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Research Paper

Exploring the Effects of Forced Telework in Lebanon during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

Establishing a Framework to Enhance Teleworker Job Satisfaction and Work Motivation

Bachelor Thesis

Geneva Business School

Research Paper

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Geneva, Switzerland

Date: 29/11/1997

Word count: [8,900]

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Abstract

In times of crisis where the workforce is obliged to adopt teleworking arrangements, certain challenges may emerge that have repercussions on the mode of operation of organizations and their employees. This study explored the effects of forced work-from-home on the job satisfaction and work motivation of employees in Lebanon. The need for this study stems from a staggering lack of literature that covers teleworking in third-world countries in times of crisis, despite the associated repercussions on the well-being of employees and their organizations. A qualitative design was adopted, with grounded theory its guiding approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with 8 participants working in different fields, surveying their experiences and perceptions of telework by drawing on the theoretical framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Thematic content analysis was then applied to code and organize the data. The study found that teleworking in Lebanon during the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected employees' job satisfaction and work motivation by diminishing their need for safety and stability, raising their sense of professional isolation, and inhibiting their potential for growth. Managerial recommendations were made to tackle these pain points.

Keywords: [Telework, COVID-19, Lebanon, Job Satisfaction, Work Motivation]

1. Introduction

1.1.   Background

The COVID-19 pandemic threw the world into disarray in 2020. In a hyper-connected, international business environment where cross-border trade and human mobility are of substantial importance, disruptions on the scale of a pandemic immediately become palpable. The economic implications of the coronavirus are still contentious, but there is consensus on the overall negative impact on the global economy: Not only has air traffic been paralyzed and tourism activities diminished, but supply chains have also been disrupted, foreshadowing slow economic growth not just in 2020 but also in 2021 (Haddad, 2020). In addition to being sporadically forced into quarantine by order of their governments, individuals have also had to deal with a drastic transition into new work arrangements, mainly work-from-home. However, this abrupt adoption of new work arrangements is by no means smooth; for many, challenging issues may arise that create bottlenecks, inefficiencies and generally disruptive patterns that did not exist prior to the pandemic. For instance, some productivity benefits attained through workplace interactions are difficult to reproduce remotely (Neeley, 2020). More importantly, recent research has found that out of all jobs, approximately 40% may potentially be completed from home (Dingel & Neiman, 2020), leaving the remaining 60% to an uncertain fate if the need for remote work persists in the long-term. Still, the rapid transition to more flexible, work-from-home arrangements that has taken place in 2020 is unprecedented. This transition was facilitated by digital technologies that bridge the communication gap between work colleagues; while many of these technologies pre-date the coronavirus crisis, their documented utilization increased drastically since mandatory stay-at-home policies took effect all around the world. For instance, online conference applications like Zoom and Microsoft Teams witnessed a 500% increase in an interest and 70% rise in the number of active users respectively (Maalsen & Dowling, 2020).

1.2.   Rationale

While a bulk of studies exist on the productivity of employees working from home or via other flexible work arrangements, few have been conducted about teleworkers' welfare in times of crisis. Yet, in the aftermath of a major *force majeure* like the COVID-19 pandemic, employee well-being ought to be of major concern not just to employees themselves, but also the companies that employ them. In fact, one key aspect that differentiates work-from-home arrangements before and after the pandemic is duration of telework. Whereas before the crisis work-from-home was primarily adopted as an auxiliary method to supplement work at the office, many employees during the pandemic have been forced to spend a long time at home

working, with no ability to opt out. In effect, this has tethered employees to a new reality that they were not accustomed to, bringing to light unforeseen challenges to the global workforce:

> Given the pandemic's widespread disruption of the economy, the task-related and financial changes may not be surprising, but… an array of mental-health impacts are at least partly due to severed or altered workplace relationships that have become more important in an era where club membership, volunteer work, and other traditional means of social connectedness are on the decline. (Powell, 2020, para. 5).

One survey conducted by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that 56% of workers forced to rapidly adopt work-from-home arrangements reported an increase in their levels of anxiety. In addition, 45% reported increased loneliness and 35% a rise in depression (Powell, 2020). These alarming rates foreshadow a detrimental effect not only on teleworkers' ability to work with a clear head, but also on retention rates, making the status quo problematic for all stakeholders. Hence, there exists a clear need to focus on how rapid transitions to new work arrangements impact employee work motivation and satisfaction, and what can be done at the managerial level to deal with relevant issues to ensure a win-win situation for both companies and employees.

1.3.   Research Objectives and Guiding Questions

The main objective of this thesis is to determine how the rapid adoption of telework during the COVID-19 pandemic has affected teleworkers at the level of job satisfaction and work motivation. Based on the findings, pertinent recommendations are made to managers on how to remedy the situation and to prepare for future crises. Thus, the guiding questions for this thesis are as follows: How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect employee work motivation and satisfaction following the rapid transition to work-from-home? What measures can companies take to effectively respond to the crisis and to prepare for similar future developments?

1.4.   Thesis Map

Chapter 1 of this thesis provides a background on the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to the global business environment, highlighting the need to study the effect of rapid adoption of work-from-home arrangements on employees' wellbeing and by association their ability to work efficiently. It also presents the research objectives and guiding questions that the thesis seeks to answer. Chapter 2 reviews pertinent literature on the subject, beginning with a framing of job satisfaction and work motivation within Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Moreover, scholarly articles on the effect of telework on job satisfaction and work motivation are critically reviewed before the research gap is elaborated. The third chapter first conceptualizes job satisfaction and work motivation, then discusses the methods used to collect primary data, including the research philosophy and approach, sampling procedure, research instrument and data analysis. Subsequently, the fourth chapter discusses the findings within the context of the reviewed literature. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes the thesis,

summarizing the main findings, discussing their theoretical and practical implications, and suggesting avenues for future research endeavors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Telework

In "A Theory of Human Motivation," American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943) suggested that individuals make decisions based upon a hierarchy of psychological needs, which he expanded upon in his book *Motivation and Personality* in 1954. Maslow groups these needs into 5 categories which he organizes in the shape of a pyramid. At the bottom, physiological needs are the most basic needs required by humans to survive, including food, water, shelter, clothing, general wellbeing, and reproduction. Just above physiological needs are safety needs, which comprise matters such as health and financial security, emotional stability, and protection from harm. Moving further up the pyramid's hierarchy, the category of love and belonging needs pertains to human interaction, including bonds formed among individuals that satisfy needs such as emotional and physical intimacy. Fourth, esteem needs are characterized by Maslow as being ego-driven. They include elements such as self-esteem and self-respect, which are often satisfied through others' acknowledgement and validation, but also through an individual's own sense of achievement and independence. As for the top of the pyramid's hierarchy, it comprises self-actualization needs, identified as being a person's sense of fulfillment. Maslow contents that this category of needs involves more intellectual endeavors, such as receiving education, developing skills, and refining skills; these initiatives could then be used to achieve tangible goals like being promoted and winning awards which feed the sense of self-actualization. In addition, it sometimes involves more altruistic aspects such as caring for others.
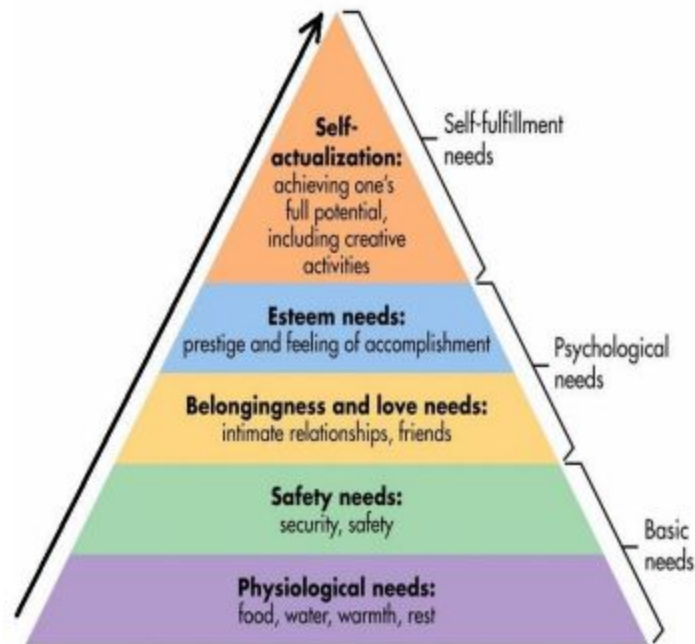
Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Building on Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene theory which is itself inspired by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Stewart, Nodoushani & Stumpf (2018) argue that while many employees may choose to adopt telework for this arrangement's propensity to fulfill the needs in the upper echelons of the needs pyramid, fundamentally, the foundational needs also need to be met to attain job satisfaction. These include an adequate salary and working conditions, as well as a properly managed physical work place, and healthy relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Also examining telework within Maslow's framework, Christine Rowland (2020) discusses how each of the needs categories correspond to different aspects of telework that serve to fulfill the respective needs. For one, physiological needs are met primarily by the salary of the teleworker, which is augmented by time and money savings on transportation. Moreover, the auxiliary safety needs that are generated by the work-from-home arrangement include not just the positive externalities of an employee's wage on his/her ability to pay for basics such as rent and food, but also heightened control over the workplace setting, as well as the employee's ability to be more protective of his/her family, being in closer proximity to them. Further up the Maslow's pyramid, the need for love and belonging is largely met in the context of telework via the teleworker's ability to interact with his/her family more often by virtue of the work's flexible spatial attribute. However, the need for belonging may be diminished for teleworkers who feel isolated from the workplace, particularly if they feel that telecommunication technology does not compensation for physical contact. As for esteem needs, Rowland asserts that these are often met through the flexible and autonomous nature of telework, as teleworkers are endowed with a strong sense of accomplishment, managing their time and duties with less scrutiny than in the traditional workplace setting. At the same time, teleworkers may also suffer at the level of self-esteem and self-actualization, given they

are endowed with fewer opportunities to interact formally but also informally with colleagues and supervisors: "It may be difficult for remote workers to experience formal manifestations and recognition of their accomplishment. In addition, the virtual nature of their jobs reduces sensory input that signifies goal achievement and personal development, which affect employees' esteem and self-actualization. This condition is especially notable among remote workers with menial jobs that have insignificant or absent recognition for achievements" (Rowland, 2020, para. 14). The following diagram summarizes the opportunities and challenges of telework as framed by Maslow's hierarchy:

Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy Applied to Telework

The conceptual framing of telework within the context of Maslow's work on human needs helps to better understand the primacy of job satisfaction and work motivation when dealing with novel work arrangements, especially in situations where such arrangements have been adopted drastically and completely (as opposed to partial telework). However, reviewing empirical findings on the effect of telework on job satisfaction and work motivation would elicit the practical implications and contribute to carving out a research gap that urgently needs to be filled.

2.2.   Telework and Job Satisfaction

Research on job satisfaction in relation to telecommuting arrangements reveals a generally positive relationship. Studying employees working for multinational manufacturing firms in the U.S., Caranto et al. (2020) found that participants expressed a firm preference for flexible work arrangements, asserting an overall higher level of job satisfaction. A similar study by Schall (2019) examined the perceptions of 185 employees working for multinational professional service firms in the U.S., but came up with more nuanced findings: The researcher found that mediating variables played an important role in the relationship between telework and job satisfaction, including the degree of autonomy perceived by employees, how their new work arrangement affected their ability to balance their work and family responsibilities, as well as how long they were expected to telework in relation to working at the office. Some studies (Golden & Veiga, 2015) sought to resolve inconsistent findings on this dimension that were published in the late 90s, where one stream of research (McCloskey & Igbaria, 1998) found a

favorable impact of telecommuting on job satisfaction regardless of other variables like "extent" of telework (time spent working from outside the office), and another stream (Cooper & Kurland, 2002) found that extended periods of telework were associated with dysfunctional outcomes prompting low satisfaction. Employing a hierarchal regression analysis on a sample of 320 employees, Golden and Veiga (2015) found that the relationship between telecommuting and job satisfaction was contingent on telecommuting duration; after a number of hours spent working remotely, the level of job satisfaction generally plateaued, but was also mediated by other variables such as task interdependence and job discretion: The more employees needed colleagues to get a task done, the less satisfied they were. Similarly, the less control they had over how to conduct their tasks, the lower their satisfaction.

Other studies found that interpersonal externalities of job satisfaction were also affected by telework. In particular, affective motivations to work remotely, as expressed by telecommuters themselves, included the pursuit of high work-life balance, especially in the context of lowering work-family conflict (Stephens & Szajna, 2015). However, even this dimension was affected by the *extent* of telecommuting, with Allen et al. (2015) finding that the more time spent working from home, the less positive impact this work arrangement had on work-life conflict. The scholars suggested that this could be due to an increase in stressors, such as the responsibility of taking care of more household chores and errands, as well as the absence of healthy boundaries between the family and work-related tasks. Generally, employees seeking out autonomy and having to work part-time at home were the most satisfied, whereas those with families who worked exclusively from home were more prone to being dissatisfied and stressed.

2.3.   Telework and Employee Motivation

Both ideationally and practically, job satisfaction and motivation overlap in many ways. Inherently, motivated employees are likelier to be satisfied on the job that their unmotivated counterparts. However, some distinctions exist that must be tackled not just for a more thorough review of the literature, but also to serve as a basis for the exploratory research strategy. In terms of motivation, Suomo and Pekkokla (2017) conducted multiple case studies in different work disciplines in Finland. They found that the main motivational inhibitors associated with telework were most prevalent in the early stages of setting up the telework environment, as employees attempt to adapt to the new environment. One of the biggest issues noted was stress emanating from the focus on work completion without the rigid temporal factor. In other words, many employees found it difficult to pace themselves and had to work long hours into the night to complete their tasks, increasing their risk of burnout. An examination of similar literature on work motivation in the context of telework reveals a strong focus on the presence or absence of psychological stressors that affect the degree of teleworkers' motivation. For one, employees' desire to *acquire,* as suggested by the model of

Nohria, Groysberg, and Lee (2008) may be stunted by their negative perceptions regarding opportunities for career advancement promotion. In companies with an elevated face-time culture (that values time spent at the office), telecommuters feel less motivated to adopt flexible working arrangements out of fear of low visibility; in contrast, in organizations where telework is valued and prevalent, motivation for telework is comparatively higher (Pedersen, 2020). Another prominent inhibitor to employee motivation was found to be the risk of social isolation. Collins, Hislop and Cartwright (2016) found that teleworkers were more likely feel a social disconnection from their colleagues, thereby impeding their motivation to bond. However, higher levels of motivations were found among employees who valued aspects of telework such as flexibility and autonomy (Caranto et al. 2020).

2.4.   Research Gap

While some literature has covered the effect of telework on employee satisfaction and motivation, little has been done to evaluate this effect under unique circumstances such as the rapid and obligatory adoption of work-from-home in the aftermath of a force majeure. One pertinent study by Carillo et al. (2020) did look at the effect of telework in France during the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring both crisis-specific and non-crisis specific factors to elicit any differences in their respective impact. They found prominent crisis-specific issues due to the disruptive and lengthy duration of telework, including workload increase, stress and professional isolation. The researchers then presented actionable recommendations for practice, including actions that may be taken in the immediate crisis context and to prepare for a similar event in the future. At the methodological level, studies tackling telework in times of crises such as during the COVID-19 pandemic are not heterogeneous: They mostly employ a positivist approach by conducting quantitative surveys to determine teleworkers' general experiences. For instance, Baert et al. (2020) surveyed teleworkers in the Netherlands about their experiences, expectations and hopes, widening the scope of data collected, whereas Raišien et al. (2020) study in Lithuania was conducted with an organizational focus in mind and did not delve into great detail about employees' perspectives. Thus, there is still a dearth in literature that covers employee-centric concerns and grievance. Moreover, much of the studies on the disruptive effects of the coronavirus pandemic on organizational outcomes and employees' performance/well-being have been conducted in the Western realm, which is problematic on multiple fronts. First, more attention ought to be awarded to employees' job wellbeing in third-world countries, as these countries are inherently more vulnerable than their first-world counterparts due to being generally less developed in so far as technological infrastructure, but also less prepared to handle crises of this kind when it comes to social welfare programs and overall public preparedness. Second, some the most recent scholarly work on telework in Europe has determined that the West is endowed with cultural attributes that act as facilitators to the adoption of work-from-home arrangements, including low power distance, high individualism and high femininity (Ollo-Lopez, Goni-Legaz & Erro-Garces, 2020). In contrast, many third-world countries rank low on power distance, but also low on individualism (high on collectivism) and low on femininity (high on masculinity). This could further exacerbate the ability of employees in these countries to adapt to telework, by

extension lowering their job satisfaction and work motivation. Thus, there exists a clear research gap in this area which is imperative to fill such that a framework may be established to deal with the associated negative repercussions of disruptive crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, simultaneously preparing a preemptive response in case another crisis emerges in the future.

3. Methodology

3.1. Conceptualization of Job Satisfaction and Motivation

3.1.1. Job Satisfaction

The variable of job satisfaction is regularly studied in organizational research due to companies' intent on reducing the risk of employee turnover and rewarding their most proficient workers. However, whereas job satisfaction is often assessed from an organizational perspective, vocational psychology perceives it from the employees' lens. As such, it is conceptualized as being the general feeling or attitude that an employee has vis-à-vis his/her

job. Underlying this attitude are evaluative beliefs that define what which parts of their jobs workers value highly or poorly (Savickas & Savickas, 2017). Typically, vocational psychologists examine three facets to job satisfaction. The first involves position performance and organizational adaptation, which comprise variables like satisfaction with job duties and satisfaction with the organization. The latter refers to work load, routine and empowerment, whereas the former denotes satisfaction with company policy, financial compensation and other benefits. As for the second facet, it relates to satisfaction with work colleagues, including interpersonal communication with coworkers and supervisors, as well as employees' work ethic and conscientiousness. Lastly, the third facet involves satisfaction with career advancement prospects. This kind of satisfaction may be felt by employees even in the absence of high levels of job satisfaction, particularly when employees perceive their current job as being a necessary temporary endeavor on the way up the professional ladder (Savickas & Savickas, 2017). In a similar vein, Rothausen and Henderson (2018) conceptualize job satisfaction within a humanistic frame, arguing that this type of satisfaction is strongly linked with the jobs' fulfillment of human needs, such as dignity, financial stability and the desire to be involved in meaningful work. In addition, the scholars consider another dimension of job satisfaction that involves employees' lives outside of the confines of the job-related environment. This includes overall health, leisure, family and community. Roathasen and Henderson classify job facets of meaning relating to job satisfaction into two categories: "Individual self and identity" and "Community, life, and relationship interdependencies". The first category comprises elements such as workers' ability of self-expression through while conducting their jobs and their satisfaction with their self-development through the work that they engage in, such as growing professionally, learning skills, etc. The second category relates more to satisfaction with the way workers' jobs endow them with an adequate standard of living both for themselves and their loved one, as well as their satisfaction with the way in which their jobs affects their interpersonal relationships, including mostly family and friendship ties.

3.1.2. Work Motivation

While there are various schools of thought that cover the notion of motivation, there is substantial consensus on the manifestations of work of motivation through two broad channels: Intrinsic and extrinsic (Jiming & Xinjian, 2013). For employees, intrinsic motivation derives from work's intrinsic value, whereas extrinsic motivation arises from the desire to reach tangible, external outcomes such as financial rewards or a promotion to a higher post (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). In essence, what underlies intrinsic motivation is the expectation of pleasure that is obtained through internal satisfaction with the nature of the job and the positive effect it could have on attributes such as self-fulfillment. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is activated in anticipation of positive outcomes derived from the external environment (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). Generally, it is agreed that workers need both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to be satisfied and perform to the best of their abilities (Kamal et al., 2006).

Nohria, Groysberg, and Lee (2008) propose a model that conceptualizes motivation as being underpinned by four main drives: The drive to acquire, the drive to bond, the drive to comprehend and the drive to defend. First, the drive to acquire denotes individuals' desire to

attain scarce assets that promote their sense of well-being. These assets are not limited to physical items such as food, clothes, or money; rather, they also include more experiential elements such as entertainment, travel, and events that ameliorate social status, like getting promoted at work. This desire is also relative, seeing as individuals often compare their own acquisitions to those of others. Second, the drive to bond represents individuals' desire to relate to others, to experience potent positive emotions such as being cared for and loving others. At the workplace, this can translate to feelings of pride and belonging as part of a well-functioning, compassionate group of coworkers. Third, the drive to comprehend entails the desire for sense-making:

> We want very much to make sense of the world around us, to produce theories and accounts… that make events comprehensible and suggest reasonable actions and responses. We are frustrated when things seem senseless, and we are invigorated by the challenge of working out answers. In the workplace, the drive to comprehend accounts for the desire to make a meaningful contribution. Employees are motivated by jobs that challenge them and enable them to grow and learn, and they are demoralized by those that seem to be monotonous or to lead to a dead end. (Nohria, Groysberg, & Lee, 2008, para. 12).

Finally, the drive to defend refers to individuals' desire to protect and defend themselves and others from external threats. It not only manifests itself as an aggressive reaction to adverse actions but rather often in the form of initiatives undertaken to promote social justice, for instance. Fulfilling this desire results in feelings of confidence and security, whereas not fulfilling generates feelings like resentment and fear.

3.2.   Research Philosophy and Design

The objective of this thesis is to determine how the rapid adoption of telecommuting arrangements during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic affects employees' job satisfaction and work motivation. While some researchers have attempted to measure these variables via a quantitative approach, such an approach does not accurately capture the subtleties of human emotion and behavior. In particular, while using quantitative surveys to collect data (often self-rated responses) from teleworkers would potentially yield a plethora of responses, the data itself may not be highly reliable or representative of the sample considered. Rather, gauging job satisfaction and work motivation is a highly subjective endeavor, seeing as teleworkers' perceptions and experiences of working from home during a time of crisis is likely replete with emotion and complex behavior. Hence, interpretivism constitutes the most adequate research philosophy for this thesis. In fact, the interpretivist approach endows the researcher with the means to explore the meanings underlying human behavior, interactions and society. More specifically, this approach guides the researcher toward the adoption of an empathic lens through which participants' feelings as well as the meaning that they ascribe to their daily activities may be understood in a way to better analyze their behavior (Pulla & Carter, 2018).

In line with the interpretivist philosophy, the grounded theory approach was employed, owing to its underlying inductive, comparative methodology that is useful for data collection,

synthesis, analysis, as well as the conceptualization of qualitative data with the aim of theory construction (Charmaz, 2001). More specifically, constructivist grounded theory was adopted, focusing more on the studied phenomenon of telework during the COVID-19 pandemic than on the methods of its study; the strategies employed are considered as tools rather than prescriptions, and the researcher's role is put in the forefront in so far as the interpretation of the data is concerned (Charmaz, 2001). The justification for the use of constructivist grounded theory is straightforward: The field of study is not only poorly researched but also novel, in the sense that at no time in the past have employees globally been obliged to work from their home environment for a substantial duration of time. In this case, grounded theory makes for a suitable approach that is both structured yet flexible and conducive to the construction of an explanatory theory that unravels a process inherent to the substantive area of inquiry (Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). Whereas telework may be a growing trend, previously it has manifested itself only in the form of part-time / flexible and often optional work arrangement. Moreover, research on telework in the third-world setting is lacking severely, with much of the scholarly work focusing on Western, developed countries that are arguably more prepared to handle shifts in working arrangements than developing nations. In this context, critically, grounded theory endowed the researcher with the ability not just to collect pertinent data but also to develop analytical ideas around this data that may be used to make insightful inferences (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010).

3.3.   Research Instrument

The research instrument chosen for this thesis was the qualitative interview. More specifically, semi-structured interview questions were designed to maximize the researcher's ability to collect nuanced data from participants in an informal and interactive manner. In fact, this kind of interview is best-suited for the exploration of participants' beliefs, attitudes, opinions and emotions, which is particularly ideal for research that aims to evaluate individuals' physical, social and psychological wellbeing (Collis & Hussey, 2014). In addition, the flexibility inherent to semi-structured interviews is crucial to the solicitation of nuanced responses, as it allows the researcher not only to ask follow-up questions, but also to alter some questions based on interviewees' responses when needed (Qu & Dumay, 2011). As such, this kind of interview enables the collection of in-depth responses that provides highly insightful during the data analysis phase.

Based on the conceptualization of job satisfaction and work motivation, as well as Maslow's theory on human needs, the interview questions were thematically organized to cover all facets of employee satisfaction and motivation. First, the three facets of job satisfaction from the perspective of vocational psychology were considered: Performance and Organizational Adaptation, interpersonal work relations, and career advancement prospects. To gauge the level of participants' satisfaction, the first four interview questions aimed to evaluate each of these facets from the lens of teleworkers.

Performance and Organizational Adaptation

(1) Compared to when you were working at the office, how would you describe your experience at home when it comes to role you play at your organization and the duties you are expected to fulfill? Have you encountered any challenges and bottlenecks with your work assignments that were not present at the office? Do you feel less or more empowered to get the job done? Why?

(2) How is your relationship with your organization? Are you happy with its telework policies? Did the company offer to facilitate your transition to telework or provide you with additional incentives/compensation? If not, what do you think your organization could have done during this crisis?

Interpersonal Work Relations

(3) While working from home, do you feel disconnected from your colleagues/supervisors? Do you communicate them less frequently than you used to at the office? How does that make you feel? Are you able to focus more than before, or was the physical presence of your colleagues more helpful to you in doing your job?

Career Advancement

(4) Do you think that working from home helps or hurts your chances of being promoted? Please elaborate.

The second set of interview questions aimed to assess the work motivation of teleworking participants, drawing on the framework of Nohria, Groysberg, and Lee (2008) in conjunction with the different levels of Maslow's hierarchy.

The Desire to Acquire / Physiological and Safety Needs

(5) Has your transition to telework in any way affected your finances and spending decisions? For example, do you feel you are able to spend more or less? Were you obliged to take a pay cut because of the situation? Do you feel safer and more in control of your daily life while working from home? Or is something missing that you had before?

The Desire to Bond / Love and Bonding Needs

(6) Does your absence from the physical workplace make you feel alienated or isolated? Were you energized by seeing and interacting with your colleagues, or are you just as motivated while working in a private, quiet setting?

The Desire to Accomplish / Esteem Needs

(7) Do you feel that telework empowers you to accomplish more compared to working at the physical office? Do you enjoy the flexibility and autonomy that it provides, or do you feel more efficient and productive working in a traditional environment?

The Desire to Grow / Self-Actualization Needs

> (8) While working from home, do you feel as though your work is as valued and recognized as it was in the traditional workplace? Do you feel more or less inclined to work on personal development and growth? Why?

3.4. <u>Setting and Sampling Method</u>

The research setting chosen for this study is Lebanon, a third-world country affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. To acquire a thorough understanding of how telework affects employees in a third-world context, the research sought out participants who work in a wide range of professions. While the sample was not particularly large enough to derive generalizable conclusions about these fields, it nevertheless allowed for an exploration of perceptions and experiences regarding job satisfaction and work motivation that would enable a more complete analysis and more nuanced framework for the implementations of ensuing recommendations. Moreover, ideally random sampling would have best suited this study, as it would have been the least liable to biases. However, due to time constraints, a form of convenient sampling was employed, a non-probability sampling method that allowed the researcher to more easily connect with and schedule interviews with participants that meet the general research criteria: Employed and forced to work from home during the coronavirus crisis. More specifically, a mix of snowball and purposive sampling was used as per the following procedure: Two teleworkers were first selected by the researcher from his contacts in the Lebanese capital Beirut, a man working in the financial sector, and a woman who works at a local branch of an international advertising agency. Subsequently, these participants were asked to think of a list of acquaintances that were operating under conditions (teleworking full-time), preferably in different professions, who would also be available to be interviewed and whom, by their judgement, would offer valuable insight that could further the research. Thus, the two original participants were involved in the process of purposive sampling which typically intends to identify participants that meet specific criteria (Lavrakas, 2008), but also snowball sampling by helping choose these participants. In qualitative studies, the snowball sampling method not only allows the researcher to find eligible candidates for data collection relatively rapidly, but it also does not substantially impair the diversity of data, as would be presumed in a quantitative context. In fact, the goal of this study is not to infer generalizable conclusions from a large and diverse dataset, but rather to gather a diversity of perspectives from individuals whose knowledge would be especially insightful and favorable for an in-depth and contextualized exploration (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018) of full-time telecommuting and its implications.

The full list of respondents and relevant attributes are summarized in the following table:

Table 1

List of Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Field	Work Experience (Years)
1	25	Man	Finance	4
2	28	Woman	Advertising	8
3	23	Man	Programming	2
4	25	Man	Architecture	3
5	33	Woman	Higher Education	9
6	30	Man	Information Technology (IT)	8
7	49	Man	Psychotherapy	25
8	27	Woman	School Counseling	6

3.5. Data Collection

Considering the lockdown and social distancing measures enacted globally, including in the Lebanese research setting, in-person interviews could not be conducted with participants. Instead, these interviews were scheduled with all 8 respondents as per their respective availability, in the span of 5 days. 4 interviews were conducted using the Zoom application, and the 5th was done over Whatsapp voice call. In each case, respondents were first informed of the research objectives and how the results may help further efforts to alleviate the transition to telecommuting arrangements. Moreover, they were assured that their feedback would be completely anonymized in the findings, and that their responses were confidential and would

not be used outside the scope of this study. Respondents were also informed that they may withdraw their participation from the study at any point of their choosing, should they feel uncomfortable with the process or the questions being asked. On average, each interview took approximately 17 minutes to complete, beginning with a brief introduction about the researcher and the study, and ending with short thank you note for participation. Furthermore, interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher; in some instances, the researcher translated parts spoken in the Lebanese dialect to English to obtain a more homogeneous result, ready for analysis.

3.6.   Data Analysis

The theoretical framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in addition the motivation model suggested by Nohria, Groysberg, and Lee (2008) were used as guiding vectors in the thematic content analysis. Some themes were established a priori, including safety, social connection, acknowledgement, personal growth and autonomy. In line with the fluid flow of grounded theory, themes were then refined as the coding process evolved and the analysis matured. Prior to the analytical generalization, the researcher began with a general overview of the interview content; the responses of each interview were read three times to obtain a high-level understanding of interviewees' experiences and perception of telework. Subsequently, 2 iterations of coding were conducted. The first comprised open coding to determine what initial themes may be inferred. Open coding defines the process through which the researcher first tags units of data that are most pertinent to the study and its objectives (Merriam, 2009). The second iteration of coding involved analytical coding, engaging primarily the researcher's endeavor to interpret the data and reflect on its meaning (Merriam, 2009). In this iteration, the organization of codes was conducted on the basis of the aforementioned a priori themes, which allowed for a review of themes and their alteration to better fit the scope and intricacies of the collected data.

3.7.   Limitations

Some constraints have saddled the study with noteworthy limitations, the most evident being the short duration of time available to conduct the research. Not only did such temporal constraint diminish the ability to employ a form of random sampling in the selection of participants, thereby reducing diversity and data bias, but it also restricted the number of interviewees. More valuable insight could have been acquired by interviewing a greater number of participants, and/or by exploring the effect of teleworking on employees in more than one third-world country to account for the possible effect of diverging cultural attributes. Moreover, enforced social distancing guidelines constrained the researcher to conducting the interviews online; in line with the findings of Jenner and Myers (2018), the interviews conducted through Zoom yielded a strong rapport and exceptional disclosure, as the researcher's interaction with interviewees was uninhibited by distance. However, conducting 3 of the interviews via voice call did detract from the researcher's ability to capture the full subtleties of these interviewees' responses.

4. Discussion of Findings

Following the analytical process, the a priori themes drawn from the theoretical frameworks adopted for this study were edited to reflect the essence of the data collected. Generally, the main findings revolved around five main themes: Safety, professional isolation, work-life balance, autonomy and growth. There was large consensus among participants that their abrupt transition to telework reduced their feelings of safety and stability, engendered substantial professional isolation woes that were not anticipated, improved work-life balance, endowed them with a greater sense of autonomy, and decreased motivations for personal growth and development.

4.1.   Safety

The first building block of Maslow's pyramid of needs is the need for safety, encompassing desires such as financial security which is associated with the ability to acquire basics such as food and shelter. After coding interview responses, there emerged sub-themes that were highly insightful, including those of financial distress and instability, which together contribute to lowering the degree of safety. Most participants expressed a fear that conducting their jobs from home diminished their ability to do them well, generating feelings of distress and anxiety about their job security. Cognizant of the colossal economic crisis that Lebanon is going through, upon receiving responses about distress the researcher asked whether participants were worried because of the economic situation or because of any perceived challenges pertaining to telework specifically. 6 out of 8 of respondents specifically stated that telework made them feel as though they were falling behind on their duties. It was noted that the most anxious responses came from older participants (above 30), a surprising phenomenon given

that typically older employees with several years of experience tend to feel more stable than their younger, inexperienced counterparts. For instance, in response to the first question about duty fulfillment, the 33-year-old public university professor stated: "The situation with online education is a mess; I feel like I cannot do my job properly because I lack proper coordination with my students. The online communication tools like Zoom are not bad, but the whole thing is just chaotic. My students are not doing as well as they used to, and who does this reflect on other than me? I worry that the administration might make cuts soon based on unfair evaluations." Moreover, all participants asserted that they were not offered meaningful incentives or updated compensation schemes to help with their transition. Half of respondents claimed that they were spending less overall, and that they felt their salaries were not substantial. However, through follow-up questions, the researcher found that one of the culprits was the severe devaluation of the Lebanese pound (lira) over the past year.

4.2.   Professional Isolation

The original theme relating to interpersonal relations was "social isolation", but it was updated following the coding process to "professional isolation" to better capture the core meaning of interviewees' experiences and perceptions. Generally, respondents felt disconnected from colleagues and supervisors, and for some clients as well. One clear exceptions was the 23-year-old programmer who claimed that physical presence was not as important to him as efficient communication, which he said may be conducted online via video calls or, "most of the time through email". However, participants were predominantly distressed with the situation, suggesting that they were cut off from their peers in such a way that reduced their ability to be productive. For instance, the advertising teleworker stated: "My field is very creative; I have no problem working alone, but when I get spontaneous ideas frequently, and I sometimes I have to share them with my colleagues on the spot to get feedback before moving on. You can imagine the hassle of having to video call them or share my screen every time; it's chaotic. We're learning still how to do it, but it's slow and disruptive". Even the interviewee working as an IT manager was distressed, claiming that it has become far more difficult for him to diagnose IT problems and fix them, because a lot of the complaints he used to receive from colleagues were involved 5-10 minutes of information interaction. Furthermore, the school counselor contended that she has had severe issues coordinating with her school's administration on how to manage students' challenges and experiences during lockdown: "It has been hell; I feel like I cannot get my points across on the internet; it's just too subjective and a lot of decisions require an emotional understanding; like how do you relay that online? I'm trying my best, but it's draining".

4.3.   Work-Life Balance

The work-life balance theme was introduced following the low-level coding iteration, whereby it was determined that participants did not feel socially isolated overall, but rather appeared to appreciate the enhanced social connections that they were able to form with loved

ones. In response to the 6th question about possible feelings of alienation or isolation, in particular, 5 out of 8 participants were emphatic about their increased *control* over their lives. Most enthusiastic about this was the participant working in the financial industry: "I typically work late hours; I mean I'm very ambitious, I don't mind. But I felt more isolated at work than I do at home. I barely spent any time with my new fiancé and my parents. Even when working at home, I tell them not to distract me too much, but still I can be by their side". This kind of sentiment was mirrored by the psychotherapist who added: "I never really felt *isolated* per se when working from home. I do miss my colleagues because we tend to have a deep, very humanistic connection. But there's an abundance of ways to keep in touch these days: Zoom, Skype, Whatsapp. Now, at least, I get to spend more time raising my children and being with my wife, which makes us all very happy". Some participants were less enthused by this prospect, especially young, single participants such as the architect and the programmer, but they were not particularly vocal about feeling isolated. Moreover, whereas the school counselor expressed distress with regard to inhibited interaction with her colleagues, she was less adamant on describing herself as being socially isolated, recalling that she did enjoy the extra time spent doing her own research, meditating and cooking.

4.4.   Autonomy

On the question probing for answers relating to esteem needs, most interviewees expressed their satisfaction with the increased level of autonomy that they had over their lives, but not especially over their work per se. This was one of the most challenging themes to unpack. On one hand, participants prized the flexibility of telework with regard to a few perceived benefits, including reduced (eliminated) commute time and the partial control that they had over their schedules. 3 out of 8 participants expressed a sense of pride relating to how they took initiatives to help themselves and their colleagues adapt and become more productive. For instance, the programmer stated that he had effectively become more productive by designing stricter schedules that included planned rather than spontaneous feedback sessions as he had to "deal with" at his traditional workplace. Furthermore, the participant working in advertising said she conducted substantial research on tools such as Microsoft Teams and Slack and presented her findings in online conference call to her colleagues; soon after, the way her team communicated changed drastically. On the other hand, while some participants said they enjoyed having more independence and say in their duties, they nevertheless complained about having to deal with some rigid instructions from management. The university professor, for one, said that her department head insisted on certain approaches to online teaching that she did not agree with but had to follow anyway. Moreover, the architect was adamant on reiterating that he felt his line of reasoning was not as influential as it once was, with his supervisor often overriding him and going in a different direction: "It doesn't really annoy me all that much; he's a smart guy, but sometimes it just feels like a one-man show. That's not how I felt before [prior to the pandemic]."

4.5.   Growth

One particularly surprising finding was participants' aggressive responses to questions about their own growth and personal development. In response to the 8th question about whether they felt their work was valued and recognized, all but one interviewee expressed negative feelings and perceptions about their organizations. Whereas the participant working in advertising felt particularly at ease with the way her superiors evaluated her work, other interviewees exhibited an apparent frustration regarding this matter. The university professor, in particular, was vocal about her administration's mismanagement and how they the situation at her establishment was so chaotic that there was no proper framework through which to evaluate staff adequately and fairly. As for the architect, he expressed similar sentiment, stating that he felt underappreciated and less visible, "as though working as a part-timer or a freelancer". Even some of the most optimistic interviewees like the young programmer, who seemed satisfied with their work arrangement, declared that they felt less acknowledged: "In a weird way, I feel like I'm working for myself. I mean, I'm making more decisions, but sometimes they get drowned out… like… it's like working as a ghostwriter where you do all the work but rarely get credit. If that makes sense". Similar responses were given to the 4th question about career advancement. Most participants (6 out of 8) expressed their concern with career progress and growth; however, their pessimism was more linked to the economic crisis than their organizations. The participant working the financial field was most vocal, arguing that he had entered the sector based on his belief that through his hard work he would be able to climb the professional ladder fast: "Given the chaotic situation, I'm not sure my company is even considering promoting anyone, honestly. Not just me. Because of this, I'm considering applying to other countries. It's just a shame." However, the 2 participants working in the educational sector stated that their organizational culture was also a culprit.

5. Conclusion

5.1.   Key Findings

The findings of this study revealed an overall low level of job satisfaction among participants, as well as the salience of factors that impeded their motivation to work and grow within their organizations.

First, participants' low perception of safety and stability is connected to reasons involving uncertainty around the fulfillment of job duties and technical challenges rendering some of them alienated by work online. These dimensions are more pertinent to the study than the financial concerns expressed by participants, given that these concerns may be confounded by the effect of the ongoing financial crisis, as well as the additional repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic. Moreover, rather than having *socially* isolated, the sample was adamant on drawing a distinction between difficulties bonding with colleagues and the positive externalities of telework on their work-life balance. This finding was in line with the work of Collins, Hislop and Cartwright (2016), indicating that teleworkers in Lebanon score low on work-related motivation to bond. However, contrary to the findings of Golden and Veiga

(2015), this study's participants had no qualms about the interlacement of their jobs and their personal life, including family. No concerns were voiced about any distracting elements or work-life conflict that got in the way of their duties. This surprising contrast may be explained by the fact that the Lebanese society is characterized as being collectivist, whereby most individuals not only embrace social and interpersonal bonds, but often depend on them to go about their lives. Thus, it could be that the salience of collectivist bonds mitigates the risk of conflict emerging from any overlap of personal and professional duties. Where the findings do partially mirror the literature is in the elevated sense of autonomy. In line with the work of Caranto el al. (2020), the study found a substantial appreciation expressed by teleworkers for higher flexibility and decision-making. However, while this preference was clear and indicated that teleworkers' esteem needs may be satisfied, nevertheless some factors diminished teleworker motivation such as a general lack of recognition by their supervisors for their efforts. This finding was in accordance with Rowland's (2020) application of Maslow's hierarchy to the teleworking realm, whereby participants' perceptions of sudden recognition cut-off is likely due to reduced sensory input that makes it more difficult for supervisors to fuel their employees' self-actualization. Still, the lacking motivation for growth and career advancement implicit in respondents' claims cannot reliably be attributed to the nature of telework, due to the confounding economic variable, whereby at the time of the study Lebanon was suffering a harsh financial crisis.

Overall, while the study could have benefited from a larger sample and more diversity, its findings do reflect the clear ills of teleworkers in Lebanon striving to adapt to a challenging status quo. As intuitively excepted, the pains experienced by these teleworkers are comparatively greater than their Western counterparts, emphasizing the need to pay close attention to teleworkers in third-world countries.

5.2.   Managerial Recommendations

To handle issues that arise from telework, Fujii (2020) suggests the implementation of policies that involve four tasks. First, input must be drawn from employees, management, and data collected from other companies on what it means to be "successful" in telework. Second, narrower insight must be collected on the most high-stakes matters by asking pertinent questions to individual contributors and their supervisors, including teamwork concerns, trust issues, communication tools, virtual presence options, technological support, office space requirements and customer service needs. Third, employees must receive training on remote working and its underlying expectations. Finally, measurement strategies should be put in place to assess on a regular basis how employees are performing.

Fujii's framework is a good but largely generic starting point. In addition to the suggested actions, extending this framework to the Lebanese context would target the main pain points expressed by this study's participants: Lack of safety/stability, feelings of professional isolation and diminished perceptions of acknowledgement that impede growth. The following recommendations would serve this purpose:

1. Organizations ought to provide its teleworking employees with the necessary material and moral support to ensure a level of stability required for a carefree home work environment. Managers must prepare a checklist that oversees employees' access to adequate technological components, as well as a stable uninterruptable internet connection. In addition, weekly 15-to-30-minutes conference sessions with individual employees are recommended to align their duties and responsibilities with those of the team and organization's objectives.
2. Managers must regularly ensure that their communication lines among employees are not just open but also systematically scheduled and balanced to ensure that every teleworker has a say and feels listened to.
3. At the end of each work week, it is recommended that all team members join in on a conference call where they share their weekly milestones and achievements, culminating in an informal and upbeat chat before the weekend break.
4. Managers must be trained to become more systematic and fairer in their evaluation of teleworkers' work. Reflexivity exercises must focus on the need to evaluate tangible work and creative ideas rather than concentrate on sensory data relevant to employees' degree of activity in conference calls or their personality attributes.

These recommendations may face resistance from employees, especially older managers and individual contributors who are inclined to conduct their duties as traditionally as they comfortably would. In these cases, it would be appropriate to use positive reinforcement as one method to help these employees adapt to the new reality, taking gradual steps to the fulfillment of the aforementioned recommendations.

5.3.   Recommendations for Future Research

Future research may extend this study by adopting two directions: First, a larger, more diverse sample may be investigated to obtain more representative results of the general population. Second, given Lebanon's dire economic situation at the time of this study, it would be pertinent to explore how employees in other third-world countries in the region have handled teleworking during times of crisis.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

(1) Compared to when you were working at the office, how would you describe your experience at home when it comes to role you play at your organization and the duties you are expected to fulfill? Have you encountered any challenges and bottlenecks with your work assignments that were not present at the office? Do you feel less or more empowered to get the job done? Why?

(2) How is your relationship with your organization? Are you happy with its telework policies? Did the company offer to facilitate your transition to telework or provide you with additional incentives/compensation? If not, what do you think your organization could have done during this crisis?

(3) While working from home, do you feel disconnected from your colleagues/supervisors? Do you communicate them less frequently than you used to at the office? How does that make you feel? Are you able to focus more than before, or was the physical presence of your colleagues more helpful to you in doing your job?

(4) Do you think that working from home helps or hurts your chances of being promoted? Please elaborate.

(5) Has your transition to telework in any way affected your finances and spending decisions? For example, do you feel you are able to spend more or less? Were you obliged to take a pay cut because of the situation? Do you feel safer and more in control of your daily life while working from home? Or is something missing that you had before?

(6) Does your absence from the physical workplace make you feel alienated or isolated? Were you energized by seeing and interacting with your colleagues, or are you just as motivated while working in a private, quiet setting?

(7) Do you feel that telework empowers you to accomplish more compared to working at the physical office? Do you enjoy the flexibility and autonomy that it provides, or do you feel more efficient and productive working in a traditional environment?

(8) While working from home, do you feel as though your work is as valued and recognized as it was in the traditional workplace? Do you feel more or less inclined to work on personal development and growth? Why?