of responses in comparison to the communication variable ($SD = .80$). The results from Table 4 show that this variable had multiple correlations; firstly, with workspace suitability ($r = .44, p < .001$). This can again be drawn back to participants being provided suitable workspace equipment during lockdown, in which these were enabling enough for them to maintain interpersonal team-workability. Additionally, the collaboration variable also had a moderate, positive correlation with attitude to remote work now ($r = .47, p < .001$), which can be attributed to participants' need for interpersonal interactions and relationships in work settings, particularly after actually experiencing WFH conditions. Moreover, this adds to the collaboration variable's correlation with overall job satisfaction ($r = .30, p < .001$), which can support the academic finding that relying on co-workers can be professionally beneficial for both employee satisfaction and overall business operations. Simply put, this means that changes in levels of collaboration during remote working simultaneously occurred alongside positive changes in the three variables concerning participant's perception of workspace suitability, attitude to remote working now and overall job satisfaction.

Following this, the results from the team trust variable showed insight into participants' organisational relationships during COVID-19. On average, participants reported fairly high levels of team trust ($M = 3.82$) with a narrow distribution of responses ($SD = .52$) indicating a high level of consistency. Since participants' feelings about team trust during lockdown were neutral to slightly positive, it again shows that while participants' perception of team-workability may be important to note, it also must be acknowledged that the COVID-19 crisis could have spurred a heightened need for dependence on each other for support.

In addition to these results, there were positive correlations between the three variables of communication, collaboration, and team trust. Firstly, there was a moderate, positive correlation between communication and collaboration ($r = .40, p < .001$). There was also a moderate, positive correlation between collaboration and team trust ($r = .41, p < .001$). And finally, there was also a moderate, positive correlation ($r = .39, p < .001$) between communication and team trust. This shows that all three variables are highly interlinked and occur alongside each other.

These results are presented in a basic, raw form, but will be further explored and integrated with the qualitative results in the next chapter.

4.3 Chapter summary

Reviewing my analysis of the data, the results summate to provide a complex story of participants' RWE and how their organisational relationships were tested as a result of the COVID-19 global disruption. I started the chapter by first presenting a basic joint display (see Figure 1) illustrating a visual overview of my key findings and how they correspond with this study's RQs and sub-RQs.

I then depicted my qualitative results, in which codebook thematic analysis was employed to identify and explore themes. I distinguished two types of themes; the first type being contextual, overarching themes, which included the era of a global pandemic, and the organisation's existing familial culture. The second theme type, RWE themes, was directly influenced by the contextual themes and were more specific to the participants' ordeals themselves. These included removing in-person interactions and the toll of technology (pertaining to sub-RQ1a), and the element of humanity in trust and questioning where loyalties lie (pertaining to sub-RQ1b). Both the contextual and RWE themes outlined positive and negative experiences, but ultimately participants' responses reflected a story capturing the essence of people doing their best to adapt to a difficult situation.

In support of the qualitative themes, I then presented my quantitative findings, in which data from the Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions of the survey were analysed. These variables were organised under the two categories to again answer the sub-RQs as per the joint display. The results showed that, although the disruption caused by COVID-19 impacted participants' overall lifestyle and well-being immensely, overall, participants were able to adapt effectively to WFH.

In the final chapter, I integrate these qualitative and quantitative results and discuss its relevance with my literature review research. I then acknowledge the contributions and practical implications of my research, evaluate its strengths and limitations, and address and make suggestions for future studies.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this research was to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the experience of work. To reach this objective, this study posed the following overarching RQ:

RQ1: How has the global disruption of COVID-19 impacted employee work life and workplace connections?

This broad RQ was broken down into sub-questions to allow further exploration of moving away from a distinct, formal work environment to instead work remotely, and how this work location shift affected trust in organisational relationships. The two sub-RQs were:

Sub-RQ1a: How did employees' transition from a distinct, formal work environment to home-based remote working affect their work experience during COVID-19?

Sub-RQ1b: How did employees' experience of home-based remote work during COVID-19 impact organisational relationships?

The previous chapter explored in great detail the qualitative themes and quantitative factors related to each sub-RQ and thus, the overarching RQ. Therefore, the answers to these questions can be found in the way the two data types (qualitative themes and quantitative factors) are integrated and interpreted. This is depicted in the upcoming Figure 2 and explored further in the following *Integrating qualitative and quantitative results* section. However, I provide a summary here for better orientation and to introduce such integrated findings.

Regarding sub-RQ1a, the transition from a distinct, formal work environment to home-based working was an abrupt change that affected two main areas of the RWE: the enablement of workers and providing equipment to effectively adopt remote working practices, and communication. While both these areas would have been considered by organisations offering remote work even before COVID-19, the pandemic put these in a unique light. The RWE during COVID-19 not only emphasised the importance of proper investment into these areas, but also put this into perspective for organisations across every industry; therefore, it is pertinent to consider in the

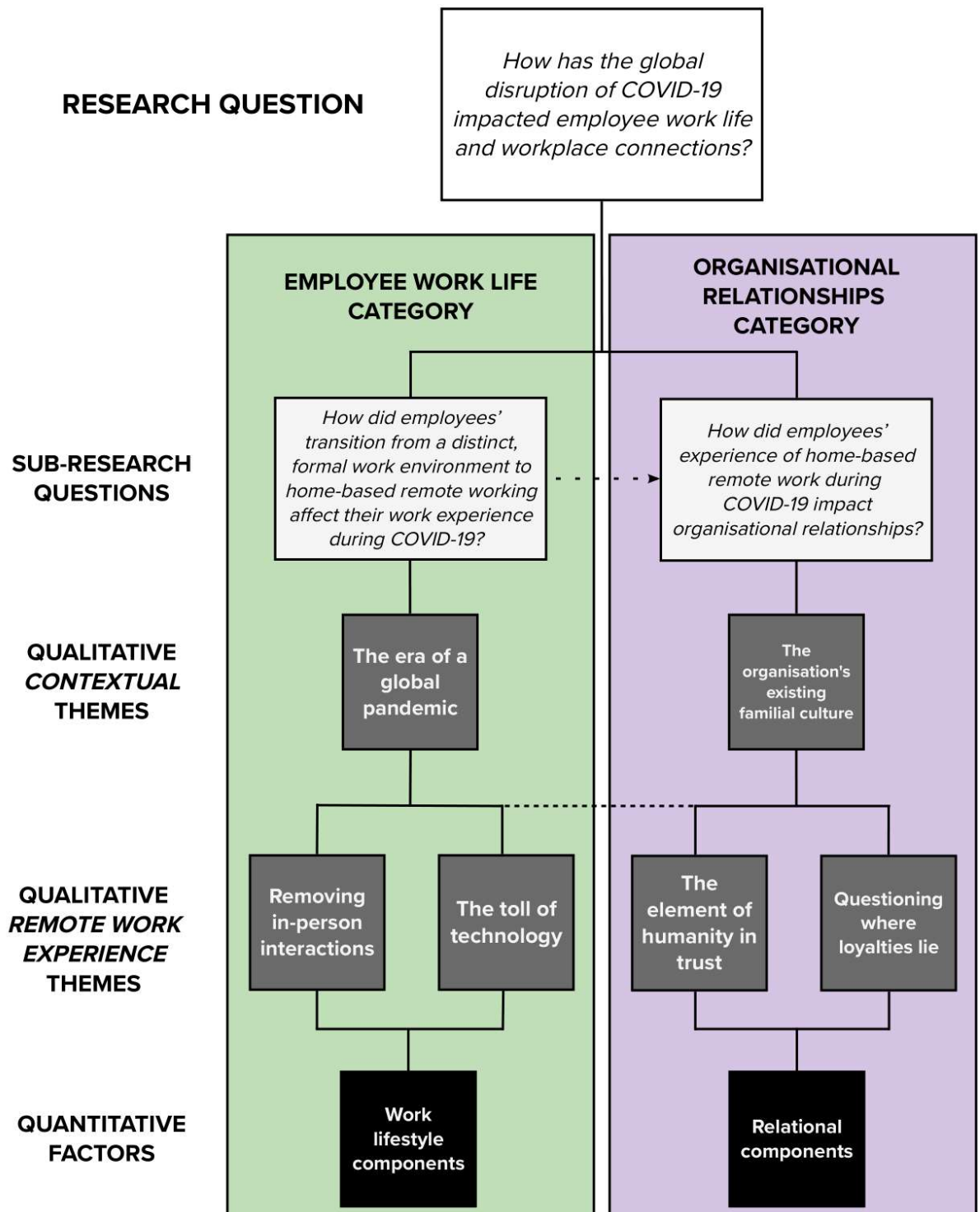
experience of work moving forward. The importance of these two integrated findings, enablement and equipment, and communication, was made clear firstly by the relevant qualitative themes of removing in-person interactions and the toll of technology. Participants' main concern regarding the deprivation of face-to-face human interaction during COVID-19 was made even more challenging by technology, namely technostress, which affected overall communication during the RWE. The quantitative factor pertaining to participants' work lifestyle reflected similar findings, with components related to participants' physical workspace playing an impactful role during the transition into the RWE, in both the areas of enablement and equipment, and communication.

In answering sub-RQ1b, observing the organisational relationships of participants during COVID-19 made it clear that employees valued collective synergy to aid in their ability to conduct work, particularly in a time of crisis. Collaboration and team-workability were in large part aided by the heightened level of empathetic understanding that was present during the pandemic, both from an individual level and from an organisational level. The need for collective synergy thus showed how the prioritisation of different employees' organisational relationships varied during the RWE which revealed levels of employee loyalty, with particular focus on the employee-organisation relationship. This simplified answer to sub-RQ1b was informed by the qualitative themes of the element of humanity in trust and questioning where loyalties lie. These themes showed participants' need for understanding during crisis and what the reality of such understanding and empathy looked like in various organisational relationships. Additionally, the quantitative factor exploring the relational components of communication and change management, collaboration and team trust, echoed the qualitative findings. Specifically, that while the RWE was not easy during COVID-19, its impact on organisational relationships was somewhat moderated by the evident increased empathy and understanding displayed by other employees.

Overall, the key findings relative to these are summed up in Figure 2 which is an expanded joint display emphasising the direction of thinking and how each finding fits within the context of the sub-RQs and the wider RQ.

Figure 2

Expanded joint display of MMR results within the context of the RQ and the sub-RQs



In the remainder of this chapter, I provide an expanded interpretation of the integrated qualitative and quantitative findings and analyse their contributions. I also present the practical implications of this study, before evaluating the study's strengths, limitations, and areas for future research.

5.1 Integrating qualitative and quantitative results

There are two key considerations in integrating two data types. Firstly, it is important to justify the integration of the two data types within such a comprehensive study; and secondly, to be mindful of Sanscartier's (2020) craft attitude during integration, which acknowledges the complexities of finding key threads and developing coherence of participants' perspectives. In saying this, I acknowledge that the qualitative and quantitative did not always match, as negative responses were often more saliently expressed than positive views. A plausible interpretation of this discrepancy is presented by Baumeister et al. (2001), who point out that bad is stronger than good across a broad range of psychological phenomena, inclusive of crisis events; as such, negative information and experiences are processed more thoroughly than positive. An apt reflection of this concept in the study is seen in participants' general inclination to describe the consequent, bad emotions related to the events of COVID-19 in more detail than the good that came from the experience (Baumeister et al., 2001; Brazzale et al., 2022). Similarly, Baumeister et al. (2001) found that interpersonal interactions involving conflict are seen as stronger and have bigger effects than friendly, harmonious ones, relating to the organisational relationships category of this study. However, the results of this study still showed contributory value toward academic research which will be presented later in the *Contributions* section.

To create a rational integrated analysis, I use the qualitative results as a base framework and employ the quantitative results to support and further inform my findings. My aim is to clearly explain and develop a coherent participant narrative to answer the RQ. Therefore, the two key categories in which results must be integrated are the employee work life and their organisational relationships during COVID-19 (as illustrated in Figure 2).

5.1.1 The remote work experience

Of the qualitative and quantitative results regarding the RWE, two main integrated findings emerged. The first integrated finding relates to the enablement and equipment provided to effectively adopt remote working practices, particularly under the time pressure presented by COVID-19. The second integrated finding relates to aspects of communication that affected the RWE and subsequently, interpersonal organisational relationships, which will be covered later in this section.

Enablement and equipment

This integrated finding regarding the RWE results relates to participants' enablement and equipment, and this can be broken into three aspects: participants' perceptions, workspace-related factors, and technological equipment. Firstly, the participants' perceptions were covered by the open-ended questions prompting responses about concerns or negative experiences, and what they most appreciated or enjoyed about remote work. Overall, these opinions were very much varied, with most participants going into more detail about their complaints than their positive recounts. This can be seen in the sheer volume of negative to positive responses; for example, grievances around overworking outnumbered the praises of remaining employed during lockdown. This was difficult to analyse as participants could have had more positive accounts of their RWE, and yet, they focused on the negative experiences. However, integrating this with the quantitative results, the average opinions of the related quantitative variables were at the upper end of the Likert scales. While there was a wide distribution of stress levels, participants indicated a positive perception of the RWE in the variables of overall job satisfaction, and attitude toward remote work both pre- and during lockdown. This shows that, while participants faced struggles of many kinds, the RWE was more positive than the qualitative results alone lead one to think. This discrepancy was accounted for earlier in this chapter, where Baumeister et al. (2001) revealed that people are psychologically inclined to emphasise their negative experiences. In this case, this somewhat misleading qualitative conclusion can be due to participants wanting to take full advantage of describing their specific complaints and concerns, and therefore feeling compelled to go into more detail about the RWE negatives as opposed to the positives.

In regard to workspace-related factors, this was partly covered by the contextual theme of the era of a global pandemic, in which many participants noted violations of their work-life boundaries. Many had found that their home life was distracting and affecting their work life, which was a detrimental consequence of the RWE specifically under lockdown circumstances. Workspace-related factors were also investigated in the quantitative variables of distraction, privacy, workspace satisfaction, and physical workspace suitability. Participants' survey ratings of their physical workspace showed that they were not only receptive to the RWE but had actually adapted well despite the abrupt change in work environment. This is seen in participants' low average distraction levels, high average privacy levels, and high average workspace satisfaction levels. I

interpret that the speed at which employees had to react may explain the complaints outlined in the qualitative results, as a lack of preparation may have provided an initial shock and therefore, affected responses. Some participants had even stipulated that if it were not for COVID-19 requiring everyone to remain under quarantine, and context-specific distractions such as kids at home as opposed to school were removed, they may have actually enjoyed the RWE. This fits with the finding regarding physical workspace suitability in that, on average, participants gave positive ratings to suitability, meaning their home working environment enabled them to conduct their work, regardless of the work-life boundaries becoming blurred. In saying this, it also should not dilute the adverse experiences of participants who did find that the lack of personal and professional dissociation violated and negatively blurred boundaries during lockdown. This was mainly because, without the distinction of work-life boundaries provided by work hours and separate physical workspaces, participants were inclined to overwork; completing tasks after hours and remaining professionally available via technology. This resulted in feelings of productivity guilt when participants felt like they had not done enough for the day, despite working overtime and dealing with work-life violations. Therefore, to apply Sanscartier's (2020) craft attitude in finding key threads and developing coherence from participants' perspectives, this can be interpreted in a way that acknowledges the adversities in the violation of work-life boundaries during the RWE but also generalises findings into the physical workspace being a suitable and enabling factor of the RWE in recognition of the more positive quantitative results.

The third and final area for the integrated results regarding the workspace environment focuses on equipment provided and utilised during the RWE, namely, technology. The majority of these responses were negative, while few touched on the appreciation of ICT support as a part of this. As seen in the qualitative results, the COVID-19-induced transition into remote working increased dependence on technology. This observation was not unique to YouFirst; organisations worldwide had to battle the evident question of whether technology was a blessing or a burden during the crisis. The qualitative results touched on the toll of technology, showing evidence of ICTs playing a major role in affecting participants' RWE; implications included causing technostress, submitting participants to significant screen exposure as part of daily work life, and adding interpersonal politics regarding technological handicaps which created an imbalance of remote work abilities. However, in the quantitative results, the variable related to technology explored whether participants found it enabling as part of the

RWE, in which the results showed a high average level. To integrate these, I interpret that the reasoning for the quantitative results is due to participants' feeling like the technology was enabling but yet would oftentimes not be using ICTs to their full capacity. Whilst the ICT resources provided were enabling in general, participants' technological knowledge and confidence might have been lacking in a time of great stress and change, as seen in the qualitative responses, and therefore was one of the causes of the technostress sub-theme. Additionally, these observations may have clashed because the majority of participants were less inclined to describe positive technological enablement and more likely to go into detail about negative experiences in the qualitative responses (Baumeister et al., 2001). Moreover, most complaints in the qualitative results were centred around the lack of adequate ICTs as opposed to actual enablement. Therefore, this integration showed evidence of a substantial negative technological impact on participants' RWE, which was attributed to the use of technology and not questioning the enablement of the provided ICTs.

Communication

The other integrated finding regarding the RWE results relates to communication, which also branches into three aspects: the lack of physical, interpersonal interaction, level of communication and intentionality, and the medium of technology. These aspects of communication applied to participants' personal and professional capacities. The qualitative themes of removing in-person interactions and the toll of technology indicated that the implications of WFH had a massive impact on participants' interaction with their workplace connections; this traces back to the overarching contextual theme of the era of a global pandemic. In participants' open-ended responses, many had expressed missing a distinct aspect of in-person communication that the RWE simply could not provide, even though participants were able to remain connected via technology. There was evidence of some relief from this with the intentionality of communication being apparent in light of the COVID-19 crisis; both in the professional sense of having more streamlined correspondence and in the personal sense that co-workers would check in on each other more often than before lockdown. However, particular to participants' work life during COVID-19, the complete removal of physical interaction meant that they suffered from consequences like excessive meetings and Zoom fatigue, which took a toll on their ability and effectiveness in conducting their tasks. Again, I interpret that the effect on employees' ability to conduct work was partly due to the technology utilised, where communication

enablement was appreciated but also had adverse effects as it still could not provide the level of interpersonal interaction participants craved. Furthermore, the quantitative results showed that the communication and change management variable had a positive, moderate correlation with the workspace suitability variable. I interpret this to mean that both variables had a role in determining participants' RWE, where those who were better equipped with a more suitable workspace may have been more receptive to communication.

Participants particularly missed interacting directly with their immediate colleagues. Thus, they missed the free flow of work-related information and discussion that happened in the office, and such spontaneous ability to check in with each other was beneficial in both professional and personal connections. While maintaining communication with workmates was important even before the global pandemic hit, participants quickly realised just how important informal communication and social connections were due to the restricting lifestyle of remote working during COVID-19. This importance being placed in informal communication was exposed in the responses identifying an inherent need to communicate or receive communication relationally in order to feel motivated in a time of crisis. There was an implicit notion that, if these communication needs were not met, participants' perception of the RWE lessened in effectivity and value to them, which also may have affected their productivity levels. Furthermore, as identified by the contextual theme of the organisation's existing familial culture, I interpret that the impact of such a deficiency in communication was felt by participants on a deeper level, affecting collegial relationships.

5.1.2 Organisational relationships

While more questions of the survey pertained to the RWE, the results regarding organisational relationships showed the potential to have valuable insights into the behaviour of both participants and YouFirst. Of the qualitative and quantitative results regarding YouFirst's organisational relationships, three main integrated findings emerged. The first integrated finding pertains to the determining factor of collective synergy. The second integrated finding relates to the required level of understanding needed in both professional and personal lives, particularly in a time of crisis. Finally, the third integrated finding concerns the presence and demonstration of loyalty in organisational relationships.

Collective synergy

When examining the data relating to organisational relationships, both the qualitative and quantitative results revealed the importance of collective synergy within the workplace. From the qualitative results, this is mostly seen in the theme of removing in-person interaction; while this was a communication-focused theme, it also exposed how much participants relied on collaboration and working with each other effectively in their everyday work life. It also revealed how having strong organisational relationships can affect employees and their ability to conduct work. Additionally, the contextual theme of YouFirst's existing familial culture added an extra layer of significance for participants, as they may have expected more team-workability from their co-workers relative to employees at other organisations. This interpretation is justified by some participants describing feeling betrayed in negative occurrences where trust in each other was lost or eroded over time. On the other hand, participants also illustrated how meaningful it was when their trust was reinforced or restored in situations where their co-workers followed through and proved themselves reliable and supportive.

To support the qualitative results, this is also where the quantitative variables of collaboration and team trust were illustrative of YouFirst's organisational relationships during COVID-19, and, in particular, the need for synergy. From an organisational perspective, having employees that work better and more effectively as a combined team as opposed to the sum of their individual output is a desirable workforce characteristic. In this case, the average levels of collaboration and team trust were high, which suggested that there were high levels of synergy amongst employees. Particularly as seen in the collaboration variable's moderate, positive correlations with communication, team trust and overall job satisfaction, it can be interpreted that participants place importance in collective synergy. Whether participants' increase in the need for synergy is an attribution towards the contextual theme of the era of a global pandemic is explored further in the following section.

Understanding during crisis

There were two perspectives to this integrated finding of understanding during crisis, the first being on an individual level. Looking at the qualitative results, the element of humanity in trust theme showed that participants displayed an increased need for empathy and the ability to empathise due to the disruption caused by the crisis.

Participants expressed having an amplified level of understanding and intention to keep in touch to strive toward unity. These shows of support came in the form of pursuing intentional communication with each other, catching up virtually in informal, social meetings, and finding shared experiences during the time of COVID-19. As mentioned, this stemmed from the crisis situation in which participants were able to find solace within each other, despite their general lifestyles having had such an overhaul in what was normal and what was not. The quantitative results support this, with participants reporting high team trust. These high average team trust results suggest that understanding of each other's situations was also high, regardless of the struggles brought on by COVID-19. This can also be attributed to the contextual theme of the existing familial culture, which was suggestive of an already present element of trust. This corroborated the shows of participants' level of care for each other during the crisis, which frequently outweighed work disputes or conflicts.

The second perspective of this integrated finding is seen in the results of the quantitative variable of communication: that of the organisation's perspective. According to the high average communication results, YouFirst's change management of the situation was well-received by participants during the transition into lockdown WFH circumstances. This supports the qualitative results, where participants commended YouFirst's handling of the situation and appreciated their thorough communication during such a difficult time. Moreover, participants showed particular appreciation for YouFirst's organisational commitment to prioritising their people during the global disruption; these results can be related to participants' loyalty to the organisation and the existing familial culture cultivated by YouFirst. So, I interpret that, from an organisational perspective, the importance of understanding during crisis was catered to in the prioritisation of their employees' well-being and the provision of clear communication in the transition and changes resulting from COVID-19. Moreover, YouFirst played a role in facilitating such communication between participants by setting meetings in which non-work, social conversations could take place to maintain and strengthen organisational relationships during lockdown.

Loyalty in organisational relationships

This integrated finding is rooted in the results of the qualitative theme of questioning where loyalties lie and supplemented by the quantitative results from the collaboration and team trust variables. Questioning where loyalties lie was a major

theme extracted from the data which had four sub-themes that represented the directions in which loyalty could have been exercised during the COVID-19 RWE. The responses in these qualitative results exposed how participants prioritised different organisational relationships: whether that be to their personal priorities, their team, their superiors or to YouFirst as an organisation. While participants' personal priorities were most notable in the qualitative results, this integrated finding focuses on that of employee-organisation relationships; in particular, the sub-theme of loyalty to team is emphasised to coincide with the contextual theme of the existing familial culture and quantitative results. The other related sub-themes of loyalty to superiors and loyalty to the organisation are still pertinent to answering the RQ and are factored into the consideration of organisational relationships as a whole. However, for this integrated finding, the main focus will be on participants' loyalty to their team.

The quantitative variables of collaboration and team trust again are factored into loyalty in organisational relationships. For the collaboration variable, participants were presented items regarding how they were able to work collaboratively with their teammates during COVID-19 and whether this collaboration improved their work productivity. For the team trust variable, participants were presented with items pertaining to the levels of trust existing in their team and with their supervisors. Integrating these with the qualitative results, the high average levels of the collaboration variable corroborated the qualitative findings around the sub-theme of loyalty to team and participants' dominant positive team perception. The collaboration results reflected this side of trust between team members, as many of the items in this scale pertained to working together professionally as opposed to the emotive perception of each other. This is shown again in the sub-theme of loyalty to team, where participants demonstrated that their fundamental trust in each other being based on their teammate's professional capabilities. Moreover, the high average levels of team trust were indicative of participants' placing importance on their team and co-workers. This also links back to the previous two integrated findings of collective synergy and understanding during crisis, as organisational relationships during COVID-19 were harder to maintain since they did not occur as naturally, and undergoing a global disruption presented additional challenges.

However, the results showed that YouFirst was able to handle the situation relatively well. Although the qualitative questions of the survey had given more opportunity for participants to illustrate details of their negative opinions, having the

supplementary quantitative results showed that participants' overall opinions on YouFirst's handling of COVID-19 were actually relatively positive (with some exceptions). For example, I attributed participants' varied stress levels to the sudden transition into a WFH lifestyle and the pressures that come with facing a global pandemic, as opposed to specific job-related stress. Additionally, another example is the team trust variable results only slightly leaning towards the positive side, aligning with my earlier analysis of the sub-theme of loyalty to team. I interpreted that, although there was more diversity in the negative qualitative responses, the responses exhibited that earnest trust trumped untrustworthy behaviour. Moreover, the areas where participants mentioned trust being enabled, restored, negatively affected or broken, were more likely to draw negative accounts than positive ones.

Summarising this section integrating the qualitative and quantitative results, I interpret that while the mentioned integrated findings show YouFirst handled the crisis effectively, there were also areas where they could have done better. This is informed by the following *Contributions* section that explores how such integrated findings align and compare with existing research around the RWE and organisational relationships.

5.2 Contributions

Following on from the integration of the qualitative and quantitative findings, and acknowledging Sanscartier's (2020) craft attitude of providing truthful accounts of the messiness of reality, these results can now be examined in line with the research concepts presented earlier in this thesis. In this section, I evaluate how the integrated results compare and relate to the concepts and existing research presented in the *Literature Review* chapter.

5.2.1 The concept of the COVID-19 crisis as a more specific class of organisational change

This study was rooted in the major contextual circumstances that came with COVID-19. In the *Literature Review* chapter, it was identified that while this global pandemic did classify as a significant organisational change, its characteristics of a grander scale of disruption, low probability of occurrence, and the likelihood of endangerment to an organisation's operations and continuity were better categorised as the more specific class of organisational change known as crises (Abo-Murrad et al., 2019; Knowles et al., 2019). Accordingly, such management of change is unlike the

usual, anticipated, or planned change often initiated by an organisation (Alas & Gao, 2012; Smith, 2011; Vargo & Seville, 2011). Instead, a balanced reactive and proactive management is needed to effectively respond to the rapid developments and decisions needing to be made during crises (Abo-Murad et al., 2019; Smith, 2011). To demonstrate crisis management decisions being made in context, the NZ government had mandated a nationwide lockdown, which forced YouFirst to transition into compulsory remote working to continue business operations (Henrickson, 2020). This enforcement had led to many rapid decisions needing to be made by YouFirst, which were often made without the usual two-way facet of communication they may have had with their employees first. Crises-related decisions cannot be made lightly, particularly because making poor decisions can result in an organisation suffering from a damaged reputation, significant financial loss and, in extreme cases, loss of life (Knowles et al., 2019). This puts a lot of pressure on decision-makers, who are usually senior employees, due to the organisation-wide implications and urgency of crisis management requiring prompt decisiveness (Alas & Gao, 2012; Vargo & Seville, 2011). However, it must also be acknowledged that not all decisions are in the control of an organisation's leadership, as decisions are also at the mercy of the crisis' context and circumstances.

As seen in this study's results, many aspects of the RWE were still under the control of YouFirst during COVID-19, such as what equipment was made available, the level of interpersonal communication via online work meetings, and set hours and tasks needing to be completed to maintain productivity levels. However, other aspects of the RWE were subject to the ever-changing COVID-19 developments; for example, nationwide Alert Level changes and restrictions on physical movement and interpersonal association (Henrickson, 2020). The challenge was not just that decision-making had to account for both what was in YouFirst's control and what was not, but also determine the level of communication maintained between employees and the organisation; this included how much input and say employees could have over decisions that affected the entire organisation. As in most crises, YouFirst's management decisions focused on threats to the organisation and prioritised survival over inclusivity in decision-making (Vargo & Seville, 2011). In practice, this was effective as seen in the qualitative responses that praised YouFirst's handling of the response to COVID-19; these were also reflected in the high average employee ratings of YouFirst's communication and change management. In some cases, this could also be an indication of the presence of employee loyalty due to participants' appreciation of

the organisation's evident display of prioritising people's health, safety and well-being, even during crisis.

Therefore, it is important to reflect on YouFirst's decision-making during the development of COVID-19, and it was pointed out in the *Literature Review* chapter and *Methods* chapter that such major change can be constructively understood using the notion of storytelling (Reissner, 2011). Storytelling is a notable means by which the parties involved in change can process what is happening and, if effective, can come to terms with the differences between their expectation and reality (Reissner, 2011). Interestingly, inviting participants to complete this survey was a means through which storytelling could take place. By asking broad, open-ended questions, participants were given the freedom to recount specific events regarding their RWE. This thus gave participants the opportunity to contribute to the holistic interpretation of the change (Diefenbach, 2007; Langer & Thorup, 2006), as well as give insight into the levels of consistency in such stories.

The integrated results showed that while variations were evident in the balance of positive and negative experiences, the overall consensus was surprisingly consistent. The relatively coherent participant narrative reiterated that the COVID-19 disruption was a difficult change to experience from a working perspective, and the implications of such disruption did damage to participants' ability to work and maintain professional interpersonal relationships. In saying this, positives from the experience were still present, and there was a general overall acceptance of the fact that everyone is human and understanding and empathy for each other was needed in the time of crisis. To relate this narrative to what literature stipulates about crisis management, it was found that crisis management efficacy was influenced by organisational culture (Gillespie et al., 2020; Elving, 2005), which is determined by the strength of employee relationships and loyalty (Al-Khrabsheh et al., 2022), and ultimately boils down to levels of trust and organisational support (Aristana et al., 2022). Therefore, these ideas will be applied to participants' generalised narrative compiled from the integrated results, and the contributions organised sequentially into the transition phase of the RWE and the RWE under lockdown.

5.2.2 YouFirst's crisis management, handling of the remote work experience and maintenance of organisational relationships

The transition into remote work

The first key issue that participants identified as a prevailing crisis management factor was the organisation's level of communication during the transition into the RWE. Whilst it is already established in academic literature that communication is important, particularly to achieve effective crisis management, both the qualitative and quantitative results from this study corroborated this notion. Smith (2011) found that specific facets of communication contributed towards its efficacy: honesty and transparency, accuracy and clarity, timeliness, two-way reciprocation, and multi-modal. During YouFirst's initial response to COVID-19 and related government restrictions, YouFirst did not have the luxury of employing all of these facets of communication (e.g., the absence of two-way reciprocation regarding the reactive response decision to transition into remote working). This had implications; for example, some participants had articulated a deeper mistrust in YouFirst leadership for expecting productivity levels that were unreasonable in their eyes and therefore, not having empathy and understanding for their employees' mental health and well-being during COVID-19. This may indicate that there was ineffective communication from the lack of clarity in expressing such concern or lack of timeliness in conveying such empathy; this mistrust is also explored later in *Settling into remote work under lockdown*. However, in many ways, YouFirst had met these facets in the wider scope of the COVID-19 RWE. This is seen in participants' overall gratitude towards YouFirst in the qualitative theme of loyalty to the organisation, which was not only attributed to the top-down communication during the RWE but also their facilitation of lateral, interpersonal communication within teams (e.g., the set-up of additional, more social Zoom meetings to maintain employee relationships). Regardless of how many facets of communication YouFirst employed, the overall conclusion is that participants were generally satisfied with the communication during COVID-19.

According to Edmonds (2011) and Elving (2005), effective communication with parties involved in change is important to prevent resistance and gain support. While crises are a more specific class of organisational change, and aspects of crises are not subject to the notion of resistance or support, the concepts still apply in the management and transition phase of such change. In this study, the arrival of COVID-19 in NZ and

related events, such as government-mandated lockdowns and remote working, were out of YouFirst's control. However, such events still gave YouFirst some room to make management decisions in response that achieved organisation continuity and abided by government mandates. This thus provided the research opportunity to observe the reactions of employees, and namely, whether they resisted or supported such decisions. It is important that the reactions to the decisions made should be informed by whether participants' response was in YouFirst's control, as the product of such a decision can aid in illustrating the efficacy of YouFirst's crisis management and handling of the RWE. For example, employee resistance to the occurrence of the government-mandated lockdown tells us nothing about YouFirst as an organisation; however, resistance to the way YouFirst leadership transitioned into the RWE may expose a crisis management flaw such as lack of employee support or miscommunication. Generally, what revealed participants' expressions of resistance or support of YouFirst's handling of crisis change management is the way they described aspects of their RWE, whether such description was in a positive or negative light and the strength of their response. This evaluation of participants' shows of support or resistance is critical in getting a better understanding of how YouFirst and its employees handled working under COVID-19 conditions.

In regard to the organisational relationships during the transition phase, the integrated results show that reciprocal support from YouFirst was key in gaining supportive responses from participants. The concept of organisational support was covered in the *Literature Review* chapter, in which organisations providing tangible and intangible resources, positive encouragement, and maintaining transparent communication aided in demonstrating genuine care for employees' intrinsic needs (Lee, 2021; Men et al., 2021). Supplementarily, in the context of the COVID-19 RWE, organisational support was more critical in areas such as technology, conflict resolution and social isolation (Charalampous et al., 2019; Gillespie et al., 2020; Molino et al., 2020; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). In application, as mentioned previously, the qualitative and quantitative findings on communication show that YouFirst's communication was generally satisfactory during the uncertainty of forced transition; this communication classifies as an intangible show of organisational support. A tangible show of support was YouFirst's provision of equipment and ICT help to enable those who did not have access either to the proper ICTs or to sufficient ICTs required to WFH.

From an organisation's point of view, providing employees proper with equipment decreases the productivity risks involved with remote working, which was a

common concern amongst employers even pre-COVID (Hunter, 2019; Isac et al., 2021; Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Soomar, 2020). On the other hand, earlier research identified that the added cost of providing such equipment was considered too much relative to the value of remote work by employers and managers (Lupton & Hayes, 2000). Since the sudden mandatory change of physical workspace limited YouFirst's control over the facilitation of employee productivity (e.g., providing office spaces to work), their decision to invest in their employees – allowing employees to take office ICTs home with them, providing equipment and, in some cases, financial support – proved to be a wise choice. While there were still participants who expressed complaints in regard to the quality of their WFH equipment, many had expressed that this had not negatively impacted their enablement in continuing work. Additionally, the complaints that participants had were mostly attributed to the lack of technological knowledge and feelings of not using ICTs to their fullest capacity as opposed to ICT provision itself. While under normal circumstances, this could have been solved by adding training workshops for employees in preparation for remote work, this understandably was not possible in the immediate aftermath of the sudden transition. As an added concern, the transition into remote working was organisation-wide, meaning the ICT support team was stretched very thin; if it were not for this, the ICT support team could have been more accessible to provide the help that many of the participants needed. If future organisations were to learn from YouFirst, keeping employees trained and up to date in technological knowledge could prove to be a useful tool in future crisis management in a case where an abrupt reliance on technology is applicable to the circumstances.

However, although providing employees with technology demonstrates organisational support, with this provision of technology comes the high possibility of technostress, a major implication of remote working particularly under COVID-19 conditions, which is discussed below.

Settling into remote work under lockdown

As the main medium of communication during remote work, technology comes with its own set of implications, and these were experienced in varying degrees by the participants of this study; the main downside to this being technostress, which is the collective experience of physical, social and cognitive stressors resulting from technology use (Nimrod, 2022; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Satpathy et al., 2021). Some

technostress creators include seemingly menial issues such as poor internet connectivity, poor processing speeds, frequent system upgrades, virtual meeting difficulties, and staff intranet and database access issues (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Spagnoli et al., 2020). In addition to these, participants also expressed other, more specific technostress creators to the COVID-19 RWE. These included significant screen time, an imbalance of technological capabilities, sedentary lifestyle habits, and even distrust in co-workers' participation in meetings and productivity levels.

However, as pointed out in the *Literature Review* chapter, there also exist technostress inhibitors, which include the ways in which an organisation can reduce or minimise technostress and relieve pressure off employees; this also aligns with the bigger umbrella concept of organisational support (Nimrod, 2022; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). According to literature, and as shown in the results, a common way an organisation can reduce technostress is through the provision of technical and ICT support (Nimrod, 2022; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). This was especially important not only because of the need for ICTs to support remote work during COVID-19 but also due to the fact that over a third of the participants in this study had never experienced WFH before (Nimrod, 2022; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). While participants expressed their gratitude towards YouFirst's ICT support team, the general feedback around technostress was mainly negative. This could be due to YouFirst's lack of effective technostress inhibition and organisational support, the ranging variation of participants' technological knowledge and confidence, or a general excess of anxiety.

The consequences of techno-stressors also spilt over into unhealthy working habits that majorly harmed participants' well-being and work lifestyle (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Suh & Lee, 2017; Tarafdar et al., 2007). Such consequences encouraged negative working habits like practising over-accessibility, presenteeism, excessive multitasking and privacy invasion (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Satpathy et al., 2021). Pre-COVID, these stressors would otherwise be minimal or non-existent, but the constant connectivity of technology and the nationwide quarantine raised expectations around employee availability (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Delfino & van der Kolk, 2021; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Satpathy et al., 2021; Suh & Lee, 2017; Tarafdar et al., 2007). For the participants of this study, this prompted salient workaholism, which had a detrimental impact on an individual level (Spagnoli et al., 2020).

Regarding workaholism, many participants admitted to experiencing guilt when they felt like they had not met their supervisors' work expectations. As a result of this productivity guilt, participants created an inherent compulsion to refrain from taking breaks and found difficulty in distinguishing work hours while WFH. Furthermore, results show that virtual meeting fatigue was a notable technostress creator during the COVID-19 RWE, indicating that technology was associated with over-accessibility, productivity guilt, and professional over-exertion due to the frequency and length of Zoom meetings, thus, further damaging employees' ability to fully engage in work (Hacker et al., 2020; Karl et al., 2022). On top of these techno-stressors, it must also be acknowledged that there was a great deal of contextual stress associated with dealing with a global pandemic as well, fuelling heightened anxiety and creating an added level of disruption to participants' work-life balance that was unlike any other crisis to date.

It is important to note that much of the literature around remote working was developed pre-COVID. In spite of this, even in this earlier period, the change of physical environment involved with remote work already showed having an impact on remote employees' work-life balance. However, the notion of WFH before COVID-19 offered other additional positives than negatives back then, in comparison to the damaging impacts found in the integrated results regarding participants' RWE during COVID-19. The beneficial outcomes of WFH pre-COVID included an appealing sense of autonomy, feelings of being privileged as one is entrusted with the rarity of remote working, more personal time, removal of commute time and stress, a quieter, more personalised work environment for greater productivity, and more time to fulfil family obligations (Hunter, 2019; Isac et al., 2021; Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018; Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012).

While WFH before COVID-19 was mostly perceived as a desirable work option for employees, the reason behind it not being a common opportunity was due to the preferences of employers, namely, supervisors (Hunter, 2019; Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). This is because those in authority were sceptical of the lack of monitoring, supervision, and proof of productivity of employees working offsite since they considered it more a risky disadvantage that was not needed as opposed to a potential flexible work option for direct reports (Hunter, 2019; Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Soomar, 2020). However, in the context of COVID-19, YouFirst, like most other NZ organisations, had no choice but to allow remote work for the sake of survival (Green et al., 2020; Molino et al., 2020). This meant that

organisations were forced to adapt to remote work, regardless of whether supervisors and their direct reports alike thought it was effective or what damage the implications of remote working under COVID-19 might inflict on workers. Ultimately, the COVID-19 RWE carried over mostly negative pre-COVID remote work trends. On the whole, participants' work-life balance was majorly, and sometimes adversely, affected; this was in most part attributed to the change in physical work environment.

Past research shows that the distinction of having separate, designated times and physical environments to distinguish different areas of life is a defining means for individuals to accommodate various life roles (Allen et al., 2020; Rigotti et al., 2020). In particular to remote working, there was less chance of maintaining such distinction and therefore, increased risk of one element of life spilling into another, such as family disruptions affecting work or vice-versa (Allen et al., 2020; Rigotti et al., 2020). In the context of this study, this was applicable and seen in the major disruption to participants' lives, in which they correspondingly experienced a considerable invasion of privacy, lack of work-life dissociation, and lack of boundary management (Allen et al., 2020). This thus made it more difficult for participants to maintain their different life roles in comparison to remote workers pre-COVID.

However, it must be acknowledged that the integrated results also showed that participants generally had a high level of satisfaction with their physical workspace, meaning the lack of work-life dissociation can be more attributed to the contextual isolation of COVID-19 lockdown. Additionally, there were still some positives of remote working that were carried over, such as the removal of commute stress being a notable factor in participants' qualitative responses, as well as high average results found in levels of workspace-related factors (e.g., distraction, privacy, satisfaction, and suitability). This is also corroborated by the quantitative findings which showed the minor positive shift found in participants' attitudes to remote work from pre-COVID to present-time feelings. While again, evidence of such a change only came from participants' comments in a single data collection during COVID-19, it does factor into the analyses of the RWE as it showed a shift in participants' attitudes. However, the fact that about two-thirds of participants had little to no previous experience remote working means their first-time experience could have been idealised, even under crisis conditions (Stats NZ, 2019). This is in reference to participants' WFH expectations being met and perhaps even exceeded in a time when organisations had little choice but to invest in remote working.

In addition to recognising the importance of the physical workspace, particularly in this context of mandatory nationwide lockdown, the lack of physical interaction impacted participants both in a professional context and a social context. According to the *Literature Review* chapter, remote working was found to reduce the quality and quantity of co-worker interaction even before COVID-19. (Golden et al., 2008; Kraut et al., 2002; Phillips, 2020). This had the potential to decrease professional confidence, effectiveness, work-specific knowledge and context, interpersonal communication skills, sense of connectedness, social support, and shared, interpretive spontaneity of being in a workplace context (Golden et al., 2008; Kraut et al., 2002; Phillips, 2020). Similarly, this was a major finding in the results of this study. Participants voiced having a particular desire to regain the organic, face-to-face conversations they had in workplace settings prior to lockdown and, in hindsight, had come to appreciate more during the RWE. This idea is echoed by Isac et al. (2021) stating that to be human is also to be a social entity, and an individual's work life is no exception.

These results from undergoing a full-scale transition into remote working for a long period of time made it clear that pure remote work cannot wholly fulfil employees' need for social satisfaction and the quality of connection required to build a strong, natural rapport and trust within teams (Isac et al., 2021; Phillips, 2020). However, in saying this, it also does not imply that maintaining workplace connections was hopeless or impossible during COVID-19. These results also showed that, on the whole, participants' organisational relationships were not only relatively maintained but, in some cases, strengthened after settling into the RWE. This was seen in the qualitative themes of loyalty to both the upward and lateral dynamics of the organisational relationships: to the organisation, superiors, team, and personal priorities.

The integrated interpretation of the results of this study revealed the importance participants placed in their interpersonal relationships, intentionality in communication, collaboration and team-working levels, and overall collective synergy. From an organisation's perspective, cultivating strong workplace relationships and interpersonal bonds are the keys to which a balanced reactive and proactive organisational culture can be fostered and maintained during crises (Abo-Murad et al., 2019; Pomare et al., 2019). Through the lens of literature, strong workplace connections are pivotal during crises in which the foundations of these relationships and the organisation's culture can be tested (Abo-Murad et al., 2019; Pomare et al., 2019). Elving (2005) identified that trust and loyalty were linked to the strength of relational bonds found in any strong organisational

culture. Relatedly, Aristana et al. (2022) found that these concepts of trust and loyalty were correlated, as high levels of trust form an inherent organisational commitment where employees willingly want to remain loyal to an organisation. Thus, the analysis of trust and loyalty were used to interpret an accurate narrative of how participants' organisational relationships were impacted during COVID-19.

In the context of trust during YouFirst's RWE, the pre-existing familial organisational culture played an interesting role for participants as they expressed having more extreme reactive emotions, whether that be positive in strengthening trust or negative in generating deeper mistrust. Research shows that individuals' perception of trustworthiness is influenced by time-based familiarity, shared experiences and goals, the degree of communication, and a demonstration of honourable behaviour from both parties (Dani et al., 2006). Participants had disclosed all of these aspects in great detail in their qualitative responses, with many identifying a need for reciprocal shows of trustworthiness to be able to build strong interpersonal bonds, and thus, strong organisational culture (Mishra & Morrissey, 2000). This applied to both the upward and lateral organisational relationships of this study.

For the lateral, employee-employee relationships, the qualitative sub-theme of basing trust on meeting professional expectations pre-COVID showed that participants had high professional expectations of their fellow team members. This indicated that their reliance on each other and their existing familial culture was the likely source of participants' extreme emotional reactions. When such expectations were either met or failed to be met, it resulted in either the strengthening or damaging of YouFirst's organisational culture. For the employee-organisation relationship, shows of organisational support strengthened the trust, and therefore, loyalty participants felt towards YouFirst. This is supported by literature showing evidence that organisations that offer thoughtful, intentional support during crises will augment trust in relational bonds, and nurture employee loyalty towards the organisation (Aristana et al., 2022; Lee, 2021). Results showed that what damaged employees' trust was YouFirst's failure to meet participants' expectations to be cared for by the organisation, which was particularly crucial in a time of great stress and anxiety. This meant that any redundancies, productivity monitoring, and lack of authenticity and intentionality participants experienced during COVID-19 had an especially detrimental effect on trust, and therefore, the organisational culture (Gillespie et al., 2020).

It must also be acknowledged that many of the participants' responses regarding both lateral (employee-employee) and upward (employee-organisation) relationships referred to behaviours that built up trust or mistrust. This means the relevance of actual COVID-19-induced events may have been affected by participants' pre-existing notions regarding any of these directional parties. To exemplify, the many behaviours outlined by participants regarding trust and mistrust could lead one to interpret that the strongly negative wording of some of the responses implied the presence of weak interpersonal bonds within YouFirst. However, aligning these findings with the positive quantitative results around the collaboration and team-working variables suggests that the general feedback around participants' organisational relationship with their team in a professional setting was mainly positive. This is where the element of humanity in trust plays an important, overarching role, as the COVID-19 circumstances incited a higher level of empathy, compassion and understanding towards other employees which allowed for a certain tolerance and grace towards these trust-related events and built-up behaviours.

Ultimately, this overall narrative draws back on the increased empathy, compassion and understanding demonstrated during COVID-19, and the finding of Gillespie et al. (2020), that accept that retaining trust during any change is not a perfect process; both leaders and direct reports are likely to make mistakes along the way. The more specific change context of crises amplifies the importance of trust, in a time when it is most required, and yet more easily lost; and despite the errors that may occur, research shows that it can be preserved and even enhanced during such disruption (Gillespie et al., 2020). Whilst COVID-19 caused significant global disruption in all aspects of life, participants exhibited a predominantly pragmatic reaction towards the RWE, that is, understanding that the situation was new to everyone. Additionally, YouFirst demonstrated an imperfect, yet promising handling of the situation, particularly with the management of its organisational relationship with employees during COVID-19. The ideas of Gillespie et al. (2020) mesh with both other literature and the integrated findings to sum up this narrative eloquently: to truly accept and manage the inevitable circumstances of crises, it is important to comprehend that behaving with integrity, authenticity, and humanity is what will truly maintain trust during such a challenging disruption.

5.3 Practical implications

This section will begin with the implications related to organisations in the current COVID-19 disruption, before exploring the implications on organisations undergoing similar global disruptions in the future. Drawing such practical implications is valuable because organisations will continue to need the ability to adapt to diverse crises in order to avoid wasting limited time and resources, resiliently prevent threats that endanger the organisation, and actively seek positive opportunities from crises (Vargo & Seville, 2011). In considering the following practical implications, I acknowledge that it is likely that several parties will be affected by crises; whether that be the COVID-19 pandemic or other future disruptions. While many groups experience the effects of such implications, the perspective I focus on in this section will be from the organisation. Although the study's data are at the employee level, the insights from the integrated findings can inform organisations on how they can better their crisis management strategies, based on the narrative recounted by the participants. This means that the findings are most relevant, and therefore, have the most potential to benefit the organisation. However, at the end of this section, I present a broad, overarching practical implication which is applicable to both organisations and employees alike.

5.3.1 Practical implications for current organisations experiencing the COVID-19 global disruption

This research explores the organisational impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic; however, this disruption to date is still ongoing. Currently, the crisis has developed at varying rates for each country worldwide; in NZ, major developments of the crisis include the handling of COVID-19 variants such as Delta and Omicron, the issue of numerous vaccines creating conflict in politics and society, inherent discrimination of the vaccinated from the unvaccinated, and people getting complacent and relaxed with mask-wearing protocols. As a result, these developments have people further questioning the safety of various work operations and organisations can only proceed with heightened caution and wariness over health and safety protocols. These added obstacles to organisation operation and survival make it difficult to maintain workplace relationships and strong culture. However, from this study, it is clear that employee trust and loyalty are critical in maintaining organisational relationships during crises (Abo-Murad et al., 2019; Elving, 2005; Pomare et al., 2019). Therefore, a major practical implication for organisations to consider whilst still battling the disruption of

COVID-19 would be to examine the strength of their organisational culture and the level of overall trust both in each other and in the organisation. By doing so, organisations gain a better understanding of their workforce and their current perceptions of how the effectiveness of their crisis management can affect the bonds employees have within their teams and with their organisation as a whole. An organisation can foster and strengthen these bonds by offering both tangible and intangible shows of support (Lee, 2021; Men et al., 2021). Moreover, it may be useful to pay attention to employees' reactions, of either support and appreciation, or resistance and negative storytelling, to see if their efforts are successful (Braben & Morris, 2020; Diefenbach, 2007; Edmonds, 2011; Lee, 2021; Men et al., 2021).

5.3.2 Practical implications for future organisations undergoing similar global disruption crises

This research also has relevance to a generic comprehension of organisational change and crisis management, meaning its findings may prove beneficial to future organisations undergoing similar circumstances. The applicability of this is justified by the fact that, while COVID-19 presented a unique situation, it still produced findings that have the potential to inform other types of global disruptions, crises, and general organisational change. These are the changes that have a major impact on both employees and employers, driven by an, often unavoidable, need to adapt to circumstances, and that are likely to affect work operations (Braben & Morris, 2020; Nelson, 2003; Pomare et al., 2019; Smith, 2011). As previously established, a crisis is defined as a radical, unpredictable disruption (Knowles et al., 2019), so any number of future disruptions may have similar organisational impacts to the COVID-19 case which, therefore, may be informative for organisations in the future. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in specific contextual circumstances such as government-mandated remote working and contact tracing, future organisations can learn from employees' experiences and the actions undertaken by YouFirst that proved beneficial during the crisis and improve on the actions that proved detrimental to the situation.

From an organisation's perspective, management can keep a more open mind to providing remote work as a seemingly desirable work option for effective crisis management in context. As shown by the experiences during COVID-19, remote working proved to be beneficial in many ways; not only in maintaining organisation continuity but also in offering a more flexible arrangement that suited employees' work

lifestyle and balance and strengthened participants' feelings of trustworthiness (Charalampous et al., 2019; Green et al., 2020). Moreover, YouFirst's commendable handling of the transition into COVID-19 could provide an ideal model for future organisations to adapt to their own circumstances. More specifically, the level and maintenance of communication during the transition and the provision of enabling equipment were two specific acts of organisational support that employees appreciated. While these must be acknowledged in light of the specific circumstances that future crises present, organisations that choose to copy YouFirst can simply adapt such practices accordingly.

Other implications can involve assessing how a nurturing, familial organisational culture can benefit an organisation in crisis; in the case of YouFirst, its culture inspired employee loyalty to the organisation and to other employees. While not perfect, there were clear signs of advantageous impact on YouFirst employees' teamwork ability and collaboration, such as intentional internal communication, and subsequent development of stronger organisational relationships. This encouraged an environment of support which YouFirst facilitated by offering many opportunities for employees to remain in contact, particularly in informal, social settings (e.g., "virtual coffees"). Offering and facilitating such spaces where employees can maintain workplace connections can be another practice that future organisations implement during their own crises; however, they should be wary of not meeting excessively to avoid the contrasting consequence of Zoom fatigue as explored in the *Literature Review* chapter.

Additionally, future organisations undergoing crisis can hopefully learn from how such circumstances can change on a large scale both rapidly and unexpectedly; meaning that an organisation's crisis management response may need revamping, thorough planning, and more suitable organisation to better equip themselves in times of crisis. While YouFirst did display exemplary behaviour in many aspects of supporting remote working under COVID-19 conditions, there were also downfalls in the areas of technology and trustworthy behaviour that could have been improved. Suggested improvements include more investment into ICT support teams and providing organisational support in conflict resolution or employee well-being programmes. As Vargo and Seville (2011) identify, the key facilitators to effective crisis management are leadership, culture, decision-making and situation awareness, all of which are encapsulated by the importance of planning and adapting. This means future

organisations need to frequently revisit and update their crisis management plans, giving particular attention to these factors to avoid the downfalls that YouFirst experienced.

5.3.3 The overarching practical implication of the study

The biggest takeaway from this study that can be applied in similar future crises is the factoring of the element of humanity in trust. Similar to the practical implications for organisations still experiencing the effects of COVID-19, the element of humanity is an important factor for both the organisation and its employees to consider in ensuring smoother handling of mass organisational change. Without considering this theme and implementing the enhanced understanding and empathy that comes alongside it, organisations are likely to struggle to maintain efficient operations, existing organisational relationships, and overall level of internal trust. Accounting for the element of humanity during any type of global disruption, COVID-19 or otherwise, goes a long way in avoiding testing employee loyalty to the organisation, where the consequences of not doing so may result in undesirable workforce behaviour (e.g., low motivation, low satisfaction, and high turnover among employees). This is applicable even in situations where organisations are simply trying to effectively implement a general organisational change. Demonstrating intentional empathy will better prime employees' reactions towards large-scale change to be more open-minded, express more forgiveness towards miscommunications, enhance understanding to foster a more supportive organisational culture, and allow organisations to identify problem areas needing improvement and action from management. The challenge for organisations is to find the line between episodic human error and actual continuous mistakes, and to treat each accordingly.

5.4 Strengths of this study

A strength of this study was the decision to use MMR, a pragmatic paradigm and a concurrent triangulation research design, as these choices were complementary to the nature of the study. Exploring the depth of individuals' experiences required comprehensiveness, open-mindedness and structure, and this study's research methods allowed the investigation and presentation of more diverse, varied views of a single phenomenon; more specifically, the exploration of employees' various perspectives of the way they and their organisation handled the global disruption of COVID-19 (Feilzer, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). If the research design selections did not

suit the nature of the study, a less informed narrative would have been interpreted from the data and participants' experiences would have been given a less accurate depiction if this study were conducted using solely qualitative data and analysis. This, therefore, could have impacted the quality of the contributions and practical implications of this study. For example, solely qualitative research would have put more focus on participants' negative experiences; solely quantitative would have depicted more of participants' broad positive experiences, on average. Thus, qualitative and quantitative research together via MMR provided both breadth and depth. Additionally, the selection to use pragmatism reflected the ideals of MMR by validating the fact that different, even conflicting ideas are all constructive processes in which one can comprehend reality (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2014). Therefore, the flexibility and open mindset required to effectively integrate qualitative and quantitative research in MMR were provided for in the selection to use a pragmatic research paradigm.

Another strength of this study was the timeliness of the topics and concepts it touches on. COVID-19 provided a unique research opportunity that was able to bring the already established concepts of organisational change and crisis management, remote working, organisational relationships, and trust into a different light; particularly in a time when the research was greatly needed. Moreover, the topic of remote working was specifically timely as it was gaining increasing attention just before COVID-19 hit. Additionally, at the time, YouFirst, much like many other NZ organisations, were not likely to have anticipated the COVID-19 crisis; therefore, the information from this study could not only give insight into the effectiveness of their existing crisis management strategy but also the specificity in context based their organisation could prove useful in amending their crisis management planning.

The timeliness of this research also relates to the final strength of this study being the usability for future reference; this is already mentioned in the *Practical implications for future organisations undergoing similar global disruption crises* subsection. Although COVID-19 posed very particular circumstances that have not been seen before (such as the non-essential working world collectively transitioning into remote working), learning from this crisis can inform future organisations going through similar events like another pandemic or natural disaster requiring a large-scale move to remote working.

5.5 Limitations of this study

One limitation of this research is that the complexity of MMR and integrating two research methods does question issues regarding paradigm mixing, appropriate analysis methods, the quality of integration of qualitative and quantitative data, and how to resolve discrepancies between findings (Creswell et al., 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). In recognition of Sanscartier's (2020) craft attitude acknowledging the complexities of developing coherence in MMR, I recognise that not all the qualitative and quantitative results coincided perfectly. Nonetheless, the data show enough analytical parallels between the qualitative themes and quantitative variables to provide useful theoretical and practical insights.

Another limitation is that the data were only gathered from one point in time. This means that the data provided a 'snapshot' of these participants' experiences as opposed to providing a reading of how the situation developed over time. Observing participants' experiences temporally would have been useful in revealing any changes in participants' feelings towards remote working and trust in their organisational relationships. This is especially valid as, for some issues, there will have been variation, acclimatisation and adjustment due to changes in restrictions. An example of this would be the quantitative variable of stress levels, which were likely to have varied over the duration of the global disruption. More particularly, stress would have differed during stages like the initial announcement of lockdown, the adjustment to remote working, and later when participants had settled into a routine lifestyle WFH. Differing stress levels would have then had cascading impacts on other quantitative variables such as overall job satisfaction during remote working.

Finally, with my qualitative analysis, several remote working themes revealed more complaints than praises, which may be misleading in the overall interpretation of the RWE. For example, there was great detail about how ICT issues, techno-stressors, significant amounts of screen time and technological handicaps were major problems that frequently arose in participants' responses, and yet there were considerably fewer accounts of the enablement of ICTs or appreciation for ICT support during the transition into WFH. This reflects the ideas of Baumeister et al. (2001) and Brazzale et al. (2022) who found that bad is stronger than good, particularly in crisis situations. This may be a study limitation because giving participants the freedom to share details of their RWE meant they were less likely to be inclined to describe positive experiences, and more

likely to go into detail about negative experiences. Another plausible interpretation of this discrepancy could be the existing general negative perception of the context in which this study is set in (COVID-19), and this negativity may have spilt over to the recounts of the experiences themselves. It is also likely that participants would have wanted their negative issues resolved, and may have seen this independent university-based research as a way to achieve this. Since positive recounts do not need resolution, there is less motivation for participants to report them and get responsive action. Again, a potential solution to this could have been to collect multiple, timestamped data sets. This would have better informed whether such concerns were short-term and fuelled by participants' fresh emotions, or if they were long-term, recurring experiences that could have been examined and potentially have added value to the research contributions.

5.6 Areas for future research

This study's results point to several potential areas for future research. Firstly, the RWE and organisational relationships are both incredibly complex concepts (Morrison, 2005; Schinoff et al., 2020). Focusing on one of these categories instead of both in one study could produce more specificity and detail in contributing results. For example, a study focusing purely on the RWE has a greater opportunity to delve deeper into the comparison of pre-COVID and post-COVID findings, on the assumption that such data would be available. Expanding on this, future research could also look at the effectiveness of offering the flexibility of remote work as an option. Similarly, a study focusing purely on organisational relationships has more room to examine each directional relationship (inclusive of employee-employee, employee-supervisor and employee-organisation relationships) and analyse what trust and loyalty actually look like in the face of general organisational change. In particular, future research could take into consideration the ways in which organisations can foster reciprocal trust and loyalty, and whether that goes beyond shows of organisational support.

Investigating either of these areas individually can be executed using more qualitative-intensive research methods. This is due to the narrower, more subjective nature of these potential study foci, and the added benefit of being able to conduct qualitative, open-ended interviews for exploratory freedom to delve deeper into participants' experiences (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Additionally, the overarching practical implication of this study pertained to the element of humanity in trust, and looking into this in more depth can

offer more insight into newer concepts revolving around what “humanity” may mean in more academic terms. For example, investigating whether such innate empathy is a healthy emotive expression or if such tolerance towards error can be detrimental in a professional setting. For similar reasons to the previous example, this also would be best researched using qualitative methods, as the exploratory nature may be more suitable for inductively generating new theoretical insights and developing a deep understanding of the potential phenomenon of “humanity” in work (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Venkatesh et al., 2013).

The type of organisation being studied is also an interesting matter that has the potential to better inform future organisations. The size, structure and workplace culture of an organisation are just a few aspects that may impact a study’s results, and taking these into account can prove to be more useful to future organisations who may look to this academic research to aid in navigating through crises. In this study, YouFirst had an existing, familial organisational culture, which may have produced different results from other types of organisations and their workplace cultures. If, for example, employees of a public multinational corporation were observed instead, they may express feeling little connection to their organisation. Therefore, trust and employee loyalty might look vastly different, especially in participants’ reactions to organisational change, let alone crisis management responses.

To illustrate using the variable of organisation size, a small organisation may not have the resources to support their employees as much as a larger organisation could during crises. However, as stipulated in the *Literature Review* chapter, organisational support was one of the factors that was shown to cultivate employee relationships and loyalty (Aristana et al., 2022), which therefore supported organisational culture (Al-Khrabsheh et al., 2022), and, overall, influenced crisis management efficacy (Gillespie et al., 2020; Elving, 2005). Having a different capacity for providing support might then produce different, more varied themes in the results regarding how a small organisation could maintain organisational relationships and manage the crisis with fewer resources. Therefore, future research may find a case study comparison useful in observing two or more different types of organisations that experienced remote working during COVID-19. This research could then inform a variety of organisation types so that future organisations can learn from the particular crisis management techniques employed during COVID-19. This would give the beneficial research opportunity to assess the different types of leadership used, ascertain what a balanced reactive and proactive

crisis management strategy looks like, or simply observe employees' support or resistance to evaluate the overall effectiveness of such handling.

And finally, crises are known to impact several parties in a professional setting; in different levels of aggregation (such as individual, group, department, organisation, and industry), and in different organisational roles (such as team members, supervisors and senior leaders). Acknowledging and investigating the viewpoint of each could shed some light on the role of power and control in remote working, and exerting authority within organisational relationships (Men et al., 2021; Mishra & Morrissey, 2000; Restubog & Bordia, 2006). This can be done by looking into different individuals' perspectives; either from specific levels of an organisational hierarchy (e.g., only supervisors to specialised teams) or from several, more equally aggregated groups within a workforce (e.g., participants from a range of organisational departments). Investigating a more diverse range of perspectives may also open up more opportunities to develop the findings around trust in organisational relationships, as the concept of micromanagement in this study also showed to be a potential strain for further exploration.

If, for example, data were collected from a group of team leaders, this may offer insight into both the effective and ineffective small-scale management practices during COVID-19. This can also reveal more context behind employee responses about micromanagement since even just the perception of micromanagement was found to majorly decrease employee morale, trust and productivity (Jeske, 2021). This also was found to spill over into impacting problem-solving abilities and efficiency when trying to make decisions under the pressure of scrutiny (Jeske, 2021). Therefore, a narrower participant group could offer more specificity and context in future research.

5.7 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruption around the world. For organisations and their employees alike, this meant that the experience of work underwent a drastic change from what it used to be. This thesis sought to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on employees' work life and workplace connections. To reach this research objective, I used MMR, giving priority to qualitative over quantitative data, and a pragmatic paradigm to investigate secondary data. I also used codebook thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative responses, and descriptive statistics and correlations to analyse the supporting quantitative data.

The results revealed fascinating qualitative themes and quantitative factors that gave insight into what participants experienced during COVID-19. These were organised under two categories of employee work life and organisational relationships in a basic joint display. For the qualitative research, two types of themes emerged from the coded responses: contextual themes and RWE themes. The two contextual themes played a bigger, overarching role in the grand scheme of circumstance: the era of a global pandemic and the organisation's existing familial culture. The four RWE themes were more specific to participant narratives: removing in-person interactions, the toll of technology, the element of humanity in trust, and questioning where loyalties lie. For the quantitative research, the analysis of the descriptive statistics and correlations was organised into two factors pertaining to the work lifestyle components and relational components. These results were summed up in an expanded joint display which illustrated how each finding fits within the context of the sub-RQs and the wider RQ.

The basic form of these results was then developed into integrated findings, recognising Sanscartier's (2020) craft attitude in integrating two data types in MMR, and acknowledging Baumeister et al.'s (2001) finding that bad is stronger than good across a broad range of psychological phenomena, including crisis events. With both these concepts in mind, the five integrated findings were around enablement and equipment, communication, collective synergy, understanding during crisis and loyalty in organisational relationships. These integrated findings, alongside the contributions of this research, were underpinned by concepts in academic literature regarding crisis management, organisational support, collaboration, organisational culture, and trust. The overall narrative of participants' work experience during COVID-19 reflected a story capturing the essence of people doing their best to adapt to a difficult situation. Although the disruption caused by COVID-19 and the need to WFH impacted participants' overall lifestyle and connections immensely, participants' thoughts on how YouFirst responded and adapted to the crisis were generally viewed as effective. This indicated that the findings from this study could prove useful in practice for organisations in the present-time crisis and organisations that might face other future crises, some of which might require a similar shift to WFH.

Practical implications for employers included evaluating the type and strength of organisational culture and level of overall trust, explicitly offering shows of organisational support, keeping a more open mind to providing remote working as a work option for employees, and giving more consideration to bolstering crisis

management responses. The study's overarching practical implication was that accounting for the element of humanity is crucial, as demonstrating evident, intentional empathy will better prepare and prime employees' reactions towards any large-scale change, crisis or otherwise. This goes deeper than organisations merely providing resources for employees; they need to be prepared to understand that their employees are people with feelings and relational needs, not just numbers on a salary sheet or productive units. This research contributes towards the unique opportunity to learn from the context-specific circumstances presented by COVID-19 and may prove useful in finding more productive ways to navigate and come through sustaining the distinctive aspects of work life and workplace connections during future crises.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Original AUTECH approval for the larger, longitudinal research project



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

17 September 2019

Rachel Morrison & Helena Cooper-Thomas
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Rachel and Helena

Re Ethics Application: **19/338 Moving to activity-based work: The move to activity based offices and flexible working at YouFirst**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 17 September 2022.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTECH in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTECH prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

AUTECH grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted. When the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all ethical, legal, and locality obligations or requirements for those jurisdictions.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connor'.

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Appendix B

Amended AUTECH approval to add the 'snapshot' survey and include postgraduate students as researchers



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
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16 April 2020

Rachel Morrison
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Rachel

Re: Ethics Application: **19/338 Moving to activity based work: The move to activity based offices and flexible working at YouFirst**

Thank you for your request for approval of amendments to your ethics application.

The addition of a brief 'snapshot' survey is approved.

I remind you of the **Standard Conditions of Approval**.

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTECH in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTECH prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

AUTECH grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted. When the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all ethical, legal, and locality obligations or requirements for those jurisdictions.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTECH Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Helena Cooper-Thomas; Roy Smollan

Appendix C

Study survey

YouFirst snapshot - FINAL

Start of Block: Block 1

Moving to Activity-Based Working Offices - Lock-down "snapshot" survey on remote working

YouFirst was in the process of adopting more flexible working arrangements to make better use of resources, and to match workspaces to ways of working, when the COVID-19 lockdown occurred, meaning everyone began working remotely.

This survey is designed to evaluate how these sudden changes are impacting how people work together and their perceptions of remote working.

The survey was developed by Associate Professor Rachel Morrison and Professor Helena Cooper-Thomas. Their research focuses on how the physical work environment impacts employee well-being and productivity. Dr Roy Smollan has recently joined the team; Roy researches both trust and change in organisations.

Participation is optional. The survey is longitudinal which means that your responses now will be linked to your responses in the 2019 survey (if you did it) and in future surveys. You can participate in this survey whether or not you responded to the previous one, and decide in the future whether or not you want to participate in the later surveys. All information that we gather will be kept confidential. We will analyse only the anonymised data, and our reports will also be based on the anonymised data.

The survey takes about 10 minutes and can be completed on any device, but the layout is best on a computer screen. We think it will take you less time to complete on a computer compared to a smartphone or tablet.

For more information please see the information below (or click the link to download an information sheet for your records).

Lock-down "snapshot" survey on remote working: An Invitation Our names are Rachel Morrison, Helena Cooper-Thomas, and Roy Smollan; we are academic researchers from Auckland University of Technology. We are interested in worker well-being and satisfaction in shifting to activity-based work. Because YouFirst is in the process of adopting this type of work we have been afforded the opportunity to examine these issues within your organisation. Participation in this study is voluntary. **What is the purpose of this research?** This research will contribute to understanding the ways that people work within activity-based workspaces as well as attitudes towards flexible work. In addition, we will evaluate changes in worker well-being, collaboration, and relationship quality over time, as YouFirst employees move to activity-based work. The findings of this research will be fed back to YouFirst and may be used for academic publications and presentations. All information will be anonymised. The anonymised data may also be used by postgraduate research students supervised by Rachel, Helena and/or Roy. **How was I identified, and why am I being invited to participate in this research?** To be included in this research, you need

to be an employee of YouFirst (including contractors and casual employees). **How do I agree to participate in this research?** Completing the online survey will be taken as consent to participate. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. **What will happen in this research? Are there discomforts and risks?** The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. You may complete the survey during work time. The survey alerts you if you miss a question on a particular page; however, if you do not wish to answer a question, you are free to miss the question and continue. If you wish, you may stop completing the survey at any time. **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?** The data collected will be available only to the research team of Rachel Morrison, Helena Cooper-Thomas, Roy Smollan and possibly their future postgraduate research students. All records will be stored in a password locked file at AUT University. Responses are anonymous, and respondents cannot be identified in any way. If fewer than five people identify as being from a particular work area, their responses will be combined with a functionally similar one, to avoid any possibility that individuals can be identified. **What are the benefits?** This research will contribute to better understanding of “best practice” in office design and the ways that people utilise activity-based workspaces. It will also help YouFirst to manage issues about working from home ("remote working"). A report on the findings will be provided to YouFirst and all employees, and there will also be academic outputs. **How will my privacy be protected?** As stated above, responses to the survey are anonymous; all information will be kept confidential. Data will be stored in a locked file at AUT or, for survey data, secure within the Qualtrics data collection site. YouFirst will not have access to this data. No one, other than the researchers and future postgraduate research students, will have access to the anonymous information provided by employees. You will be asked to provide a unique identifier at the end of the survey. This is only used to match your response from one survey to your responses in another; it will not be used to identify you. **What are the costs of participating in this research?** There are no direct costs to you associated with this research. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. If you have decided to participate, you can withdraw if you wish to do so without giving a reason. After the first data collection, there will be two data collection instances over the next few years. Your organisation has given permission for you to participate in the research during work time if you choose to do so. **What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?** You have three weeks to decide whether or not you wish to participate. **Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?** A report summarising the findings will be made available to employees of YouFirst. **What do I do if I have concerns about this research?** Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Rachel Morrison Rachel.Morrison@aut.ac.nz. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC, Carina Meares, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038. **Whom do I contact for further information about this research?** Please feel free to keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the members of the research team as follows: **Researcher Contact Details:** Rachel Morrison rachel.morrison@aut.ac.nz Helena Cooper-Thomas helena.cooper.thomas@aut.ac.nz Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 17 September 2019 AUTC Reference number 19/338

With thanks,

Rachel Morrison Helena Cooper Thomas Roy Smollan Auckland University of Technology (AUT) To begin the survey, please click >> below

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Flexibility/remote work

Q2.1 How frequently did you work remotely prior to the lock-down related to COVID-19

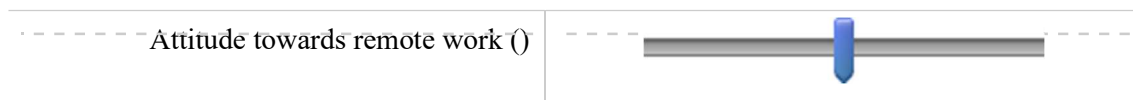
- ☐ Never (1)
- ☐ Less than once a week (2)
- ☐ 1-2 days a week (3)
- ☐ Most of the time (4)
- ☐ Almost always (5)
-

Q2.2

Thinking about your attitude **PRIOR to the lock-down**, how did you feel about remote work (working from home) in general?

Please answer on a scale of 0 (extremely negative) to 10 (extremely positive).

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

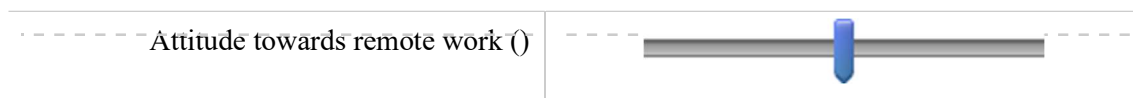


Q2.3

Now that you have been working remotely for a while, how do you feel about remote work (working from home), in general?

Please answer on a scale of 0 (extremely negative) to 10 (extremely positive).

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Start of Block: physical environment and open ended questions

Q3.1 Now that you are working remotely - select the option that best describes where you work

- ☐ a home-office (4)
 - ☐ the dining room (5)
 - ☐ your bedroom (6)
 - ☐ kitchen (7)
 - ☐ a spare bedroom (8)
 - ☐ lounge/living room (13)
 - ☐ other (briefly describe) (9) _____
-

Q3.2 Now that you are working remotely - select the option that best describes where you usually work

- ☐ a desk or table (1)
 - ☐ a counter or bench (2)
 - ☐ on your lap (3)
 - ☐ other (4) _____
-

Q3.3 How would you rate the distraction from others you have in the space in your home where you are currently remote working

Please answer on a scale from 0 (almost no distraction) to 10 (a great deal of distraction)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10


Level of distraction ()



Q3.4 How would you rate the **privacy** you have in the space in your home where you are currently remote working

Please answer on a scale from 0 (almost no privacy, it is a communal space in my home, used frequently by others) to 10 (a completely private space)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Level of privacy ()	
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Q3.5

Overall, how **satisfied** are you with your remote physical work environment (i.e., while working from home)?

Please answer on a scale of 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Level of satisfaction ()	
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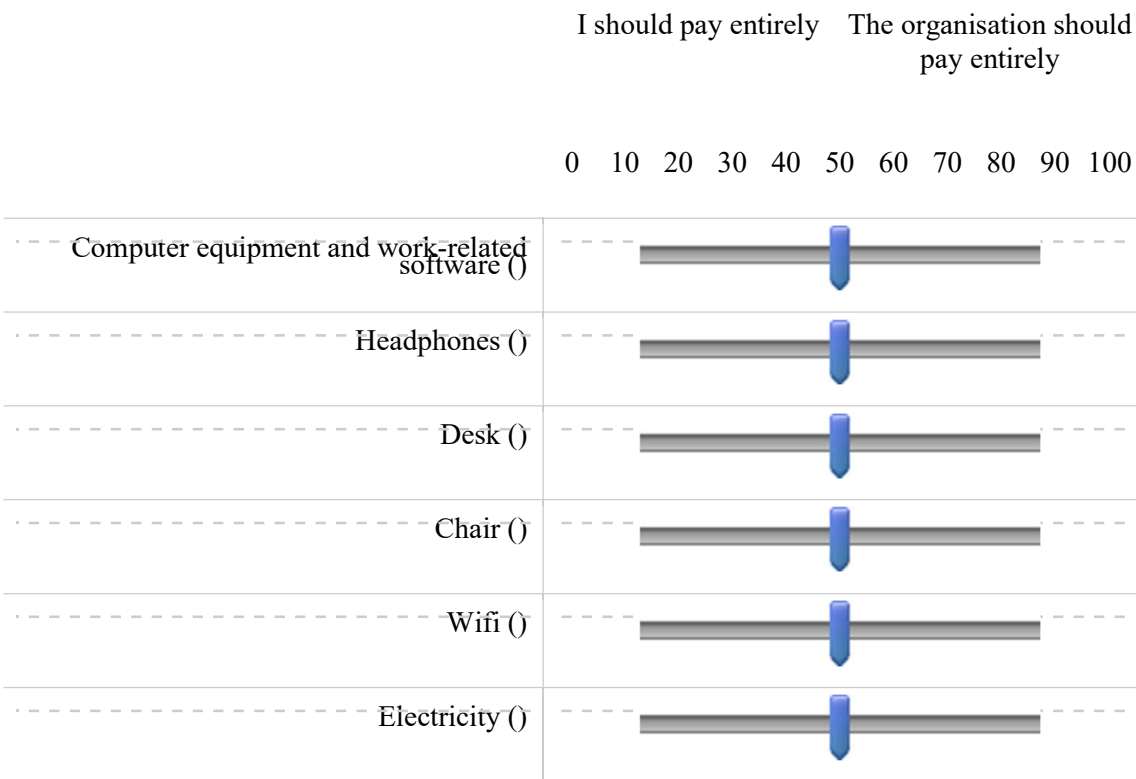
Q3.6 Thinking about the work-spaces you are working in at home, to what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements? Please select the response that best represents your view for each item.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I have access to the types of workspaces I need to work efficiently (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The equipment I use to do my job is well suited to the tasks that I do (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My physical workspaces are suited to the tasks that I do (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is a good fit between the workspaces I use and how I prefer to work (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The features that I look for in my physical workspace are provided very well at present (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The workspaces I use meet my needs very well (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3.7 Consider the things you need to work effectively from home and who should provide these. On the scales below, rate each in terms of who you believe should bear the cost.

If you think YouFirst should contribute towards the item, you can indicate this by selecting a point part way along the scale.

Please answer on a scale of 0% (I should pay for this entirely) to 100% (YouFirst should pay for this entirely).



Q3.8 Are there any other items (not listed above) that you think YouFirst should provide or contribute towards for remote working? If so, please list each item and the associated % contribution you think YouFirst should make for each.




Q3.9 Thinking about collaboration while working at home, to what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements? Please select the response that best represents your view for each item.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
While remote working, I am able to work with my co-workers to collectively solve problems (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
While remote working, people share their knowledge and ideas freely (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
While remote working, "virtual" meetings with YouFirst colleagues improve the quality of my work (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
While remote working, my co-workers and I assist each other in accomplishing tasks (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3.10 Thinking about the information communication systems and technology (ICT) YouFirst has provided during this period of lockdown (related to COVID-19), please rate the extent to which these enable you to do your work.

Please answer on a scale of 0 (poorly enabled - numerous ICT issues) to 10 (fully enabled - no ICT issues)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
How enabled I am ()											

Q3.11 Please write a few sentences to outline any **concerns or negative experiences** you may have regarding remote work (working from home)

Q3.12 Please write a few sentences to outline what you have most **appreciated or enjoyed** about remote work (working from home)

Q3.13

Do you have anything else you would like to add? E.g., about your experience since the lock-down, or regarding how you feel about resuming working onsite, and in shared spaces, again (if/when you do)?

End of Block: physical environment and open ended questions

Start of Block: Change management and communication

Q4.1 Where are you based?

- ☐ Auckland (24)
- ☐ Hamilton (25)
- ☐ Other (26) _____



Q4.2 Thinking about the way YouFirst has communicated information and managed the changes to remote work due to COVID-19, indicate to what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I am regularly informed about work-related changes that are occurring as a result of the lock-down (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have plenty of opportunities to question leaders at YouFirst about issues related to the lock-down (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clear explanations and justifications are given regarding changes related to the lock-down (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Change management and communication

Start of Block: Well-being / Trust



Q5.1 Think about the team you usually work in. To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

Please select the response that best represents your view for each item.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
In this team we work in a climate of cooperation (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this team we discuss and deal with issues or problems openly (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When making decisions, we take each other's opinions into consideration (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most people are open to advice and help from others (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My people leader trusts me to work without close supervision (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this team most people tend to keep each other's work under surveillance (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My work is constantly being evaluated (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this team people check whether others keep their promises (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In this team people monitor each other very closely (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My people leader keeps pretty close tabs on me (21)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this team people can rely on each other (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We have complete confidence in each other's ability to perform tasks (18)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this team people will keep their word (19)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In this team people look out for each other's interests honestly (20)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5.2 Working from home requires both trust and trustworthiness - in your team, between colleagues, and by your organisation.

We are interested in exploring this in YouFirst.

Teamwork can either be performed face-to-face or virtually. Teamwork implies that all team members pursue a common goal. Please think of a specific situation in which trust was an issue for you in your team, perhaps because you especially trusted or distrusted your team members at a certain point.

Please try to remember the precise behaviour of one or more team members, which directly influenced your trust or distrust in the team and describe the situation with sufficient detail that we understand why it influenced your trust or distrust, but please avoid any identifying details.

Q5.3 On a scale of 0 - 10, how would you rate the amount of stress you feel in your job at this current time?

Please answer on a scale from 0 (no stress) to 10 (extreme stress)

0 1 2 3 4 5 5 6 7 8 9 10

Amount of stress ()	
---------------------	--

Q5.4

Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied do you currently feel with your job as a whole?*Please answer on a scale from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied)*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Level of satisfaction ()	
--------------------------	--

End of Block: Well-being / Trust

Start of Block: Demographics

Q6.1 You have almost finished the survey...**Thank You** for participating.

Your responses are valuable for understanding your experience of the workplace at YouFirst.

In these last few questions we ask for some non-identifying demographic details so that we can describe our sample, for example the proportion of male, female, and gender diverse participants. Please remember that we will be grouping responses together, and won't be disclosing individual responses or details to maintain your confidentiality.

Q6.2 What is your age?

- ☐ Younger than 20 years (1)
 - ☐ 20-29 years (2)
 - ☐ 30-39 years (3)
 - ☐ 40-49 years (4)
 - ☐ 50-59 years (5)
 - ☐ 60 years + (6)
-

Q6.3 What is your gender?

- ☐ Male (1)
 - ☐ Female (2)
 - ☐ Non-binary (3)
-

Q6.4 Which of the following best describes your current employment situation?

- ☐ Permanent full-time employee (1)
 - ☐ Permanent part-time employee (2)
 - ☐ Employed full-time on a limited or fixed-term contract (3)
 - ☐ Employed part-time on a limited or fixed-term contract (4)
 - ☐ Casual employee (you work only when asked, with no guaranteed hours) (5)
-

Q6.5 How many years have you worked for YouFirst?

▼ less than 1 (1) ... 20 + (21)

Q6.6 How many years have you worked in your current role?

▼ Less than 1 (1) ... 20 + (21)

Q6.7 Which of the following best describes the physical environment that you **normally work in** (when not in COVID-19 lock-down)?

- ☐ I work in an open plan office space but have my own desk/ workspace/ work station (5)
- ☐ I work in an open-plan office without an assigned desk and sit in any available space (6)
- ☐ I work in an open plan office and select my workspace according to my tasks (Activity Based Working) (4)
- ☐ I work mainly at home (1)
- ☐ I work mainly on-the-road (7)

Q6.8 What is your role at YouFirst?

note: if fewer than five people identify as being from a particular work area, when we analyse and report the results we will combine their responses with those in a functionally similar work area to avoid any possibility that individuals can be identified

- ☐ Digital platforms (1)
- ☐ Finance, risk and analytics (2)
- ☐ Healthcare partnerships (3)
- ☐ Health Society leadership team (4)
- ☐ Marketing and customer experience (5)
- ☐ Member services – contact centre (6)
- ☐ Member services – other (7)
- ☐ People and strategy (8)
- ☐ Legal (9)
- ☐ Sales (10)



Q6.9 What is your ethnicity?

- ☐ European New Zealander (1)
 - ☐ Māori (5)
 - ☐ Pacifica (6)
 - ☐ Asian (4)
 - ☐ Indian (2)
 - ☐ Other (7) _____
-

Q6.10 Finally, in order to match your responses today with your responses in the future, please answer the last two questions. Please use the same responses you did last time (if you completed the survey previously).

Your responses here are only used to match your responses from one survey to your responses in another; they will not be used to identify you.

What is the name of the street you lived on as a child? (If more than one, select the earliest that you remember)

Q6.11 What was the name of your first pet? (If you have never had a pet, select a pet name you will remember)

End of Block: Demographics

Note. This Appendix C does not replicate the exact appearance of the survey given to participants, as such information was inputted into and presented using the third-party platform, Qualtrics.

Appendix D

Bar and pie graphs for quantitative results

Figure 1

Bar chart of respondents' level of overall job satisfaction

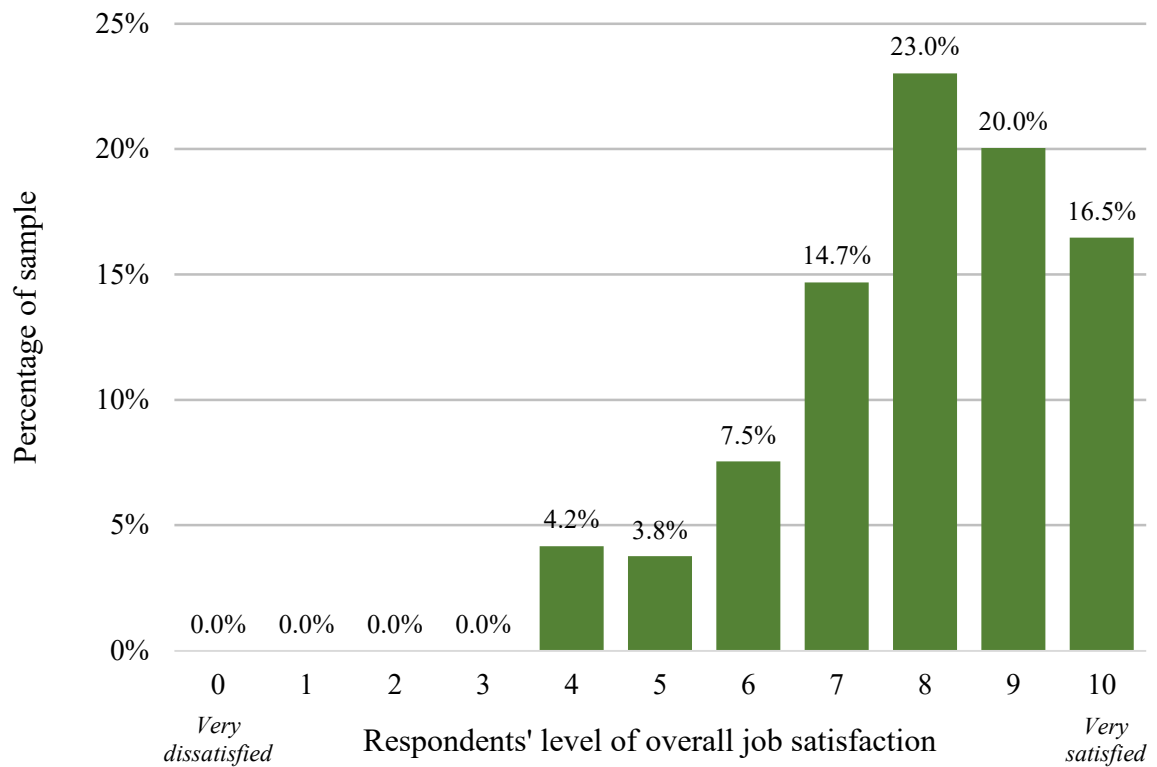


Figure 2

Pie chart of how frequently respondents worked remotely (prior to COVID-19)

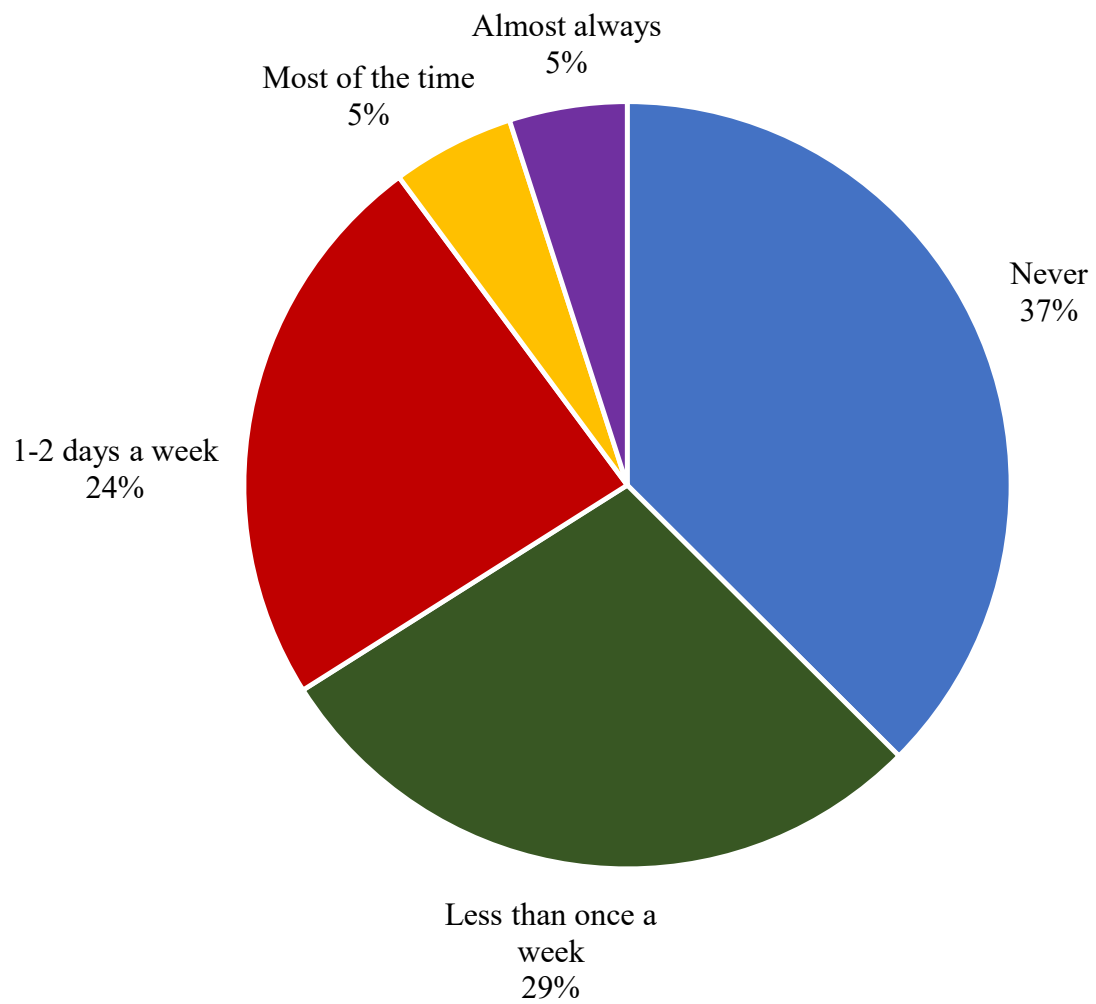


Figure 3

Bar chart of respondents' attitude to remote working

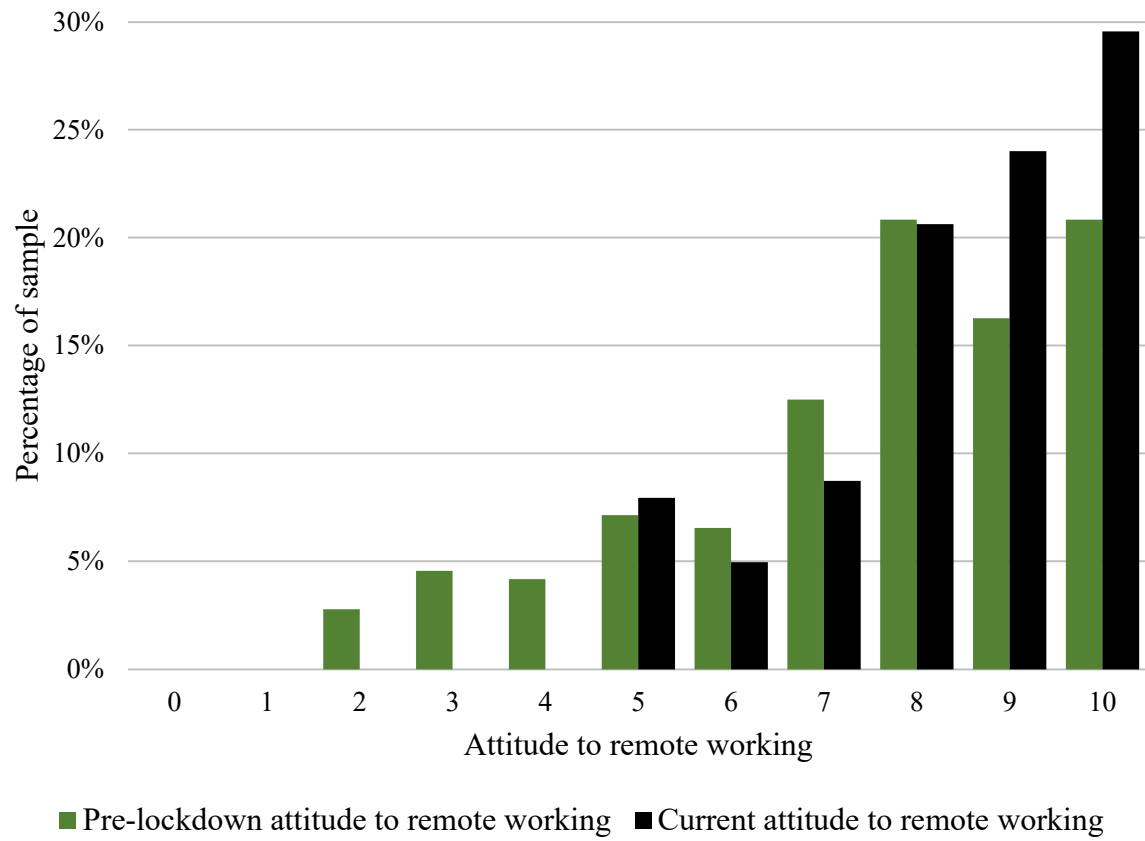


Figure 4

Pie chart of respondents' normal physical work environment (prior to COVID-19)

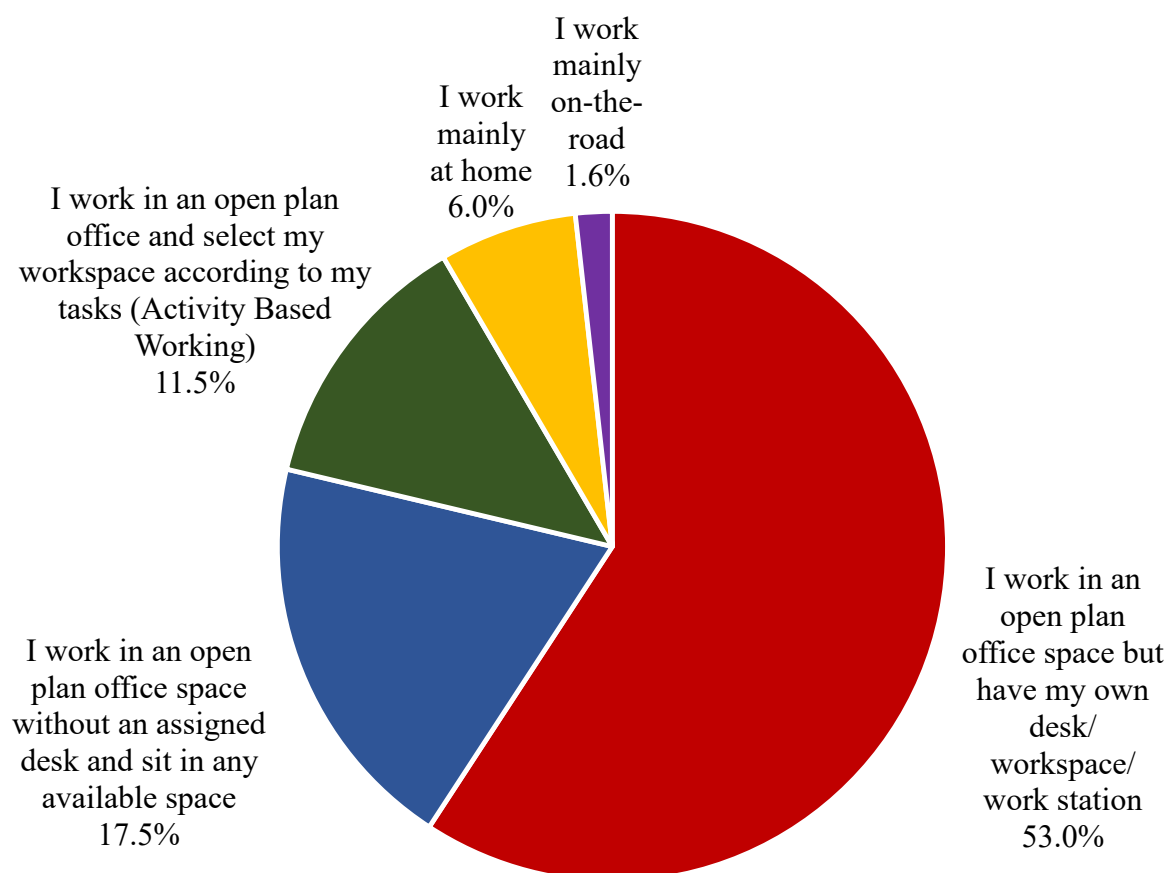


Figure 5

Bar chart of respondents' level of distraction during remote working

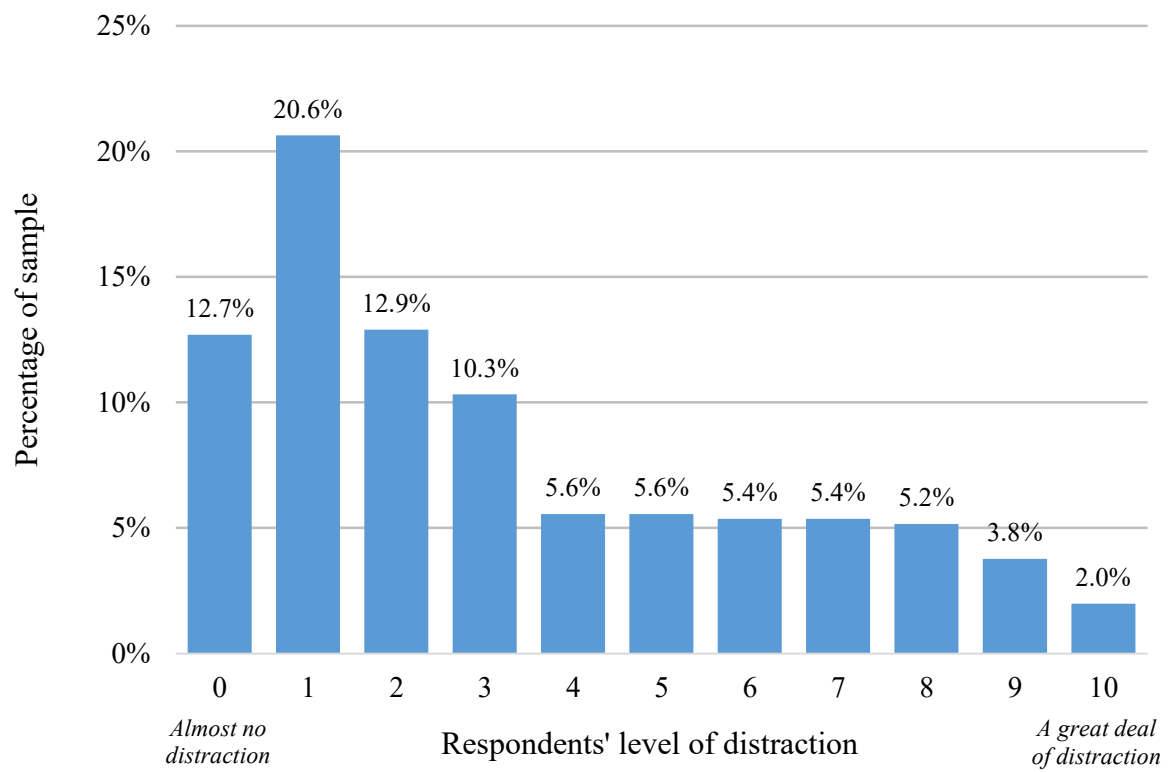


Figure 6

Bar chart of respondents' level of privacy during remote working

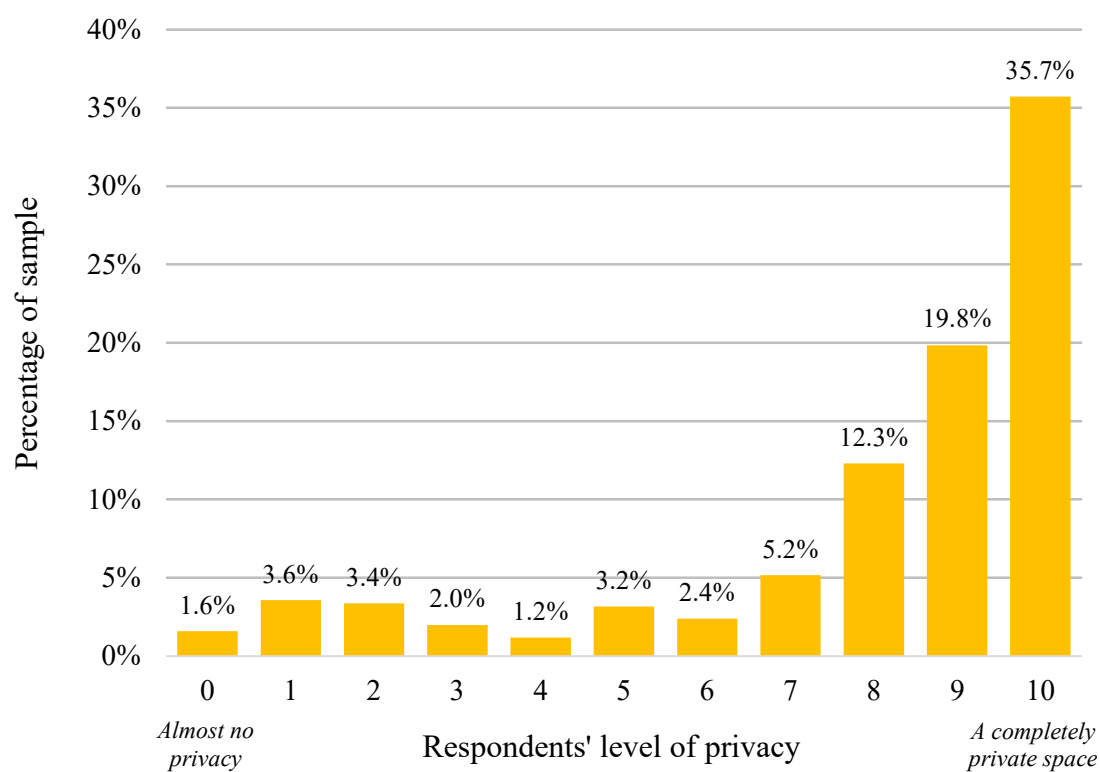


Figure 7

Bar chart of respondents' level of satisfaction with workspace during remote working

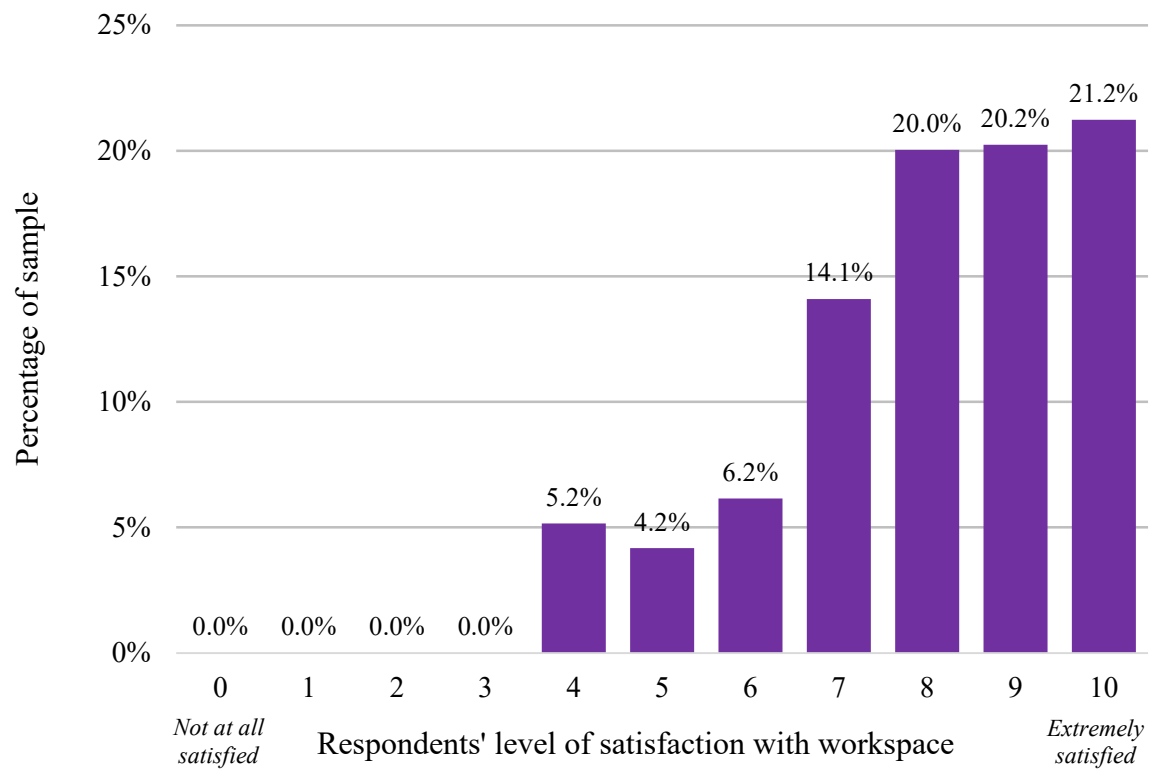


Figure 8

Bar chart of respondents' level of stress during remote working

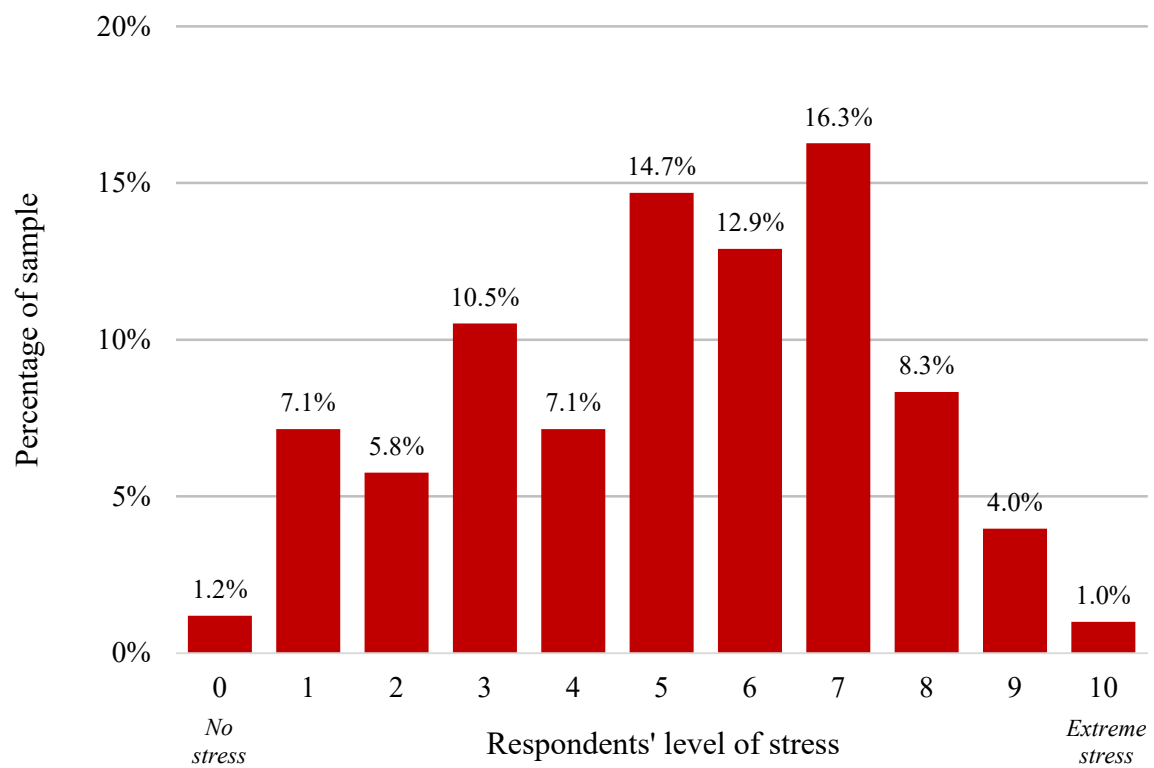


Figure 9

Bar chart of respondents' perception of technological resource enablement

