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Supported Autonomy: Exploring New Zealand Employee Leadership Needs in the Virtual Workplace.

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to persist around the world. An increasing number of workers in Aotearoa New Zealand live with two chronic stressors: that of the pandemic and the pressure of carrying out their jobs online, in virtual working environments. At the same time, organisations and leadership teams must deal with the challenge of providing virtual leadership. Much existing research tends to focus on the Full Range Leadership Model, which has traditionally identified separate Transactional and Transformational leadership styles and is relatively context-free. The changing nature of work suggests a need for a more nuanced and context-based approach.

Virtual leadership is a relatively new phenomenon; leaders must now be competent at interacting with their employees across a range of digital platforms. Research is beginning to suggest that a subtle and complex ability to blend traditional and virtual communication methods to develop an inclusive style, promote employee interaction, consider cultural differences, and provide feedback for employees is vital for the wellbeing of employees and the functioning of the organisation. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of employees in relation to virtual leadership and to provide recommendations to managers and organisations who have employees working in a virtual environment.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with seven NZ-based employees who had been working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, but who had previously been working in a face-to-face environment. The interviews explored participants' lived experience, as employees, of virtual leadership. The Critical Incident Technique was used to structure interviews. Semi-structured interviews explored positive and negative experiences, allowing participants to focus on what was successful and unsuccessful about the way their manager operated in a specific situation within a virtual work environment. The data

collection phase of this research coincided with another wave of the Covid-19 virus within the community, so all interviews were carried out via Zoom. Participants were all white-collar professionals, four male and three female, and in the 40-69 age range. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The analysis did not rely solely on the prevalence of a particular theme but also aimed to identify those themes which were seemingly of most importance to participants.

Thematic analysis identified differences in employee needs between traditional face-to-face workplace environments and virtual or remote working environments. During the initial analysis, it became apparent that themes fell into one of two categories. The first category is described as “business as usual”, in that these employee needs are apparent in both virtual and face-to-face work environments. For example, the need for a leader to reward good or hard work. The second category is described as “supported autonomy”, describing the tensions in the ways that employees require their leader both to provide support and to enable a sense of autonomy relating to their job. Supported autonomy had two fundamental aspects. First, leaders needed to be engaged and active in understanding the intricacies of the employee’s job and in setting up the employee to successfully work in an autonomous manner. The second aspect centred around the need for leaders to clear the way for their employees by removing bureaucratic and practical obstacles to work performance. The findings indicate the potential need for organisations to support and train leaders working virtually, and to introduce new guidelines relating to this new work environment to ensure the wellbeing, productivity and retention of their employees.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Purpose and Rationale

In early 2020, the Covid-19 virus spread uncontrolled around the world, heralding a change in the way people work. As this pandemic persists organisations are forced to restructure and consider their financial situation in relation to the potential for future upheaval caused by the development of this, or new pandemics. People continue to be impacted by the waves of virus in the community, resulting in the need for many to work from home, at least some of the time.

The effect of pandemics on society is far-reaching and impacts the largescale functioning of day-to-day life, right down to small cultural nuances and social norms. The population of the entire planet is living these changes in real time and one commonality is a transformation in the way people work. An increasing number of people in New Zealand now live with two chronic stressors: the pandemic, and the pressure of carrying out their jobs online, in virtual work environments. At the same time, organisations and their leadership teams are dealing with the challenge of defining and providing a new type of resource to their employees, that of virtual leadership. The main purpose of this study was to explore employees' experiences of virtual leadership, with a view to helping organisations and leaders identify approaches to virtual leadership which support employee wellbeing. Interviews explored the impacts of the change to virtual/online working for a sample of New Zealanders and investigated what employees needed from their leaders to ensure ongoing engagement, productivity and wellbeing while teleworking.

Terminology and Definitions

Telework and virtual leadership are both areas of research which have recently increased in popularity, however, despite much discussion, the nomenclature is not yet standardised for either telework (Martínez-Sánchez, Pérez-Pérez, De-Luis-Carnicer, & Vela-

Jiménez, 2007) or virtual leadership (Van Wart, Roman, Wang, & Liu, 2019). This is perhaps owing to the dynamic environment within which research is taking place, the rapid changes in workplaces and the nature of work, the Covid-19 crisis, the speed of technological development and a global interest in these topics.

Telework

Telework may be defined as working from home, remote work, virtual work, or distance work. These terms are often used interchangeably and telework has been described by Hardill and Green (2003) as sitting on a continuum of definition and practices. The original terminology was coined by Jack Nilles who explained telework as an umbrella term which “includes all work-related substitutions of telecommunications and related information technologies for travel” (Nilles, 1988, p. 301). Telecommuting was seen as a related subset which included “the partial or total substitution of tele-communications, with or without the assistance of computers, for the twice-daily commute to work” (Nilles, 1988, p. 301).

Complications relating to a lack of a consistent definition of telework prior to Covid-19 have been recognised and taxonomies have been published. Garrett and Danziger (2007) put forward three types of teleworkers: fixed-site teleworkers who primarily work at home, flexiworkers who work both at home and in an office environment and mobile teleworkers who operate in a field site. The rapid increase in telework post 2020 has called for an updated definition of the term, so for the sake of clarity this thesis uses the term telework and looks to the originator, Jack Nilles. He states that telework consists of “moving the work to the workers instead of moving the workers to work” (Nilles, 2022). Working within an area which has consistently shown change and variation means there is also the need for a project-specific definition (Sullivan, 2003). The definition of telework within this thesis research builds on the work by Nilles:

telework is the practice of working away from the organisation's physical location, where both social and job-related contact is maintained with the use of information communication technologies.

Virtual Leadership

Virtual leadership is an aspect of the evolution of telework. To maintain communication with employees working away from the organisation's physical location, leadership needs to be online or virtual. As with telework, virtual leadership lacks consistent terminology. For example, terms such as virtual leadership, remote leadership, distant leadership, and e-leadership coexist, although with only limited investigation into distinctions between the terms.

Immediately prior to the current pandemic, and the subsequent proliferation of leaders transitioning to the virtual space, several authors had started to tackle the subject of standardisation of both terminology and definition. Avolio, Sosik, Kahai and Baker (2014) noted that the rapid increase in advanced information technologies was contributing to the gap between practice in the world of virtual leadership and the pool of knowledge about its impacts on leadership, organisations, and the way this topic is studied. Van Wart et al. (2019) published a case study considering both the importance of a consistent terminology and an operational definition of virtual leadership. They define virtual leadership as:

the effective use and blending of electronic and traditional methods of communication. It implies an awareness of current ICTs [information communication technologies], elective adoption of new ICTs for oneself and the organization, and technical competence in using those ICTs selected (Van Wart et al., 2019, p. 83).

A simple search on Google Scholar confirms the term virtual leadership as the most widely used, so for this thesis, virtual leadership is defined as:

the provision of leadership via information communication technologies to employees working in an environment other than the organisation's physical premises.

The difference in virtual leadership and telework before and after 2020 reflects both a huge development in ICTs and a global crisis which has forced widespread changes in many work environments. In this new context, the concept of virtual leadership highlights the interdependence of employee and leader and has taken on additional importance due to new leadership challenges (Newman & Ford, 2021). Risks of this new environment are mainly waiting to be identified but include social isolation, work/family conflict and increased employee anxiety (Contreras, Baykal, & Abid, 2020), and organisations are having to consider the long-term implications of either hybrid or fulltime telework. One interesting review by Chamakiotis, Panteli and Davison (2021) proposes that virtual leaders may create growth in innovation and creative performance by supporting creativity and idea generation amongst employees. Other potential benefits may include better work/family balance, employee wellbeing and stress reduction (Contreras et al., 2020), although more data are needed to clarify the long-term positive and negative aspects of virtual leadership and telework.

Research Aim

The aim of the present study was to help organisations improve virtual leadership. The main research question was: What do employees who are teleworking need from their virtual leaders to ensure employee ongoing engagement, productivity, and wellbeing?

Chapter 2: Introduction – Telework: A Short History and Development of Telework

The origins of working from home are ancient. This can be seen amongst some of the world's first shops dating back to 200BC in Pompeii, where shopfronts were built onto the fronts of their owners' homes and faced into the street so shutters could be opened to the public. Farmers, blacksmiths, and potters continued to work from home or in small groups or cooperatives. It was the advent of the Second Industrial Revolution, as late as 1870, which saw rapid economic growth and a change in the way people worked, moving many workers into factories, offices, and workplaces. Economies of scale saw the success of mass production and the subsequent development of transportation, electricity, and communication (telegraph and telephones) which served to further separate home and work. But it was the energy crisis of the 1970s which first highlighted issues relating to cost in running workplaces full of workers and it was at this point that the idea of teleworking first emerged in the literature (Nilles, 1975).

An American with a background in the military and aerospace industry, Jack Nilles (1975) focussed on the looming decentralisation of organisations in the face of urban sprawl, rising fuel costs and the development of new information communication technologies (ICTs). The result was his proposal that organisations set up satellite offices, away from major hubs and closer to the employees' homes, allowing cost savings in the form of lower employee salaries relating to transportation costs, and access to workforces previously inaccessible by corporations operating in central business districts. Nilles noted that the decentralisation of organisations could impact society and change the future development of telecommunications systems. He predicted a future with "broad-band communications capability linking all the regional business centers within a conurbation, ... ultimately, through fiber optics transmission lines, leasing its communications capabilities to

organizations in each business center” (Nilles, 1975, p. 1146). He also saw impacts upon mass transit, land and building usage and the structure of the education system.

The adoption of telework over the subsequent decades was sporadic and often in response to societal change and development, both for the benefit of the organisation and the worker. In 1992, American organisation AT&T put in place flexible teleworking options with the goal of reducing vehicle emissions and thereby limiting their environmental impact (Atkyns, Blazek, & Roitz, 2002).

The area likely most impacting the uptake of telework has been the development of ICTs. As these improved, so did the ease with which organisations were able to implement telework options which maximised benefits for both employees and organisations. The late 1990s saw two of the most significant advances in technology relating to the desirability of telework for organisations. The International Telework Association and Council identified the development of “encryption capacity of virtual private network technology, which improved the security of data flows, encryption ... accompanied by substantial broadband improvements, permitting fast and easy downloading of large data sets” (Illegems & Verbeke, 2004, p. 320).

Comparison between Telework and Face-to-face Work Environments Pre-Covid-19

The telework environment prior to the Covid-19 pandemic can be viewed through multiple different lenses, as it was implemented under different conditions and for different reasons. However, earlier experiences of telework identified many of the issues organisations are dealing with today. Telework was previously approached as an optional or flexible work arrangement, with employees contracting at a client site or splitting their time between the office and home. Employees may decide to telework for a range of reasons, from improving

work-life balance and wellbeing, to having the ability to relocate and maintain the same job, or cutting down on commuting.

Organisational research shows “employees with perceived WLB [work-life balance] were found to have better health and wellbeing outcomes than those without” (Zheng, Molineux, Mirshekary, & Scarparo, 2015, p. 371), therefore it makes sense that in the past telework has been linked to an organisation’s desire to address employee work-life balance. The idea that working from home will reduce distress and increase job satisfaction has been supported to some degree by data which shows a positive connection between telework in the home environment and a greater self-reported degree of job satisfaction in comparison to those in the face-to-face work environment (Morganson, Major, Oborn, Verive, & Heelan, 2010). However, additional complexities underlie the findings. For example, Golden, Veiga and Dino (2008) found that the longer an individual is teleworking the greater the impacts of professional isolation on job performance. This highlights the human need for social connection, often missing for those who are teleworking. A study by Moon, Linden, Bricout and Baker (2014) addressed measures of traditional success by looking at outcomes for teleworkers with disabilities. They suggest that where conventional measures such as increased productivity and employee retention are still valid there is room to consider alternate relevant measures such as enhanced social capital (in the form of decreased social isolation) and job satisfaction for people with disabilities. A change in the approach to measuring successful outcomes and understanding reasons behind adoption of telework may improve the efficacy of implementing telework practices amongst disabled employees (Moon et al., 2014), as well as potential for taking individual differences into account.

Employees can find connection and communication differences when moving from an office-based to a virtual workplace. The number of people an employee talks to decreases and their channels of communication narrow to the technology available, therefore there may be

more of a need to schedule a discussion, and individuals no longer benefit from the spontaneous contact present in the face-to-face workplace. Golden and Fromen (2011) noted in the context of social exchange theory, the lack of natural social interaction between co-workers in telework. This is supported by research showing that organisational social support positively correlates with job satisfaction and negatively correlates with psychological strain (Bentley, Teo, McLeod, Tan, Bosua, & Gloet, 2016).

Telework was previously seen as more of an individual choice option; employee self-selection mitigated against the issue that telework may not be right for everyone. While some may see working from home as beneficial, others find complex pressures have a negative bearing on their work experience. Research by Anderson, Kaplan and Vega (2015) shows overall that telework directly decreases negative affect and increases positive affect, increasing positive emotions including happiness, for those employees working from home, compared with those working in an office. They also found that these outcomes were dependent on individual differences. For example, employees who displayed higher levels of social connection outside of work also displayed “higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect” (Anderson et al., 2015, p. 892), suggesting “being engaged in social relationships outside of work can further enhance the relationship between telework and well-being” (p. 892). If telework is optional, then organisations may benefit from taking individual differences into account.

The home context itself is one of the biggest and most complex differences between the face-to-face and telework environments. Traditional workplace boundaries are often clear within an office environment and may become blurred when workers transfer to the home. Greer and Payne (2014) identify physical, psychological, and temporal boundaries as aspects of telework which may need to be accommodated in an individual’s workday. For example, participants in their study reported outsourcing childcare to minimise distractions and not

answering their home phone during work hours. It is likely that issues arising from family or environmental concerns were able to be reduced or eliminated through preplanning prior to the advent of Covid-19.

Telework and Face-to-face Work Environments Post-Covid-19 Compared

Telework post Covid-19 differs from both face-to-face and pre Covid-19 telework. The pandemic has had several impacts upon telework. These include a sudden increase in the number of people engaged in a virtual work environment, the development of new ICTs specifically designed to aid people working remotely and a shift in mindset and expectations for many people relating to future flexible work options. There is also the recognition that en masse telework in a crisis environment is not adequately covered in the academic literature or organisational processes and regulations, and there is little information about the long-term impacts of a massive physical and psychological shift in the workforce.

Individual Differences and Home Set Up

Individual circumstances are prominent in a crisis-produced telework environment. For example, “benefits and barriers to telework are disproportionately distributed across age groups” (Tahlyan, Said, Mahmassani, Stathopoulos, Walker, & Shaheen, 2022, p. 398). Younger employees may encounter barriers relating to networking and career development, while older individuals may have limitations relating to use of technology and management of teams from a distance. The idea that age plays a part in outcomes for teleworkers is supported by Scheibe, De Bloom and Modderman (2022), who note that older workers showed the highest rates of resilience when engaged in involuntary telework, linking to work/home contexts. In this study, resilience and age were related to “higher job resources (i.e., job security and equipment), work–life balance, and seeing positives, whereas the relationship to demands was ambiguous” (Scheibe et al., 2022, p. 1761). Older workers may

be more likely to have a more established network and be financially stable, which in turn increases the probability they have better social support and a better work-at-home set up. The study raises the idea that other contextual factors may relate to resilience amongst older employees, including examples of job autonomy and social job resources, along with others. Further research is indicated in the area of home office set up and outcomes, which is discussed in popular media but not thoroughly covered in existing literature. This may relate to the complexity involved in separating out factors likely to impact outcomes in the telework environment, including, but not restricted to, the effect of interruptions on task flow and productivity (Altmann, Trafton, & Hambrick, 2014), boundary management (Basile & Beauregard, 2016) and ergonomic work set up in the home office. Taking one of these factors as an example demonstrates the complexity and potential impacts in a single area of interest. The quality of the ergonomic set up in telework has been documented as poor, especially in the early days of the pandemic. Davis, Kotowski, Daniel, Gerding, Naylor and Syck (2020) noted that some of their survey participants were working from the kitchen table and sitting on a kitchen chair or a bed. Those who had an office chair did not necessarily have a good quality or supportive chair and there seemed to be little regard to the fine tuning of distances and angles when setting up the workspace. Attention to ergonomic design within the home office is important because evidence links issues such as lower back pain/discomfort with working posture or stance (Gregory & Callaghan, 2008; Tissot, Messing, & Stock, 2009), and the potential for health problems relating to length spent in a sedentary position while working, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease (Wilmot, Edwardson, Achana, Davies, Gorely, Gray, Khunti, Yates, & Biddle, 2012) or weight gain (Choi, Schnall, Yang, Dobson, Landsbergis, Israel, Karasek, & Baker, 2010).

Solving Problems in a Crisis: The Home Environment

While mitigating factors may be easier to implement when telework is voluntary, this is not the case in a crisis. Employees are likely to come across problems immediately, some of which may not have solutions, and employees may be engaged in child or eldercare or have other competing priorities. Employees and their family relationships were shown to be negatively impacted during early lockdowns in the pandemic when parents were teleworking with children in the home, with one study's authors suggesting these effects may extend for some time beyond the pandemic (Feinberg, A Mogle, Lee, Tornello, Hostetler, Cifelli, Bai, & Hotez, 2022). Certainly, it seems reasonable that organisations should recognise that there may be issues in relation to the employee's home environment, for example where there may be more than one person engaged in telework or caring for and home-schooling children (Chini, 2020).

In relation to the home office set up, those working from home may not have access to a dedicated workspace, especially when the change is made at short notice. Chamakiotis et al. (2021) describe teleworkers as operating in a system where boundaries are permeable and suggest that the approach of the individual will determine how they manage their new work boundaries. The integration-segmentation model relates to the study of boundary theory and suggests that people may fall into one of two categories: those known as integrators, who choose to integrate work and non-work activities, and segmenters, who are able to separate work and non-work activities (Nippert-Eng, 1996). This model can be used to describe individuals who separate or integrate their work/home lives in relation to a face-to-face workplace. For example, those who can segment could specify a certain area and time within their home environment where work occurs, or they may not tell their family about the particulars of their work-life, allowing a separation from work to reduce stress. The ability to segment, and the degree to which individuals segment, is addressed in the study of

boundaries and micro role transitions by Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) who suggest segmentation may create clarity in roles, while also increasing the worker's transition between roles. The idea of segmentation in telework revolves around the idea of separating work and family life by putting boundaries in place. Work by Basile and Beauregard (2016) identified several areas where teleworkers have had success in using segmentation. These were broken into four strategies: physically separating from others in the house (having a dedicated room for work), using time-based separation (taking part in an activity at a specific time to signal a work boundary), behavioural separation (not carrying out work behaviour or activities during specific times) and communication (communicating expectations to colleagues and family around work intentions).

Issues Facing Managers

A manager is expected to experience changes alongside their employees and one area likely to be worthy of future investigation is the role managers play in basic checks to ensure teleworkers have access to technology and technological support (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). Because modes of communication have changed rapidly, there has been a proliferation of new technologies and the need to change ways in which technology is used. For example, the development and use of video calls requires highspeed reliable Internet access along with rules surrounding how to use the technology and behave while in multiparty video calls.

Increase in Technology and Technology Overload

One of the risks associated with increased use of ICTs is technostress or psychological overload, which consists of three factors: "system feature overload, information overload, and communication overload" (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010), with the implication that productivity loss may be linked to an increase in organisational provision of

IT tools. System feature overload is defined as “when the given technology is too complex for a given task” (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010, p. 1062), in other words for a teleworker the ICT features exceed their demands. Information overload “occurs when an individual is presented with more information than the individual has the time or cognitive ability to process” (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010, p. 1062). Communication overload “occurs when a third party solicits the attention of the knowledge worker through such means as email, instant messaging, or mobile devices that causes excessive interruptions” (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010, p. 1063), and relates to the loss in productivity in task flow through interruption (Altmann et al., 2014). All three types of overload relate to the experience of the technology user, and are important in telework as they link to issues such as the use of ICTs for both work and home purposes, re-definitions of work-family boundaries and ultimately employee wellbeing outcomes.

Counteracting technological distress and overload has been approached in several ways. One study found that teleworkers who increased their use of videoconferencing technology did not report feelings of overload in comparison to those who increased their reliance on text-based technology. This is thought to relate to the ability to schedule communication through video conferencing technology, suggesting a level of control and boundary enforcement not seen with text-based communication e.g. email (Schmitt, Breuer, & Wulf, 2021). Therefore, organisations may be able to influence employee overload through their promotion of appropriate types of technology used in the telework setting. There is also the suggestion that although teleworkers cannot permanently avoid the technologies which cause overload, they may benefit from scheduling periods of time where they disconnect or detox from technology. Further research in this area may be beneficial (Schmitt et al., 2021).

Workplace Connections

The connection between employee and organisation narrowed significantly during periods of involuntary telework during the lockdowns. People who had been able to interact face-to-face with multiple people found their social connections greatly reduced. Employees who are engaged in remote ways of working post Covid-19 may also be vulnerable to negative outcomes relating to social isolation. Chamakiotis et al. (2021) suggest that managers should make the most of the existing social connections between co-workers by aiming to maintain these relationships rather than creating new ones. One study looking at the effects of isolation on teleworkers found “employees experiencing psychological distress end up feeling more isolated, while those who feel more isolated end up experiencing greater psychological distress” (Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022, p. 618). These findings are demonstrative of the complexities that researchers face when aiming to identify themes and create practical recommendations for organisations and leaders.

Chapter 3: Work-related Stress and Wellbeing

Underlying much of the research around employee experiences of telework both pre- and post-pandemic is the need to understand how this type of work environment affects the psychological wellbeing and levels of stress for individuals. This study looks to definitions of wellbeing and stress in conjunction with the Job Demands-Resources framework and theories of needs, to create a context in which to view these issues and identify key employee needs. The chapter will start by outlining stress and wellbeing at work, then consider two theoretical perspectives: the Job Demands-Resources model, and theories of psychological needs.

Stress

Stress from a psychological view has been defined as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it” (Selye, 1974, p. 137), and described earlier again by Cannon (1915):

the increase of blood sugar, the secretion of adrenin [adrenaline], and the altered circulation in pain and emotional excitement have been interpreted in the foregoing discussion as biological adaptations to conditions in wild life which are likely to involve pain and emotional excitement, i.e., the necessities of fighting or flight (p. 211).

Fight or flight involves three main systems in the body: the autonomic nervous system, the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, and the immune system. It is the study of these systems as they relate to stress which shows the connection between a stimulus and response (Kemeny, 2003). For example, exam pressure can suppress cell-mediated immune responses, some antibodies and cytokines, which may help to explain increases in instances of viral infection or allergic reaction during stressful periods of time (Marshall Jr, Agarwal, Lloyd, Cohen, Henninger, & Morris, 1998). Stress correlates with negative psychological and

physiological indicators of wellbeing, with individual responses to stressors varied and ranging from mild to severe, short-term to chronic.

Stress is ubiquitous within the workplace, due to the extensive variety of factors which may be defined as stressors. The effects of stress may start with a physical symptom in an individual and progress to increased turnover, absenteeism and decreased employee and organisational performance (Arnold, Randall, Patterson, Silvester, Robertson, Cooper, Burnes, Harris, & Axtell, 2016), along with reduced profitability (Cartwright, Cooper, & Murphy, 1995). Although identifying stress triggers may be difficult, research is beginning to single out some factors which show strong links to stress, for example the connection between long working hours and an increased risk of stroke (Kivimäki, Jokela, Nyberg, Singh-Manoux, Fransson, Alfredsson, Bjorner, Borritz, Burr, & Casini, 2015). Work-life balance is another area which has seen a concerted research approach, in the context of both telework and face-to-face work. There is an increased potential for stress when expectations for employee availability create pressure and interfere with the work/home balance (Derks, van Duin, Tims, & Bakker, 2015). A study of managers who allowed employees greater levels of separation between home and work found reduced levels of stress and greater levels of job satisfaction in those individuals (Kreiner, 2006). A study of nursing burnout cited overwork, abuse by patients, lack of leave, and shift work as stressful demands that resulted in: serious medical mistakes, including administering incorrect medicine to a patient, resignation, and mental health issues. The study concluded that addressing individual stressors may have solved many of the problems (Prapanjaroensin, Patrician, & Vance, 2017). However, while blanket stress reductions may be ineffective or difficult to implement, solutions at an individual level have their own challenges, as needs vary between employees (Kiazad, Seibert, & Kraimer, 2014). Identifying specific stressors can signal areas where an organisation could reduce the likelihood of the negative outcomes of physiological stress

responses. Organisations focussed on stress reduction should have a wide variety of intervention options which revolve around the individual, the organisation, and the individual-organisational interface.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing can be summed up as a “combination of feeling good and functioning effectively” (Huppert, 2009, p. 1). It is associated with all aspects of a person’s life; and one way of looking at wellbeing is through the two distinct facets of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. The word hedonic comes from the Greek *hēdonikos* which translates as pleasurable, therefore hedonic wellbeing relates to the self-reported concept of subjective wellbeing, whereby people attain happiness or wellbeing through the experience of more pleasurable than unpleasant emotions. The term happiness may also be used in place of hedonic wellbeing. Within a work context, job satisfaction can be thought of as hedonic wellbeing and organisations can foster hedonic wellbeing at work by focussing on the areas of the workplace where positive emotions can thrive. Positive social connection and positive emotion are described as a “self-sustaining upward spiral” (Kok, Coffey, Cohn, Catalino, Vacharkulksemsuk, Algoe, Brantley, & Fredrickson, 2013) and organisations can use this to their benefit by creating an environment where positive social interaction can occur naturally. Research also shows that income, up to a point, positively affects happiness, although this has been shown to vary according to social and cultural factors (Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, & Diener, 1993).

The concept of eudaimonia comes from a philosophical work titled *Eudemian Ethics* by ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE), who explored factors related to a life well-lived. Eudaimonic wellbeing relates to “becoming more engaged and feeling

connected with a broader whole somewhat more to longer-term and person level outcomes” (Huta & Ryan, 2010, p. 759), and points to self-actualization within needs theory.

Hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing are not mutually exclusive. A study around eudaimonic wellbeing in relation to job satisfaction suggested that:

if we acknowledge that job-related well-being derives from the fulfilment of human needs toward work that arise from and impact workers’ lives and communities, our focus broadens from enjoyment of work in isolation from its meaning, to meaningful and whole-life-affirming work (Rothausen & Henderson, 2019, p. 370).

Further research supporting the concept of hedonic wellbeing looked at the way people lived their lives, either hedonically and/or in a eudaimonic way, and concluded that:

hedonic activity served an emotion regulation function, predicting positive affect, carefreeness, vitality, and life satisfaction. Hedonic behaviour also predicted reduced negative affect, depression, and stress. Eudaimonic behaviour predicted meaning in life and elevating experience. Both hedonic and eudaimonic behaviours predicted flourishing (Henderson, Knight, & Richardson, 2013, p. 322).

While this research suggests that increasing both types of wellbeing should benefit an individual, the ability to nurture hedonic wellbeing may be affected by factors beyond the control of the individual. For example, people with neurotic personality disorders may tend toward negativism therefore maintaining high levels of positive emotion may be harder for these individuals (Watson & Clark, 1984). Genetics may also play a part in the expression of hedonic and eudaimonic activities as they “engage distinct gene regulatory programs” (Fredrickson, Grewen, Coffey, Algoe, Firestine, Arevalo, Ma, & Cole, 2013, p. 13684).

Associated with the concept of hedonic wellbeing is the idea that people have a baseline of happiness to which they return after a happiness event (perhaps getting married) over a period

of time, known as hedonic adaption (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). Therefore, if hedonic happiness is relatively brief, individuals need to engage in more eudaimonic behaviours to impact long-term wellbeing. Due to the overlap of hedonic and eudaimonic activity functions, high levels of both may be associated with the greatest well-being (Huta & Ryan, 2010).

An Alternative Wellbeing Model: Te Whare Tapa Whā

Many approaches to wellbeing have been developed around Western academic scientific psychology, by and for Western industrialised cultures and, despite being in the global minority, the international psychological literature tends to remain dominated by Western approaches to wellbeing (Cole, 2006). This risks rendering much of the theory around psychological wellbeing unfunctional or potentially damaging to the world's majority. One way of understanding these limitations is to look at indigenous conceptualisations of wellbeing.

Te Whare Tapa Whā is a holistic Māori model of health, consisting of four dimensions of wellbeing: physical, spiritual, family, and mental (Durie, 2007). This model characterises the diverse emphases on health within Māori culture. For example, understanding the dimension of taha whanau, or family health, – the importance whānau have in relation to health: Whānau is a system of strength and support for Māori, who rely on other family members during illness and on maintaining a strong connection to their ancestors. All four perspectives then are interrelated: Physical and mental health are influenced by social and spiritual connections (Taitimu, Read, & McIntosh, 2018). Research into wellbeing needs to acknowledge the limitations of individualistic and reductionist views in order to support other cultural values and belief systems. The Te Whare Tapa Whā model of health offers an alternative way of understanding the way people operate, their belief systems and values, and

from an organisational perspective this can help to integrate objective and subjective measurement approaches to more fit a broader range of concepts of wellbeing (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016).

Legal Aspects of Wellbeing and Stress in the Workplace

In Aotearoa New Zealand legislation, the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 covers physical and mental health as well as other hazards. Its purposes are: protecting workers and others from harm, ensuring representation and resolution of health and safety issues at work, supporting unions and employer organisations, providing work health and safety education and advice, and enforcing the law ("Health and Safety at Work Act, No. 70," 2015). It is administered by New Zealand's health and safety regulator WorkSafe NZ (WorkSafe New Zealand: Mahi Haumarua Aotearoa, 2020). It does not, however, focus on building work wellbeing, but on reducing psychological and other hazards.

The Holidays Act 2003 is also important for the management of stress and wellbeing as its purpose is to "promote balance between work and other aspects of employees' lives" ("Holidays Act, No. 129," 2003). The regulator for this Act, the Labour Inspectorate, uses inspectors to enforce minimum employment standards, including sick leave, with organisations (Employment New Zealand, 2020). The Labour Inspectorate is also a regulator alongside the Employment Relations Authority in relation to the Employment Relations Act 2001. The Employment Relations Act sets out the law in relation to many differing aspects of the workplace and includes personal grievances, flexible working, breastfeeding and breaks ("Employment Relations Act, No. 24," 2001). The Employment Relations Authority is the governing body which facilitates investigation, prosecution, and mediation of workplace grievances (Employment Relations Authority, 2022).

Overall, however, it may be difficult for those living with a stressful work situation to make use of the legal frameworks. There has been a lack of prosecutions relating to workplace stress and it seems likely many grievances end up in mediation and are not publicly reported. Future reforms to labour law may impact workplace stress and wellbeing although it is yet to be seen what the effects of a widespread shift to teleworking will be.

An Integrated Approach to Stress and Wellbeing: The Job Demands-Resources Model

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model was developed by Bakker and Demerouti based on the theory that “that job characteristics can have a profound impact on employee wellbeing” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 309). JD-R is an occupational stress model created as a general model which could be used in any workplace. The relationship between factors can be seen in Figure 1.

Job demands are the physical or emotional demands of the job, and “high work pressure, emotional demands or role ambiguity” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 309). High levels of demands can be associated with burnout, as employees who are overworked and overloaded for protracted periods can feel exhausted, cynical and have a reduction in their effectiveness.

Job resources are the positive physical or emotional aspects of the job which support job performance and are related to engagement, e.g., “social support, performance feedback, and autonomy” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 309). The JD-R model identifies job characteristics as resources and demands, and proposes that when these are balanced, employee needs are met. In other words, resources can reduce the effects of demands if resources are appropriate for meeting demands.

Resources and demands can be understood on physical, psychological, and emotional levels. Resources relevant to telework may include support, remuneration, technology and

knowledge. Demands may centre around high job pressure (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), time commitments, workload, adoption of new technologies, or the lack of social contact. Demands can also include aspects of the home environment, such as boundary management, problems relating to long hours and weekend or evening work, and family or financial demands (Messenger, 2017). Employees who have a positive work environment with good social support, opportunities for development and strong co-worker relationships are more likely to feel lively, motivated, dedicated, and absorbed in their work. The JD-R model suggests when job demands are high and job resources are low, the risk increases for employee burnout; conversely when job resources are high and job demands are low then employee engagement increases (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Stress is linked to a perceived imbalance of demands to resources, and increasing work resources are linked to more employee engagement and productivity and a reduction in the intention to quit (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Engagement can be understood as “a positive work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Salanova, Schaufeli, Llorens Gumbau, Silla, & Grau Gumbau, 2000, p. 119). One study links job resources to employee self-esteem, self-efficacy and optimism, creating a pathway whereby employees feel more confident and invested in their work and therefore more engaged (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). The same study found that job resources play a part in the prevention of employee exhaustion: “employees who work in a resourceful environment feel more capable to perform their tasks without investing excessive effort, and as a result, it is likely that they will not become overly fatigued” (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, p. 136).

Wellbeing and stress can be related to telework using the JD-R framework: when demands outstrip resources burnout occurs and distress increases, but when a balance of resources and demands is reached, engagement follows and wellbeing increases. The

framework is flexible enough to be applied across varying workers and workplaces with the goal of moving employees away from distress and toward wellbeing using specific changes rather than sweeping transformation. This is possible because burnout and engagement are not mutually exclusive. The understanding is that improving relationships, leadership, and support resources for employees on both a job and personal front will improve work engagement and wellbeing, while decreasing stress (Schaufeli, 2017). A useful approach by Cameron, Mora, Leutscher and Calarco (2011) centres around positive practices in the workplace that build psychosocial resources and foster engagement. The six aspects they identify are respect, care, support, inspiration, meaning and forgiveness, which allow an organisation to create a positive psychosocial climate for workers. Another example of a practical approach is the Energy Compass (EC), which can be used to structure investigation and help guide solutions to introduce positivity and promote engagement. The EC tool is carried out by an outside party in conjunction with the organisation and involves an eight-step process: aims are clarified, the process is customized to the organisation, employees are informed and involved in the process, individuals are surveyed, reports are generated for analysis, feedback is given, interventions are devised and implemented and, lastly, evaluation takes place (Schaufeli, 2017). Instituting positive practices could happen at the job task level where management may build a more positive work environment through working alongside their employees, prompting the search for creative problem solving to increase autonomy, and creating a culture of gratitude through thanking their employees and acknowledging accomplishments (Geue, 2018). The change to more positive practices has been shown to be successful in promoting worker engagement, which in turn becomes self-perpetuating (Kok et al., 2013), and taps into the theory of emotional contagion whereby positive energy newly possessed by an engaged worker can spread to other members of their team (Torrente, Salanova, & Llorens, 2013).

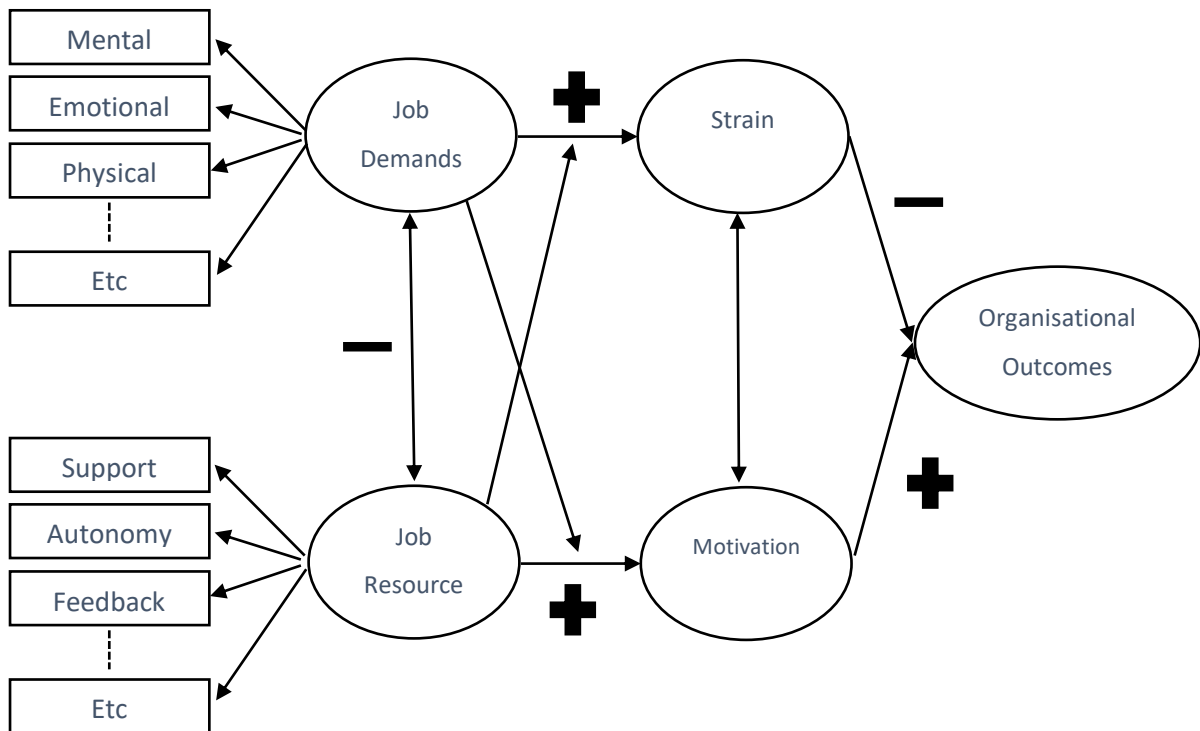
Appraisal and Coping with Work Demands

Also relevant to work stress, wellbeing and telework are theories around coping with stressors. The transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) relates to how demands and resources are appraised, and the impacts of individual and situational factors on workplace wellbeing. Demands can be appraised as threats or challenges (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A threat appraisal is made when demands exceed resources (Eatough & Chang, 2018), whereas a challenge appraisal is made when demands are seen as matching resources (Skinner & Brewer, 2002). Threat and challenge appraisals are not mutually exclusive and can be exhibited at the same time. This approach recognises individual differences in psychological and physiological responses to demands in the workplace and can point to ways to facilitate increased performance for individuals and organisations through tailored rather than standardised solutions.

Coping may be thought of as an individual's cognitive and behavioural response to managing a stressor (Billings & Moos, 1981; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and can be categorised as three coping styles: task-oriented coping, emotion-oriented coping and avoidance-oriented coping (Endler & Parker, 1990). Task-oriented coping relates to the individual's response to coping with a stressor by attempting to make a change to the situation or solve a problem and is referenced further on in relation to job-crafting. Emotion-oriented coping suggests an individual engages with an emotional response to stress (Billings & Moos, 1981), and can result negative outcomes (Norman, Collins, Conner, Martin, & Rance, 1995). Avoidance-oriented coping is the response of distraction or avoidance of the stressor (Billings & Moos, 1981).

Figure 1

The Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).



Psychological Needs Theories

Because the JD-R is a multidisciplinary model, it does not specify what demands and resources are; these are specific to work contexts and situations. This study also looks to needs theory to understand work-related resources and demands which may be relevant to teleworking.

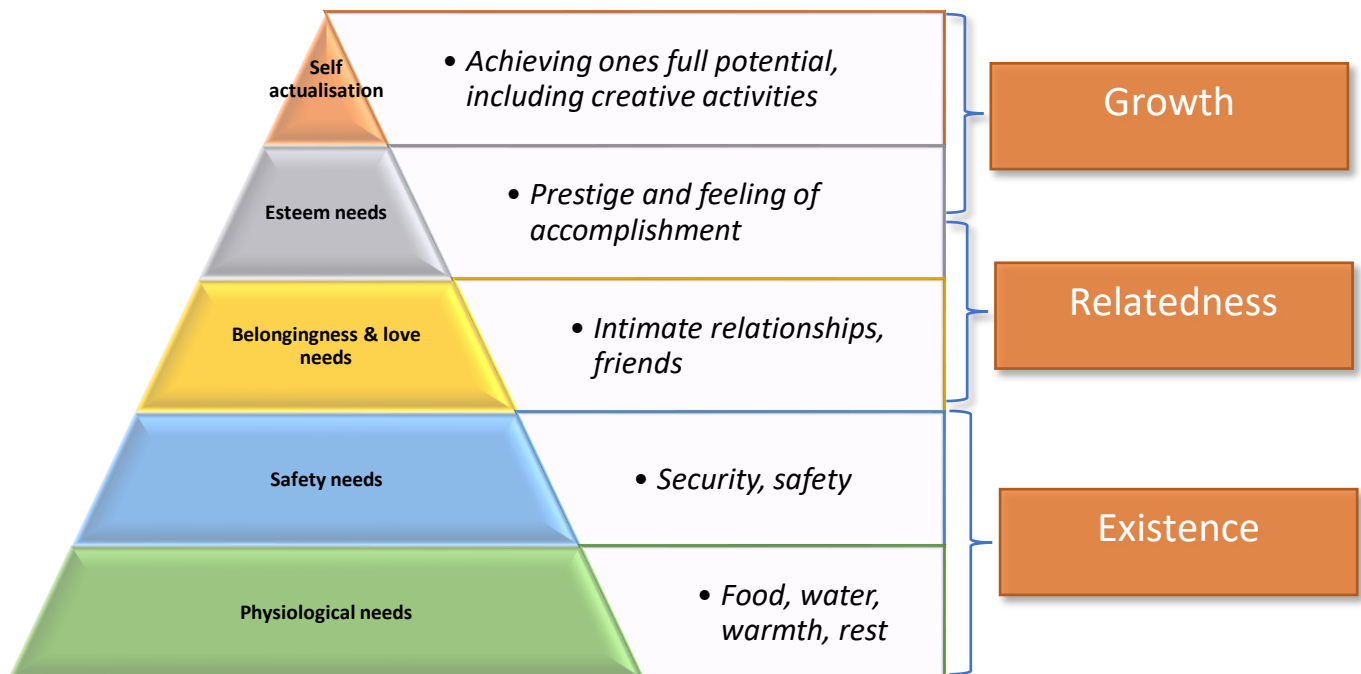
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs introduced the idea that people are motivated by five core needs, arranged in a pyramidal hierarchy of importance. Physiological needs are at the bottom of the pyramid, and, as these needs are met, higher-level needs for safety, social inclusion, self-esteem and self-actualisation are activated (see Figure 2). Maslow posited that the needs are arranged in order of significance, starting with physiological needs, and as each need is satisfied people move on to the next. The aim is to achieve self-actualisation, where

people experience fulfilment through emotional, intellectual, and creative growth (Maslow, 1943).

There is however little research evidence to support the idea of five separate needs, or that higher level needs only become relevant once lower-level needs are satisfied (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). A better-supported and more flexible model is Alderfer's Existence/Relatedness/Growth (ERG) Model which is also more in tune for use in I/O psychology. This model, which has research support, keeps Maslow's original structure but has three needs rather than five, recognises that individuals may engage in several levels of need at the same time, that some needs are never fully satisfied, and that there are individual differences in motivation and needs. Alderfer's three-factor structure is compatible with Maslow's five needs, as shown in Figure 2 (Alderfer, 1969). Alderfer's categorisation of needs helps to identify which employee needs are important, how needs might be met to result in certain outcomes and what implications are likely if those needs are not met.

Figure 2

Alderfer's ERG Theory with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Alderfer, 1969; Maslow, 1943).



Needs Theory and Wellbeing

Needs theory is useful in implementing actions relating to a specific need. For example one New Zealand study proposed that adventure recreation is an activity which satisfies the “basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness and beneficence” (Houge Mackenzie & Hodge, 2020, p. 26) using the mechanism of contact with nature to achieve the outcome.

This study uses Alderfer’s ERG theory of needs specifically, as it is tailored to meet the needs of I/O psychology in the workplace. However, there is also literature pertaining to the use of self-determination theory (SDT) within the workplace to generate employee performance and wellbeing. SDT is an interesting theory to consider as a potential way to approach the topic of employee needs in future research. SDT states that human growth and development are underpinned by three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). An example of how wellbeing can be influenced by the application of a motivational theory can be seen in the SDT Goal Content Theory. This mini theory suggests that focussing on extrinsic goals such as fame, or wealth, do not tend to increase outcomes of wellbeing or need satisfaction. In contrast, when individual goals are intrinsic and focussed on personal growth or community contribution, wellbeing and need satisfaction are increased (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). An example of this in a work context can be seen in a study by Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2014), which examined job-crafting and the resulting psychological satisfaction in relation to employee intrinsic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in a work environment. The authors determined that “job crafting predicted intrinsic need satisfaction, which, in turn, predicted employee well-being. The results suggest that job crafting may be an important underpinning upon which to base an employee well-being intervention” (Slemp

& Vella-Brodrick, 2014, p. 957). Although this study may perhaps be limited by the sample, this area might translate into future telework research.

In comparison with SDT, ERG organises needs according to a hierarchy and includes physiological needs. This theory can also be seen as embracing extrinsic needs in the form of appreciation and recognition. SDT does not refer to self-actualization. One of the aspects of Alderfer's ERG theory is relatedness which originates from Maslow's hierarchy term "belonging". This need sits in the middle of the hierarchy and has been described in literature as an innate human need which is beneficial when an interaction within a stable interpersonal relationship is both frequent and non-aversive (Baumeister & Leary, 2017). This sense of belongingness "appears to have multiple and strong effects on emotional patterns and on cognitive processes. Lack of attachments is linked to a variety of ill effects on health, adjustment, and well-being" (Baumeister & Leary, 2017, p. 497). Research supporting the idea that a need to belong is linked to wellbeing was presented by Mellor, Stokes, Firth, Hayashi and Cummins (2008). One of their findings was that individuals who lack a sense of belongingness may tend toward feelings of loneliness and social isolation. As seen in the study by Erdil and Ertosun (2011), loneliness in the workplace is a predictor of employee lack of wellbeing. Positive organisational social climates reduce loneliness and thereby impact wellbeing. It makes sense, therefore due to its physically isolating nature, that telework would see significant employee psychological wellbeing issues relating to social isolation (Mann, Varey, & Button, 2000; Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022) and loneliness relating to the need of belongingness.

Chapter 4: Wellbeing and Stress in Telework

Stress as a demand within the telework environment has been implicated in several different areas. Although the bulk of these were documented prior to the pandemic their relevance is still likely, but perhaps intensified due to the unexpected nature of the environmental change. A recent literature review divided wellbeing outcomes of teleworkers into: health outcomes (physical health, musculoskeletal and pain symptoms, mental health, psychological wellbeing), health behaviours (physical activity, nutrition, substance use, healthcare utilisation, sleep), social and family outcomes (work and family, work and nonwork, interpersonal relationships), and work-related outcomes (job satisfaction, absenteeism, presenteeism) (Beckel & Fisher, 2022). A survey carried out in the early months of the pandemic considered the impacts of lifestyle, home and occupational factors on both physical and mental wellbeing. The authors found an overall decrease in physical and mental wellbeing in those teleworking (Xiao, Becerik-Gerber, Lucas, & Roll, 2021). There is a marked lack of data relating to mental health in teleworkers post 2020, however fulltime teleworkers during this period have been recorded as suffering from a significant prevalence of impaired sleep, anxiety, and depression (Afonso, Fonseca, & Teodoro, 2021).

Van Slyke, Lee, Duong and Ellis (2022) highlighted several reasons for an uptick in workplace stress. One was the involuntary aspect of the shift to teleworking. Another was the possibility that the novelty of the work situation created uncertainty-related stress. Uncertainty has previously been linked with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Mann et al. (2000) recorded significant emotional impacts for teleworkers relating to demands stemming from being out of the office e.g. social isolation, effects on family life; and a forced reliance on digital communication with associated technical problems. Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison and Pinneau (1975), and Weinert, Maier and Laumer (2015) identified that “telework-characteristics isolation and information undersupply are significantly predictors of

work overload, work-home conflict, and role ambiguity in the teleworking context” (Weinert et al., 2015, p. 1417); they concluded that in a voluntary environment the intention to continue teleworking is negatively impacted by exhaustion and work overload. Whiting and Symon (2020) looked at the fascinating area of invisible work demands present in telework related to the high use of ICTs in work and wider society. They present the idea of invisible / not real work (e.g., work carried out in a domestic setting) in relation to visible / real work (e.g., work which is regulated and takes place in a public setting), and define work demands which generally go unnoticed by both the employer and employee. These work demands are termed digi-housekeeping and consist of all the small digital tasks carried out day-to-day, for example clearing email, sorting files and charging devices. Participants in the study reported carrying out many of these work-related tasks in their private time, perhaps while cooking dinner or commuting to work, and the use of digital devices which carry a combination of personal and work-related information (Whiting & Symon, 2020). These types of demands could prove important in teleworking as employees are expending time and mental effort without recognition or remuneration.

There is also the possibility of a positive relationship between telework and psychological wellbeing. However, limiting factors are the lack of research in this area and the timing of when it was carried out. Much of the research was carried out during lockdowns and during the initial stages of the crisis. Since then, societies around the world have begun to move into a phase where the virus, and therefore the telework situation, has become normalised. A sample of positive wellbeing outcomes during Covid-19 lockdowns in Spain, found satisfactory telework increased subjective wellbeing and performance. Rather than comparing teleworkers and non-teleworkers, the authors focussed on individual employee satisfaction with telework conditions and concluded that “positive telework outcomes lie in the employee’s satisfaction with the virtual working conditions” (Blahopoulou, Ortiz-Bonnin,

Montañez-Juan, Torrens Espinosa, & García-Buades, 2022, p. 2515). Interestingly, this study takes into account the idea that, across employees, the telework experience is more individual than common (Ipsen, van Veldhoven, Kirchner, & Hansen, 2021). Demographic factors may play a part. Scheibe et al. (2022) found higher levels of mental health, social integration, and resilience among older teleworkers, suggesting that younger employees engaged in involuntary remote work may be more vulnerable especially when demands increase. With so many factors in play there is no one solution. In just one example, sleep deficits in post Covid-19 teleworkers could be related to reduced physical activity due to being in the home environment, or less exposure to artificial bright lights during the daytime which help regulate human circadian rhythms (Mann et al., 2000). It seems likely there could be benefit in pursuing the link between the needs of the individual employee and recognition that telework may be an individual experience in future research.

Finding Balance

Wellbeing in telework in 2022 is a complex matter and the JD-R model can provide the framework on which to hang these moving parts. Van Slyke et al. (2022) found that “the effect of job demands on distress was substantially larger than the effects of job or personal resources on eustress” (p. 14). Clearly, researchers and organisations need to be able to identify demands when aiming to find a balance between demands and resources. In this study the JD-R framework determines demands and resources, needs theory defines employee needs, and coping theory can be utilised to create the process which aims to bring about employee wellbeing, productivity, and engagement.

Increasing employee wellbeing requires an approach which aims to determine which intervention options will best suit the situation and the individual. Interventions to reduce

distress can revolve around the individual, organisation, or the individual-organisational interface and can be implemented in both face-to-face and telework environments.

Research into employee cognitive approaches to telework demands reveals possible reasons as to why practical strategies may have positive wellbeing outcomes. Wortman and Dintzer (1978) suggested that an individual's cognition surrounding their ability to cope with the consequences of a stressful event is more important than their perception of the actual cause. Norman et al. (1995) found that emotion-oriented coping ensued when teleworkers perceived work-related stressors were outside their personal control. "The employment of emotion-focused coping strategies was found to be related to poorer psychological and job-related well-being, thus suggesting that the adoption of such strategies is unlikely to lead to positive adaptation" (Norman et al., 1995, p. 125). Those individuals who were optimistic about their ability to manage workplace stress events "would be more likely to engage in problem-focused coping strategies and to report better psychological and job-related outcomes" (Norman et al., 1995, p. 124).

One active, task-oriented approach which may support wellbeing is for employees to engage in job-crafting. Job-crafting enables workers to make changes to the way they do their jobs and the way they think about their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), encouraging a fresher and more positive outlook. Actively working toward solving a work problem is likely to result in increased wellbeing. Although results suggest that encouraging job-crafting behaviours could positively impact an individual's telework experience, it may not suit all employees. Job-crafting relies on employees having a certain level of autonomy in order to make changes to their job. In theory, constraints may be reduced in the telework environment, giving employees more autonomy than in the face-to-face workplace (Messenger, 2017). Wöhrmann and Ebner (2021) found that teleworkers have greater control over their work schedule than non-teleworkers, however this type of control related only to

timing rather than to control over the actual work. This suggests a tension between employee autonomy and the impacts it has on the employee, the organisation and other employees (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2007; Pearlson & Saunders, 2001; Sewell & Taskin, 2015). For example, increasing employee autonomy can result in increased responsibility which increases mental burden (Taskin & Devos, 2005). Weinert et al. (2015) suggest that autonomy “does not reduce work-home-conflict nor role ambiguity but does reduce the perception of work overload and indirectly influences telework-exhaustion” (Weinert et al., 2015, p. 1417). This study identifies information undersupply and isolation in telework as “significant predictors of work overload, work-home conflict, and role ambiguity” (Weinert et al., 2015, p. 1417). Therefore, it appears that the success of job-crafting in teleworking relates directly to the organisational policies, rules and supports put in place for remote workers.

Chapter 5: Leadership and Virtual leadership

Leadership is a tricky concept to define as there are potentially “almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (Stogdill, 1974, p. 7). Although this somewhat tongue-in-cheek comment was made nearly 50 years ago, the trend seems to have continued, with multiple definitions based around organisational and researcher focus. For this thesis, leadership is defined as “an interpersonal process in which a leader influences followers” (Dansereau, Seitz, Chiu, Shaughnessy, & Yammarino, 2013, p. 799). Rather than being solely a personal quality or trait, leadership is a process (Stogdill, 1950). The leadership process is described by the interactive influence between leader and employee (Bass, 1990); it is context-specific and when a context changes so will the leadership (Avolio, 2007; Javidan, Dorfman, Howell, & Hanges, 2010). The process is dependent on the acceptance of a specific individual as leader (Kotter, 1988), and the purpose of the process is for leaders and employees to work together to attain common goals (Stogdill, 1950). Silva (2016) adds that whether leadership is good/bad or effective/ineffective depends not only on the consequences of the process, but also how those outcomes are evaluated by others.

In terms of defining virtual leadership, for the purpose of this study the above definition stands, with the provision of a specific context:

Virtual leadership is the provision of leadership via information communication technologies to employees working in an environment other than the organisation's physical premises.

Definitions Within Definitions

There may be a need to delve a little deeper into the definitions involved within the topic of leadership. The first area is that of *leader* development versus *leadership*

development. Leader development could be thought of as building human capital and is focussed on the growth of individual leaders. Leadership development looks at building social capital through the development of many individuals (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014).

Secondly, there are the terms *leader* and *manager* about which there is a significant amount of literature, with little agreement about the differences between the terms. For example: leadership operates through persuasion and “focuses on the creation of a common vision. It means motivating people to contribute to the vision and encouraging them to align their self-interest with that of the organization” (Weathersby, 1999, p. 5). Management operates by commanding, it “is the allocation of scarce resources against an organization’s objective, the setting of priorities, the design of work and the achievement of results” (Weathersby, 1999, p. 5). However, in practice the same processes, models and behaviours may be shared between leadership and management (Yukl, 1989), and some authors suggest that leadership is not separate but simply an aspect of management (Mangham & Pye, 1991).

Early Development of Leadership Theory

Leadership theory development and research became popular in the 1930s and has continued to be examined and applied until the present day. The differing approaches often represent social ideas of the time and as society changes so does leadership theory. The importance of this area of research cannot be understated, as it impacts upon employees, leaders, and organisations, creating problems when the wrong leadership model is applied and generating far-reaching positive influences when the most suitable approach is chosen. Prior to the upheaval caused by the Covid-19 pandemic there was no specific urgency for the development of a new type of leadership and it is only now that the literature is starting to reflect a search for change in leadership theory.

Trait-based Leadership

Trait-based leadership was the earliest of the leadership theories and was first named in a series of lectures by Thomas Carlyle in 1840 as “the great man” theory. The idea is that great leaders are born with specific traits which mean that the “great man” will arise and lead when a relevant situation presents itself (Carlyle, Sorrensen, & Kinser, 1841/2013). During the 1930s-1950s many researchers supported the idea that these “born leaders” showed less anxiety, creating smooth functioning and greater satisfaction within group dynamics (Borgatta, Bales, & Couch, 1954). It was thought that people fell into two groups, those who were born with the superior traits of leadership and therefore had the ability to lead, and the employees who were naturally inferior. Leaders were identified as those with intelligence, emotional control and an ability to connect socially. While there has been recent research showing a moderate correlation between certain personality traits and effective leadership (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004), there is always the risk that those who believe their self-confidence, energy and dominance makes them a great leader will start neglecting their leadership role and focus on establishing friendships with their employees (Arnold et al., 2016), creating a lack of role clarity within the workplace. It is increasingly recognised that the search for a perfect leader can be two-sided, as employees naturally look for specific traits in their leaders regardless of whether the research says specific traits correlate to successful leadership. Nichols and Cottrell (2014) suggest that hiring the leaders that their employees want could positively impact an organisation’s success, and they indicate that employees may value interpersonal traits in lower-ranked leaders and more dominating traits in those who are higher up in the organisation.

Behavioural Leadership

Trait theory started to wane in the 1950s and over the following two decades was replaced by behavioural theory. Where trait theory is internally-based, behavioural leadership suggests that leadership behaviours can be learnt. Stogdill's (1948) expansive literature review of trait theory notes that leaders in one situation may not be leaders in another. Behavioural approaches better explain the idea that leadership exists in social situations and that people often take on both the roles of leader and employee. Fleishman (1969) submitted that the most effective leaders can increase the commitment and satisfaction of their subordinates through creating structure and considering the needs of their employees. Behavioural leadership can be looked upon as more egalitarian than trait theory.

Contingent and Situational Leadership

The 1970s saw the rise of contingent and situational leadership theories. These are underpinned by the idea that leadership is complex and dependent on context and environment rather than specific leadership styles, traits, or behaviours. The success of the leader is dependent on the correspondence between the situation and the leader's behaviours and actions (Arnold et al., 2016). The Vroom-Jago model of leadership is an example of contingency leadership, which identifies five leadership approaches including: autocratic, consultative and group-based and which considers the urgency, situation, and the importance of increasing employees' opportunities for development (Vroom & Jago, 2007).

The Full Range Leadership Model

The Full Range Leadership Model was developed in the early 1990s and defined leadership in three different ways, depending on the context and engagement of the leader with their employees. This model describes transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership approaches (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transformational and Charismatic Leadership

The new era of leadership developed in response to an increase in global instability, technological innovation, and rapid global change. Transformational leadership captures the idea that employees often possess untapped leadership qualities which can be utilised through the development of strong leader/employee relationships. This contrasts with previous unidirectional leadership models and instead takes into consideration the leader, employees, situation, and organisation. Leaders who find success in this style are likely to be those who prioritise constructive and strong relationships with their employees, providing motivation and inspiration. Employee productivity and organisational profit are achieved through a shared vision and development of resilient emotional bonds with employees (Rowold & Heinitz, 2007). Strongly engaged leadership (Arnold et al., 2016) as well as leadership utilizing employee shared decision making (Miller & Monge, 1986), have been found to correlate with employees' increased satisfaction and performance. The transformational model assigns a great amount of power to the leader and consequently there is a risk leaders may damage the organisation, or their employees, if they fail to understand the true nature of the leadership structure. A leader may dominate others without realising their behaviour is undermining relationships or goals within the organisation (Hollander & Offermann, 1990). Employees may also become dependent on their leaders, and while the relationship may be deemed positive in general, an indirect negative effect can be a reduction in employee creativity (Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013).

Charismatic leadership is strongly related to transformational leadership, but where transformational leaders lead by example, creating strong bonds with their employees to achieve outcomes, charismatic leadership is tied to specific personality traits; these leaders may lead their employees by connecting with them on an emotional level. Charismatic leadership can carry risks and may be linked to destructive leadership. Padilla, Hogan and

Kaiser (2007), propose that charismatic traits can be based around a negative or narcissistic self-image which can translate into power at any cost, with the charismatic leader using an autocratic approach to define and achieve their own ideological goals. Transformational and charismatic leadership both provide certainty and security to employees and are therefore popular in times of organisational or societal turmoil or change.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is task-oriented and based around the idea of leading by reward and punishment. Leaders determine the framework around which expectations are developed and either passive or active management by exception or contingent reward are then applied (Judge et al., 2004). This style of leadership may be useful when both parties are clear on the outcome and a combined leadership approach has been implemented in the organisation (Antonakis & House, 2014). Transactional leadership could be considered positive in that employees are rewarded through financial bonuses, pathways to career development or public praise; however the negative side to this style can consist of discipline, correction, demotion, and public humiliation. Transactional leaders are reliant on authority to motivate their employees and are considered leaders who can get the job done.

Laissez-faire Leadership

Laissez-faire translates from the French to “allow to do”. This type of leadership may be defined as a hand-off approach, or absence of leadership (Baker, 2013). Rather than freedom for employees, this style of leadership can create an environment ripe for workplace bullying, where employees may perceive that poor performance or bullying and harassment of co-workers is acceptable when their manager fails to intervene (Ågotnes, Einarsen, Hetland, & Skogstad, 2018). It could be argued that laissez-faire and destructive leadership both fall into the category of unethical leadership due to their negative impact on employees

and organisations (Pina e Cunha, Rego, & Clegg, 2010). However, while *laisse-faire* leadership is passive and inadvertently harmful, destructive leadership is intentional (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013).

Destructive Leadership

The term destructive leadership grew from an idea that the effectiveness of a leadership style is dependent on the situation (Fiedler, 1964). This idea highlighted the potential negative side to charismatic and transformational leadership and was named destructive leadership. This is defined as

volitional behaviour by a leader that can harm or intends to harm a leader's organisation and/or followers by (a) encouraging followers to pursue goals that contravene the legitimate interests of the organisation and/or (b) employing a leadership style that involves the use of harmful methods of influence with followers, regardless of justifications for such behaviour (Krasikova et al., 2013, p. 1310).

Padilla et al. (2007) describe a toxic triangle which may result in the development of destructive leadership in an individual. The leader may be exposed to negative early life events which may include poverty or abuse and which could serve as a catalyst for the leader's destructiveness. The second aspect entails employees who accept the leader's authority. Conformers may engage with the leader through fear and colluders will join the leader in their destructive behavior, perhaps because employees are looking for a sense of belonging, or are immature and have low self-esteem and are drawn to a leader with narcissistic tendencies. Employees may also be prepared to use a destructive leader to work their way up through the organisation. Lastly, an unstable environment which allows a leader autonomous decision-making without oversight enables the development of a destructive leader (Padilla et al., 2007). The effect on employees is negative and varied. Employees may

start to engage in socially learnt imitative behavior through watching their leader; they may exhibit bullying behavior or a reluctance to work; they may leave the organisation; they may experience physical, mental or family health problems outside work. Mistreated employees may also turn the tables, with destructive leaders becoming the recipients of revenge behaviors by their employees (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Destructive leadership behaviours include employee-directed behaviour e.g., bullying and abuse, organisation-directed behaviour e.g. theft, and self-interested destructive behaviour which involves the exploitation of others (Skogstad, Aasland, Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2015).

Leader-member Exchange Theory

The leader-member exchange model of leadership focuses on the dyadic relationship between employee and leader. These connections are a social exchange, which may be informal or acknowledged, and each relationship is unique. When mutual trust and loyalty are present the employee will benefit in terms of their career trajectory and performance (Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000). Those employees who are among the chosen or favoured benefit the most both personally as well as by gaining membership to a team of co-workers. However, problems may occur with workplace boundaries if leaders misjudge the relationship and become overly friendly with their employees. There is also the risk that employees who are not part of the leader-employee in-group miss out on leader support, leading to low satisfaction, engagement and poor performance.

Virtual Leadership

Virtual leadership is approached from different angles in the literature for different purposes. Each of these comes with a slightly different way to view how virtual leadership implementation and research is tackled. For example, some researchers see virtual leadership as both a role and an art, with context as an important factor (Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser,

Liden, & Hu, 2014), whereas others focus on leadership competencies (Maduka, Edwards, Greenwood, Osborne, & Babatunde, 2018). In reality, virtual leadership is a multidimensional phenomenon (Contreras et al., 2020) which differs from traditional leadership, in that there is no longer the option to rely on face-to-face communication. Leaders must be competent at interacting with their employees across a range of digital platforms (Roman, Van Wart, Wang, Liu, Kim, & McCarthy, 2019). Research on the development of virtual leadership is relatively scarce (Contreras et al., 2020), however studies are beginning to suggest that the subtle and complex ability to blend traditional and virtual communication methods to develop an inclusive style (Van Wart et al., 2019), promote employee interaction (Roman et al., 2019), consider cultural differences, and provide feedback for employees, (Contreras et al., 2020) is vital for the wellbeing of employees and the functioning of the organisation.

The most obvious difference between traditional and virtual leadership is distance. Traditional leadership operates in a face-to-face environment based around rules and understandings which have been developed since the beginning of the communal workplace. Virtual leadership aims to maintain many traditional leadership aspects, but the context is entirely different. With a change in the operating environment come changes to the way leaders must operate.

The physical distance between leader and employee may be one of the greater challenges within virtual leadership. Geographical distance separates leaders and employees and imposes challenges such as a total reliance on digital communication channels (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002), or the potential for new groups to form whose members exhibit exclusionary behaviour (Bos, Shami, Olson, Cheshin, & Nan, 2004). However, Bell and Kozlowski (2002) suggest that benefits may arise from geographical distance, including the ability of virtual teams to respond faster to competition through their ease of access to

workers with differing and relevant expertise, and the potential for organisations to have teams working 24/7 across different time zones (Avolio & Kahai, 2003).

The Development of Information Communication Technologies

Possibly the biggest change which has allowed the development of virtual leadership has been the development of ICTs. The rapid development of ICTs has changed many aspects of the way an organisation operates. This includes manager roles and activities and by 2008 managers were reporting increasing time spent communicating in meetings, by phone and through emails. Some managers were also experiencing the beginning of intrusion of work into the home (Birchall & Giambona, 2008). Prior to COVID-19, however, virtual leadership could be seen as a relatively niche concept in comparison with its vast uptake starting in 2020, although an extensive review by Avolio, Kahai and Dodge (2000) showed the importance of understanding the relationship between developing technology and the role of the virtual leader. This was at a time when ICTs had begun to affect systems we still use today, including the use of personal cell phones, email and the Internet, and brought the recognition that “organisational effectiveness is determined by how well the social and technical systems are designed to align with each other and the external environment” (Avolio et al., 2000, p. 618). The interrelationship of virtual leadership, the functioning of social systems and the increasing complexity of ICTs is still a relevant way to approach this topic today.

The development of ICTs allowed for the existence of virtual leadership, which is underpinned by the ability of managers to communicate with employees in an efficient and cost-effective manner while working in disparate locations. Van Wart et al. (2019) identify three main factors impacting the development of virtual leadership in relation to the use of ICTs. The first is the tendency to value oral communication among the main leadership skills

when it is the need for competency in complex digital communication that is now paramount. Secondly Van Wart et al. (2019) cite changing organisational patterns and the new skills and procedures driven by digital communication tools, which virtual leaders must learn, in order to engage with their employees. Finally, as technology develops so too does the need for leaders to maintain their competencies in this area. Virtual leadership is therefore affected both by the new generations of workers who have been exposed to digital communication tools, and the direct impacts of new ICTs such as numerous communication options and technology overload (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010).

Traditional Leadership Theories and Virtual Leadership

Research into virtual leadership paints a complex picture, as much of the research tends to focus on the Full Range Leadership Model which is relatively context-free. This points to a potential gap in the literature, because the changing nature of work suggests the need for a more nuanced and context-based approach. Virtual leadership retains connections to all past leadership theories. If the main difference between traditional and virtual leadership is context, then it makes sense to investigate this issue along with related impacts on both leaders and employees. This section looks to investigate how existing leadership theories apply in this new paradigm, both pre and post Covid-19.

Trait Theory

Research has suggested that traits such as social skills or professional expertise are not linked to competence in the virtual leadership space (Liu, Ready, Roman, Van Wart, Wang, McCarthy, & Kim, 2018). Instead, traits specific to working via ICTs such as “energy, need for achievement, willingness to assume responsibility, flexibility, analytic skills, continual learning, and technical skills” (Liu et al., 2018, p. 837) are most useful for leaders in the virtual space. These traits also transfer into other areas of leadership. These examples

suggest that virtual leadership research is likely to benefit from a more nuanced approach to specific skill requirements.

Contingent and Situational Leadership

Contingency theory does not appear a great deal within the literature in relation to the virtual workplace. Determining which leadership approach is best suited to a situation depends on three factors; the leader-member relationship, the task structure and position power (Zhang & Fjermestad, 2006). The virtual environment is considered more complicated due to communication challenges (Roman et al., 2019) and spatial and temporal work arrangements (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003). Therefore, two important questions are: “what contingencies differentiate virtual teams from traditional teams? [and] How do these differentiating contingencies impact on virtual team leadership?” (Zhang & Fjermestad, 2006, p. 278).

Transformational Leadership

Much of the virtual leadership theory post Covid-19 tends to focus on transformational leadership, which can be considered the most active form of leadership (Holtz & Hu, 2017) and may provide certainty during times of instability. One study found that transformational leadership in a digital context contributed to employee autonomy and improved job performance (Wang, Liu, Lee, & Chen, 2018). Benefits of transformational leadership might centre around the positive and trusting relationships formed between leaders and their employees, the care that leaders place on employee needs, and the utilisation of encouragement and reward to increase motivation. The authors go on to note that transformational leaders can “empower their workers by offering sufficient job autonomy” (Wang et al., 2018, p. 435), and help them to obtain a sense of achievement in their work. Similarly, Purvanova and Bono (2009) found that transformational leaders tended to adapt

their behaviours depending on the work context, and that leaders who increased their transformational behaviours within the virtual environment had higher levels of team performance compared to the face-to-face environment. However, variability in leadership behaviours may be related to knowledge or skills both in leadership and electronic communication.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

The value of laissez-faire leadership is limited when applied to virtual work. Research by Gross (2018) and Yang (2015) proposes that laissez-faire leadership may be considered as behavioural non-involvement, with possible positive outcomes. In the virtual environment this low leadership involvement might link to employee innovation, as this type of leadership

allows virtual team members to generate and explore ideas, provided hands-off support for future-oriented development, especially when members can self-direct themselves and perhaps are technically proficient and experienced, in which case, they should be left alone to their own devices (Gross, 2018, p. 197).

Laissez-faire leadership in this context is seen as promoting freedom, creativity, and autonomy.

Destructive and Charismatic Leadership

Charismatic leader emergence can be triggered by a crisis. Leaders may use a time of instability to increase their power (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), or employees may be more likely to attribute charisma to a leader within a unstable environment (Halverson, Holladay, Kazama, & Quiñones, 2004). Employees experiencing insecurity and uncertainty may become more receptive to the influence of this type of leader (Kets de Vries, 1989). Although charisma can be lost or gained over time (Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999), there is the chance charismatic leaders may impact negatively upon the organisation and employees while in

power. Destructive leadership in the virtual environment can mean increased employee demands including “a higher level of cognitive demands and more requests to use technology for work reasons during non-work hours, which, in turn, were negatively related to recovery strategies, which were able to decrease the risk of emotional exhaustion” (Dolce, Vayre, Molino, & Ghislieri, 2020, p. 14). Increased turnover intention is also correlated with increased employee maltreatment by a destructive leader (Schmid, Pircher Verdorfer, & Peus, 2018). In comparison to a destructive leader, one who is positive, and exhibits hope and optimism can positively impact both their organisation’s culture and levels of engagement of their employees (Schyns & Hansbrough, 2010).

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

In the telework/virtual environment, the lack of natural social interaction between co-workers and temporal and geographic distance can impede communication and connection between leaders and employees, while at the same time the virtual environment can be increasingly interdependent due the increasing complexity of work (Gross, 2018). Paying attention to leader-member exchange may be an important task for a virtual leader, as the lack of relevant regulations, policies, or communication can impact the work environment, e.g., allocation of resources. Leadership skills focussed on shared goals and knowledge, and the active building of team cohesiveness are needed (Gross, 2018). Employee needs in the virtual environment could be addressed by establishing communication/behavioural norms, creating and maintaining trust and confidentiality, and reinforcing the benefits of virtual team commitment and participation (Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007). Research proposes that when leaders “focus on activities that elevate members’ perceptions of competence (e.g., coaching or positive feedback)” (Goh & Wasko, 2012, p. 875) and avoid micromanagement, employees’ sense of self-competence and self-determination is improved, which in turn improves performance. Building the leader/employee relationship requires specific actions by

the leader to encourage trust and reduce uncertainty. These actions include “a clear definition of responsibilities, as a lack of clarity may lead to confusion, frustration, and disincentive ... guidelines on how often to communicate and, more importantly, inculcating a regular pattern of communication” (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999, p. 812).

Leadership and the JD-R

It is useful to consider links between leadership and the JD-R model, no matter how complex those connections might be. A recent systematic literature review proposes three different approaches: “leadership may affect employees namely by: (1) directly influencing job demands and resources, (2) influencing the impact of job demands and resources on well-being; and (3) influencing job crafting and self-undermining” (Tummers & Bakker, 2021, p. 1). Leadership is seen as strongly related to employee wellbeing and performance (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Tummers & Bakker, 2021), and supportive and connected leadership has been associated with decreasing job demands, increasing job and personal resources and, decreasing distress and improving work engagement (Schaufeli, 2017).

Seen within the JD-R framework, virtual leadership can be described as providing resources to employees to balance demands and resources, which leads to an increase in employee engagement and positive employee outcomes. However, leadership inhabits a slightly more complex reality, in that it creates demands alongside resources. Therefore, clarity surrounding identification of employee needs, management of demands and allocation of appropriate resources is extremely important for leaders. Sardeshmukh, Sharma and Golden (2012) separated telework demands into: time pressure, role ambiguity, role conflict, and lack of autonomy, feedback, and social support.

Before the pandemic, there was interest in how telework might reduce time pressure and exhaustion by the elimination of the commute to a physical office (Golden, 2006; Mann

& Holdsworth, 2003; Wilks & Billsberry, 2007), and in how stress associated with the need to be on time could also be reduced (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Working from home may allow greater freedom for workers in terms of scheduling working hours (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Wilks & Billsberry, 2007). This can be summarised thus: “as the extent of teleworking increases, time pressures are apt to decrease as individuals exhibit greater discretion to reallocate work periods and apply saved commute time reducing time pressure” (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012, p. 196). Post Covid-19, employees are no longer reporting time pressures linked to commuting, or the stress of being late to work, so these pressures may no longer be so relevant. This may have been predicted by Sardeshmukh et al. (2012) when they indicated that even though telework was associated with reduced time pressure, the effect was quite small.

These researchers point to other demands which have intensified, including the pressure for teleworkers to increase their output when working from home, and work/home conflict. Boundary theory addresses issues of time pressure by acknowledging that with teleworking, boundaries between home and work become blurred. Strategies which strengthen work/home boundaries include: outsourcing of childcare, only entering a home office during specific times (Greer & Payne, 2014), engaging in rites of separation to end the work day and rites of role transition to ease back into the family role, for example, walking the dog at a specific time (Fonner & Stache, 2012). Research is beginning to suggest that teleworkers with lower abilities to engage in behaviour which separates work and home suffer from more boundary violations and have less work/family balance which is in turn related to lower levels of flourishing and higher levels of burnout (Carvalho, Santos, Ribeiro, & Chambel, 2021). According to Carillo, Cachat-Rosset, Marsan, Saba and Klarsfeld (2021) other significant factors affecting employee adjustment to the telework environment include:

social isolation, followed closely by the need for appropriate physical and mental work conditions.

When leaders are able to engage in processes which help them to reduce demands and increase resources then their employees benefit with increased productivity and personal wellbeing (Bilotta, Cheng, Davenport, & King, 2021). Initiatives to build resources include organisational support (Barbieri, Balia, Sulis, Cois, Cabras, Atzara, & De Simone, 2021), management of workloads, monitoring completed work, having regular meetings, and building rapport (Golden & Fromen, 2011). Research by Sardeshmukh et al. (2012) supports the idea “that job demands are positively related to exhaustion, while resources are positively related to engagement and negatively related to exhaustion” (p. 202).

Using the theory that leadership directly influences job demands and resources (Tummers & Bakker, 2021), organisations can use the identification of employee needs to funnel resources to employees, addressing some of the demands either still relevant or newly created in the post Covid-19 telework environment. It seems likely that as communication technologies develop, they will start to address matters such as social isolation through quality communication, improving the all-around experience of teleworkers. This is likely to require a new approach to rules, regulations, etiquette, and attention to changing social norms.

Changes to management behaviour may also be needed. We can turn to literature on online learning to understand the success or failure of online communication systems. Traditional education (and arguably office-based work) is based around face-to-face interaction between people in physical proximity to each other (Bialowas & Steimel, 2019). One useful strategy for online learning is teacher immediacy, “nonverbal and verbal behaviours, which reduce psychological and/or physical distance between teachers and students” (Christophel & Gorham, 1995, p. 292). Improving communication is thought to

improve psychological and physical closeness between people (Mehrabian, 1968). Behaviours which enhance this feeling of closeness include nonverbal (facial expression), or verbal (asking questions or giving examples). When an instructor is well-informed and proficient in the use of immediacy behaviours, then participants “indicated significantly higher perception of instructor immediacy and social presence” (Schutt, Allen, & Laumakis, 2009, p. 135), assigning them the qualities of caring, empathy and emotional expressiveness. Instructors with greater immediacy behaviours “led to greater student motivation, affective learning, classroom climate, and teacher credibility” (Mazer & Stowe, 2016, p. 31) via video/audio communication. In many ways, telework aligns with online learning and an understanding of concepts such as immediacy may help make strong connections between individuals working together through video/audio technologies.

The improvement in communication technology quality and function is likely to impact stressors such as role ambiguity and role conflict, which serve as obstructions to work performance. Role ambiguity centres around the notion that “the work situation frequently presents conditions of ambiguity and conflict rather than clarity and harmony” (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek, 1964, p. 7). Role conflict can be defined as the incompatibility of roles assigned to an employee, or an overlap of role with another worker (Kahn et al., 1964). Improved interpersonal connection using effective technologies in conjunction with concepts such as immediacy could prove successful in the reduction of role stressors.

Additional examples of teleworking pressure points are: reduced feedback, a lack of social connection with managers and colleagues, and professional isolation, all of which are obstacles to telework adjustment and are exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Carillo et al., 2021). Mitigation may come from better quality and easier access to communication, as communication can increase trust in telework (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2007).

What do Employees Need in a Virtual Leader?

Bilotta et al. (2021) note that increasing job resources may not create much of a financial burden on organisations, but instead contribute to positive employee outcomes in relation to wellbeing and mental health. A needs analysis, conducted formally or informally, is a starting point for managers looking to identify relevant demands and resources. Resources might include an empathetic, understanding, and flexible attitude, clear expectations and managers making themselves available for check-ins with their employees. These authors also note the importance of considering the individual circumstances and reactions of employees (Bilotta et al., 2021).

Research by Roman et al. (2019) points to six overall virtual leadership competencies, listed as: e-communication, e-social, e-team, e-change, e-tech and e-trust. Although they do not stipulate that virtual leaders must be proficient in all areas, they do note the importance and interdependence of these competencies. The authors give an operational definition of virtual leadership,

E-leadership is a set of technology mediated social influencing processes intended to change attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and performance, which are based on ability to communicate clearly and appropriately, provide adequate social interaction, inspire and manage change, build and hold teams accountable, demonstrate technological know-how related to ICTs, and develop a sense of trust in virtual environments (Roman et al., 2019, p. 862).

The post Covid-19 virtual work environment has created an additional need for social support, which has positive effects on mental and physical health (Cohen, 2004) and can buffer the negative impacts of work stress on work/family life (Etzion, 1984). Managers can play a major role in the implementation of strategies which increase social support for their

employees. This might include revised approaches to feedback (Bilotta et al., 2021). Employee/manager informal feedback may be absent or limited, due to the lack of informal opportunities to discuss work e.g., a post-meeting walk back to the office, yet feedback has been linked to improved job satisfaction and performance (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Feedback could also become part of an employee needs assessment, benefiting both parties, as when employees feel heard, “i.e., feeling like one has the opportunity to challenge or influence a process or outcome at work” (Bilotta et al., 2021, p. 271), there may be an increase in positive employee outcomes in the areas of engagement, performance and commitment (Ng & Feldman, 2012).

In regard to employee autonomy, instead of increasing worker oversight a leader may provide a supportive environment with open communication so that people can get on with their work without the need for micromanagement (Bilotta et al., 2021). Research has suggested that engagement and productivity may be linked to greater employee autonomy (De Spiegelaere, Van Gyes, & Van Hootegem, 2016).

Leaders should be adaptable and able to respond to and manage change for the benefit of both employees and the organisation (Stout, Awad, & Guzmán, 2013) and leaders must focus on building cohesive teams in order to meet organisational goals (Contreras et al., 2020). One of the obstacles for virtual leaders operating in the telework environment could be a change in internal organisational structure, from traditional hierarchical structures to “flat decentralised structures” (Horner-Long & Schoenberg, 2002, p. 613) which “provide the speed of response and flexibility required by their business environment” (p. 613). This too will require the virtual leader to adopt a collaborative approach to interacting with peers and employees.

Recent work by Mayer (2021) pulls together research surrounding the impacts of emotion in the workplace (Barsade & Gibson, 2007) and the discussion of love and compassion within organisational life (Lazarus & Cohen-Charash, 2001), to investigate the concept of love within leadership in an increasingly technologized work environment. Findings of the study showed that the employee can be supported and the leader/employee relationship strengthened by a leader with a loving attitude, and that leaders who embody work love/compassion behaviour may help “the transformation towards accepting new work challenges and organisational transformation processes” (Mayer, 2021, p. 860). The concept of love/compassion in the workplace aligns with recent research which highlights the importance of relationship-oriented leadership, for example, an additional focus on teambuilding, individual consideration and coaching. This concept is underpinned by the changes experienced by employees, which include high job demands, changes in competencies and a shift in work/life balance within the telework environment (Schwarz Müller, Brosi, Duman, & Welp, 2018).

Virtual Leadership Training and Implementation

Virtual leadership development programs are now big business, obvious from the sheer scale of options available through a basic Google search. There is also a large amount of research in the areas of leadership training and development, which suggests there may be a need to dig deeper into terminology and definitions prior to further investigation. In terms of specific implementation and training models there are limited examples in the literature relating to telework and virtual leadership, especially post 2020, which may be due to the lag in the publishing of peer-reviewed studies.

With limited access to peer-reviewed implementation programs, it seems the best approach for organisations transitioning into telework and preparing virtual leaders is to

engage with research in the areas of employee needs, virtual leadership skills, behaviours and telework adoption, and perhaps environmental analysis. One of the studies which comes closest to the topic of implementation and training, focusses on defining the strong virtual leadership attributes required for telework (Liu et al., 2018). These include “energy, need for achievement, willingness to assume responsibility, flexibility, analytic skills, continual learning, and technical skills awareness of ICTs is critical” (Liu et al., 2018, p. 837). The authors also note that the organisational culture and vision can affect how these leadership characteristics are expressed. In conclusion, DasGupta (2011) comments that leadership goals have not changed, but the context for implementing them has.

The Present Research

The focus of this research was to explore how virtual leadership can support the psychological wellbeing of employees who are teleworking. The aim was to find out what employees need from their virtual leaders and to provide recommendations to managers and organisations who have employees working in a virtual environment.

Chapter 6: Method

Research Approach: Hermeneutic Phenomenology

A qualitative approach was determined by the author as most effective when investigating the intricacies of manager/employee relationships, support needs and the detailing of social, emotional, and work-related issues. This study is based around the research approach of hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a framework first developed by Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher, and considers that the source of all knowledge is human action (Packer, 1985), dependent on the understanding that the whole of knowledge is based on the parts, and the parts on the whole (Johnson, 2000). The researcher acknowledges they will never be in the position of detached observer, instead inhabiting the role of interactive interpreter, and the driver in the process of investigating the lived experience of an individual at a specific moment in time to grow human knowledge (Lavery, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on collecting thick rich details, including the subtleties which impact the psychological and physical characteristics of a person's working life. There is no universal truth to be uncovered within this type of research (Lavery, 2003), but rather an acknowledgement that only the individual may access their experience in that one moment in time and that all human experiences are unique.

Methodological Approach: Thematic Analysis

The design in this research is provided by a combination of hermeneutic phenomenology in conjunction with the methodological approach of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis supports the main aims and objectives in this research, by enabling the interpretation and expansion of the participants' lived experience and encouraging the researcher to connect with the process and the participant. The combined approach of the

investigate and interpret paradigms assists the researcher to categorise those experiences into overarching themes and ultimately generate insights and practical recommendations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis does not seek to test hypotheses, rather it looks for recurring patterns in the data during the analysis phase of the research.

Methodological Approach: Semi-structured Interviews and the Critical Incident

Technique

The aim of this research was to explore the lived experience of the employee in relation to virtual leadership. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is the framework which allowed for the investigation of this topic and collection of data. The CIT fits alongside both the philosophical approach of hermeneutic phenomenology and the methodological approach of thematic analysis. The CIT was developed for use in I/O psychology in the 1940s and 50s and published by Flanagan (1954), with the purpose of observing and recording human behaviour and developing solutions to practical problems. CIT is suited to qualitative research due to its unique combination of clear purpose and the “flexible set of principles which must be modified and adapted to meet the specific situation at hand” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 335).

Semi-structured interviews are a commonly-used method in qualitative studies as they allow the research to remain flexible within the interpretive paradigm (Draper, 2015). Both researcher and participant retain the ability to change the direction of the interview, creating a thorough record of a lived experience by collecting thick rich data. Spradley (1979) suggests that trust underlies the success of the interview process; as the researcher and participant build rapport, trust is created, and information is more likely to be forthcoming. The interview process involves a complex negotiation of sorts, whereby the questions and answers must originate from the participant, but the researcher must also steer them towards

topics which fulfil the aims and outcomes of the research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest one to two main questions followed up with five to seven sub-questions. Spradley (1979) notes that qualitative interviews may be formed in a variety of ways, including the use of hypothetical scenarios or descriptive questions which are general in nature, which may help to elicit large quantities of information expressed in a way most natural to the participant.

Procedure

This study used homogeneous purposive sampling as an initial way to select participants. This is a non-random technique, used often in qualitative research to select individuals who possess specific characteristics or traits (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In this case the study required individuals who worked from home and perhaps shared similar virtual leadership resources, allowing for the comparison of employee experiences. Snowball sampling was employed; recruited participants were encouraged to engage with others who fitted the research criteria and suggest they join the study as well (Ghaljaie, Naderifar, & Goli, 2017). The criteria were: the participant must be working fulltime in New Zealand, be over 18 years of age, speak English, have recent experience working remotely and, prior to Covid-19, must have been working primarily in a face-to-face environment.

The final sample size was seven, which served to allow the investigation of multiple lived experiences by considering the collection and analysis of large amounts of data, making the process more realistic in a tight timeframe. It falls within the suggested range of 2-25 participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2022).

Participants

Recruitment of participants was carried out using personal connections of the author. Potential participants who fit the criteria were approached and sent an introductory email (see Appendix A). A follow-up information letter detailing the purpose and aims of the research was sent to those who expressed interest in taking part (see Appendix B). Participants were informed that participation was completely voluntary, they were able to withdraw from the study at any time and they could contact the author to discuss any aspects of the interview process or resulting report. Of the seven participants, six were known to the author and one was referred by another participant. Table 1 details the participants' pseudonym, field of employment, gender, and age range.

Table 1

Summary of participant demographics

Pseudonym	Field of employment	Gender	Age range
Arabella	Field service provision	Female	40-49
Dominic	Heavy construction	Male	40-49
Lauren	Crown entity	Female	40-49
Michael	Education IT	Male	40-49
Nicholas	Local government	Male	60-69
Ophelia	Primary teaching	Female	40-49
Vincent	Primary industries	Male	40-49

Data Collection

Critical Incidents Interviews were used to structure the data collection. Interviews were developed by the researcher in consultation with the supervisor. Critical incidents are self-reported positive and negative incidents which transpired between the participant and leader, while engaged in a virtual work environment. Positive and negative critical incident questions allowed participants to focus on what was successful and unsuccessful about the way their manager operated within a virtual work environment. The positive and negative

versions of the question were not intended as mirror images of each other but used to help participants consider their work experiences in a holistic manner.

Initial background information was collected at the beginning of the interview, followed by the critical incident questions. The interview questions were:

- What is your current job title and what is it that you do?
- Who do you work for?
- What does your job consist of?
- What is your manager's job title?
- Are you working from home at the moment / when were you last working from home?
- How do you communicate with your manager?
- How often / how easy is it to communicate with your manager?

The main critical incident or event questions revolved around the two main questions:

- Can you tell me about a significant positive / negative event that happened while you were working from home and involved both you and your manager? Can you tell me about this event and what happened?

Follow-up or probing questions were then added to help elicit the participant's story while still focussing on the main aims of the study:

- What did you do to address the situation? What worked / did not work for you?
- What did your manager do to address the situation? What worked / did not work?
- What do you think your manager could have done differently?

The data collection phase coincided with another wave of the Covid-19 virus within the community, therefore the decision to conduct all interviews via Zoom video technology

was made. Zoom sessions were prearranged between researcher and participant for convenience to try to ensure a time with limited interruption. The researcher sent a Zoom invitation to the participant. At the start of the interview several questions were asked relating to whether the participant had read the information provided through email, whether they had any questions and if they could be recorded for the purpose of the research interview. This was considered confirmation of informed consent. The record and transcribe functions on Zoom were utilised. Immediately after the interview concluded the video file of the interview was deleted, the transcription was copied into a Word document and reviewed in conjunction with the audio file. This was listened to at least three times for the purpose of accuracy of the transcript.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used for the analysis of data, based on the six phases set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). One of the first considerations was the way in which a theme could be defined. This study does not rely solely on the prevalence of a particular theme but also looks to identify those themes which are seemingly of most importance to the participant. This fits an inductive approach, whereby themes are strongly linked to the data. The researcher investigates their chosen area of interest and identifies, codes, and develops themes directly from the data without early reference to the current literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Even with the aim of providing rich data description, some details may not be included, for example, due to lack of relevance to the research aims, or the limitations of report size, however the aim was to provide a rich description of the data within the scope of the research. This technique does not look for one singular truth, but instead looks to identify patterns and themes in the lived experiences of participants.

Braun and Clarke (2006) six phases of thematic analysis follow.

Phase 1: Familiarization with the data. Each interview produced an automated Zoom transcript which was then amended by listening multiple times to the Zoom audio file. To ensure accuracy, notes were made in relation to points of interest in the data. The audio file was transcribed as closely as possible. Interruptions, general chat, and any laughter were noted to help convey the emotional fluctuations within the interviews. The name/pseudonym of each speaker was included in the transcript so that it was immediately clear who was speaking. The transcript was then reproduced in table format so that notes could be clearly attributed to specific parts of each interview.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes. Initial codes were recorded in a table column for each interview. Codes were data driven and semantic in nature, whereby the themes were identified in the surface meanings of the data and organised in patterns to show semantic content, significance, and broader meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Where an area of interest was identified, more than one code may have been attributed to the same piece of data. A single data extract could have multiple facets of interest as participants would often reference multiple situations or needs at the same time, especially when the interviews took the form of storytelling. Many themes were repeated across several participants.

Phase 3: Searching for themes. The initial coding was reviewed and potential main themes, sub-themes and sub-sub-themes were attached to the data extracts. All initial coding and themes were kept, and short descriptions were added to each extract to help identify the possible themes. Several bubble diagrams were produced using main, sub- and sub-sub-themes so that possible patterns could be explored in a visual manner.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes. The refining process continued through the transposition of main, sub- and sub-sub-themes onto Post-it Notes, along with short descriptions of each extract. The use of a large wall space and colour coding allowed for a

largescale reproduction of the initial bubble diagram, which was reviewed and refined multiple times. This part of the process saw some of the less significant or less relevant extracts removed, put to one side, or merged into other themes.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes. Main themes were defined with several sentences linking themes to the research aims. Data extracts were assigned a main, sub- and sub-sub-theme. Once the connections had been made amongst data extracts there was a process of reorganising the data in a way which most clearly represented the aims of the study. This progressed to considering Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs along with Alderfer's ERG Theory of Motivation as fitting the thematic structure of the findings. Theme names and definitions were solidified, and direct quotes were trimmed to contain the most pertinent data.

Phase 6: Producing the report. The final part of the process involved writing up the results. Data extracts were described and linked to themes to support the research insights and recommendations.

Validity

This study addresses validity by focussing on the methodological integrity of this research. The aim was to collect a sample manageable in size in relation to the scope of this project (Smith et al., 2022). This allowed for the collection of thick rich data but also meant findings were not generalisable. Homogeneous purposive sampling ensured participants who could speak to the topic were selected (Etikan et al., 2016). The thematic analysis was carried out with close attention to Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure.

Reflexivity

The reflexivity of the researcher is an essential aspect of thematic analysis. Reflexivity can be understood as the researcher's practice of identifying their own impact on, and interaction with, the expression of a participant's lived experience, specifically through

their own practices, values and opinions (Runswick-Cole, 2011). The researcher is consciously aware of the subjective role they play in the collection of data, sifting the received information through the filter of their own bias and lived experience with the aim of identifying overarching themes and developing recommendations in the analysis and interpretation stages of the process. The researcher may also positively influence the development of the relationship within the interview process by focussing on the cultural norms of the participant and maintaining a continued awareness of reflexivity. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach states the worth in a researcher's context and background, with Lavery (2003) determining that researchers are unable to remain purely observational or separate. Thematic analysis encourages the researcher to detail their own lived experience. The author recognises the impact of their own standpoint within this piece of research.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical aspects of the study were considered early in the process and a peer review process determined the research to be low risk. A Low-Risk Ethics Application was submitted to, and approved by, Massey University's Human Ethics Committee.

Informed Consent

A written summary was provided to all participants and included any potential risks, details around how data would be collected and stored, the research aims and objectives, along with the assurance that their anonymity would be maintained during and after the study. These details were reviewed over Zoom with each participant. Participants gave verbal consent to be recorded and acknowledged they understood the conditions of participation.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

This study used pseudonyms to connect participants to the data collected. The document linking the participants' real names and pseudonyms was kept in a secure and separate location to the main collected data, and was only able to be accessed by the author. Participants were notified the data collected for this piece of research would not be available for further research projects/other researchers, in line with the original intent of data collection, participant anonymity and agreements over data use. Audio recordings were transcribed and then deleted, and identifying information was not included in transcripts (Massey University Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa, 2015).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

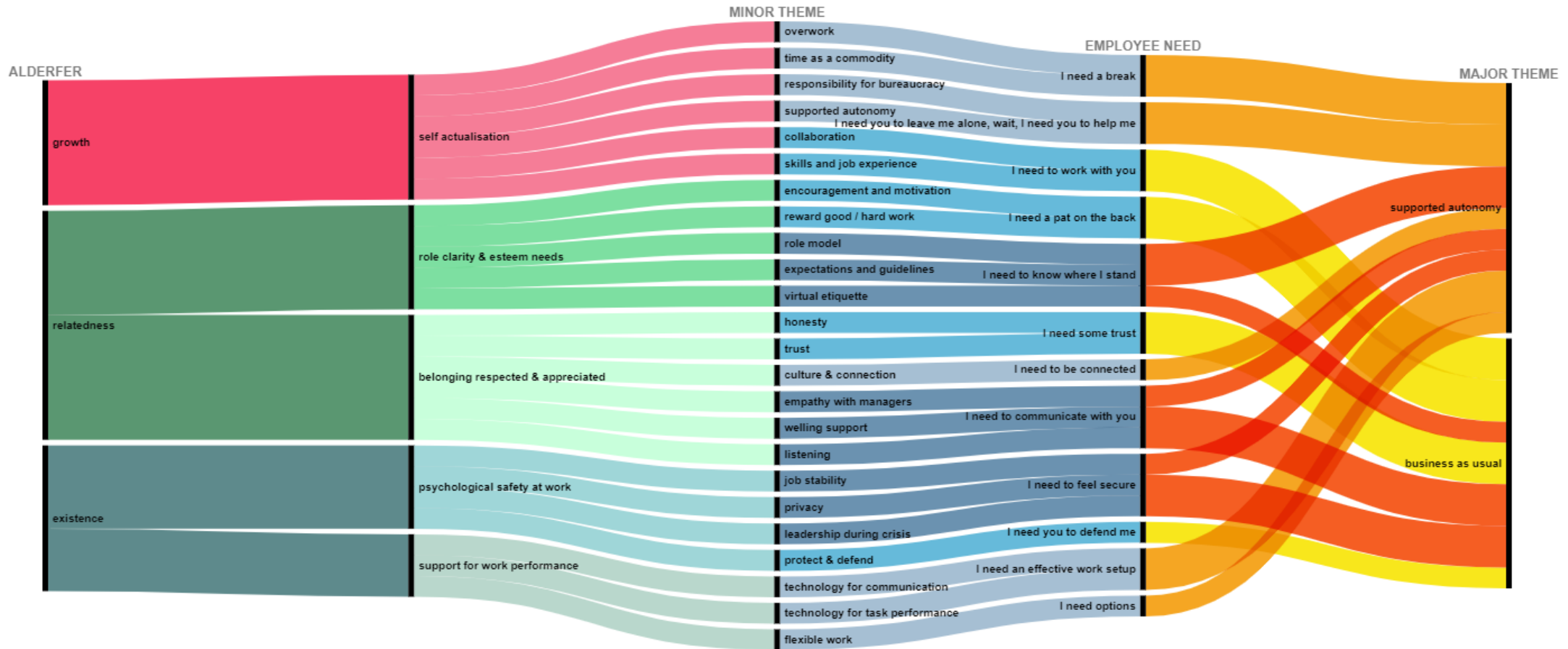
The author of this research acknowledges the importance of ensuring the accommodation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi issues and the preservation of tino rangatiratanga. An inclusive approach to people of all cultures living in New Zealand was adopted, with the aim of avoiding potential reinforcement of negative stereotypes within New Zealand research. This thesis has a relatively narrow focus, and time and scope restraints meant an inability to focus on the identification of participants by their culture and therefore a Kaupapa Māori Research framework was not used within this research.

Chapter 7: Results

This study was based around the lived experiences of employees in a virtual work environment and the needs-based framework emerged during the data analysis phase. Initial coding identified a range of work demands created by the move to teleworking and virtual leadership, and the resources that were required to meet the demands. Further analysis identified themes and an overarching framework that fitted well with Alderfer's (1969) classic theory of three basic needs: Existence, Relatedness and Growth. This conceptual framework, with some modifications to fit the teleworking context, forms the basis of the findings, see Figure 3 for overview of identified themes.

Figure 3

Overview of Identified Themes



Theme 1: Existence – Resources to Support Work Performance

At the most fundamental level, Alderfer identified Existence needs, or the physiological needs for survival. In the teleworking context these become participants’ basic needs for the resources to perform their jobs effectively. The theme and sub-themes are summarised in Figure 4 and Table 2.

Figure 4

Overview of Theme 1: Existence – Resources to Support Work Performance

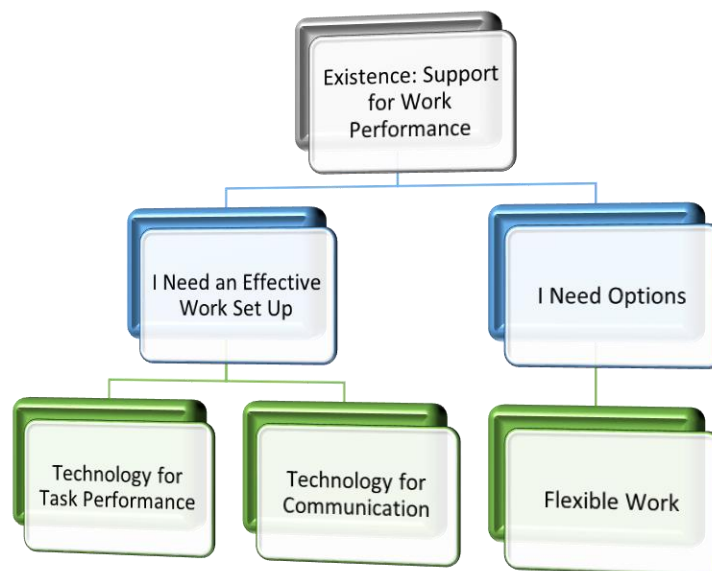


Table 2

Overview of Theme 1: Existence - Resources to Support Work Performance

Sub-theme	Minor theme	Description
<i>I Need an Effective Work Set Up</i>	Technology for Task Performance	Experience and guidelines surrounding ease of set up and compensation for equipment and resources supports productivity at a fundamental level.
	Technology for Communication	New and up-to-date technology (including Internet connectivity) avoids potential for miscommunication.
<i>I Need Options</i>	Flexible Work Options	Flexible work options and clarity around these options will help to retain / recruit staff in the long term.

Sub-theme 1: I Need an Effective Work Set Up

Technology for Task Performance.

The transition to a telework environment happened almost overnight during the early stages of the pandemic. Participants reported that they had been required to switch from working in well-appointed offices to working at the kitchen table, or a spare corner of the livingroom. Employees recounted learning to work in new ways with new technology and reached the realisation early on that effective task performance needed a well-resourced technological set up. Interviewees noted not only the need for physical resources, but for clarity on what would be provided, to whom and when, and how to use it. Employees listed office furniture and equipment, software, and computer hardware among their needs.

The managers, they didn't have an insight of what is sort of required to enable or help staff working from home. A good example is, [family members] made my table to work from home.... because [Organisation #4] did not allow us to move even a small rubbish bin or furniture, (Nicholas, manager in local government).

In contrast, Arabella found setting up at home to be relatively easy.

When we first went into working from home mode, my company was pretty relaxed. So at the first lockdown they actually allowed us to take home our devices, like monitors and keyboards and whatever set up you want, (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

While employees had different experiences with resourcing, all reported that they had a right to be well resourced either by the organisation or by being compensated for having to buy their own equipment. Supply rules needed to be made clear, processes had to be fair and formal systems and accountability were required.

One of the things that I discussed with my manager recently was, if we wanted to make working from home a little bit more formalized, the question was around, okay, it needs to be a fair process for everybody. If you wanted people to work from home, is the company going to contribute in terms of payment, financial wise, to set up their working from home areas, (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

Unfortunately, Arabella's request for clarity did not meet with support from her manager. While the manager reportedly agreed that compensation to some degree was warranted, he did not want to be involved in the day-to-day processing of applications for any financial support.

And so he's going to leave it up to me to decide who actually might need some financial support to set up their working from home environment (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

Technology for Communication.

With virtual working, team members and managers were forced to become totally reliant on digital communication technology. Global changes to communication processes have led to the rapid development of new communication technologies. A range of tools now facilitate telework and interviewees relied upon their managers to ensure the most up-to-date and appropriate technology was available. It was also important that managers and employees used communication technology in the ways which were most effective. For example, not using video on a call may mean the manager or employee missed nonverbal cues which in turn could lead to miscommunication.

If you're not engaging with all the tools available to you, whether it is sharing through a video or being able to take the time to create the time and space to have a discussion, then through rushed discussions, through not understanding what the

other person is saying, how they're feeling you miss all the social cues of good engagement, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

Communication technology included good quality Internet connectivity. Inadequate Internet connections or poor-quality video or audio caused frustration and misunderstanding, and the need to change the communication channel to one which might be clearer but less suitable.

.... he [the manager] was talking from a place where he had broken connectivity, the quality of the discussion was not there, he'd miss two or three words in every sentence that I said, and if those two or three words were the important words, then he got the wrong context of what I was saying.... [so] you jump onto a FaceTime session with someone which becomes sometimes informal, but you're trying to use every medium available to you to get that right, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

Sub-theme 2: I Need Options

Flexible Work.

The preference for either full or part-time telework was evident in nearly all the interviews. One participant reported working four or five days at home per week, others were more flexible and chose to work from home when it suited them, and one was ready to operate from home again full-time if another lockdown required it. Arabella saw it as a part of the manager's role to offer her and her colleagues this option.

... actually most IT people even when you do interviews with new people, they do actually ask for the option of working from home, so if you don't offer that, we might lose people (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

Whether or not this option will be offered and in what form will depend on the organisation's needs but there may be little consensus as to what the needs are or how to meet them. For example, there was a difference between what Arabella and her manager saw as best for the organisation.

.... so, my boss and I have got different views on this. He wants us to be in the office most of the time whereas I've got the view that we'll have some days working in the office because you're doing it for the team dynamics and to talk to people and the option to have working from home on the other days. So, I said to him can we look at options for maybe two days a week mandatory in the office.... And then the rest of the day we can just alternate working from home, but across everybody so it's fair, but he's of the view that no, no, three days a week working in the office, (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

Theme 2: Existence – Psychological Safety at Work

The psychological need for safety and protection for teleworkers sits closely alongside basic physiological needs and is therefore contained within Alderfer’s category of Existence. The theme and sub-themes are summarised in Figure 5 and Table 3.

Figure 5

Overview of Theme 2: Existence – Psychological Safety at Work

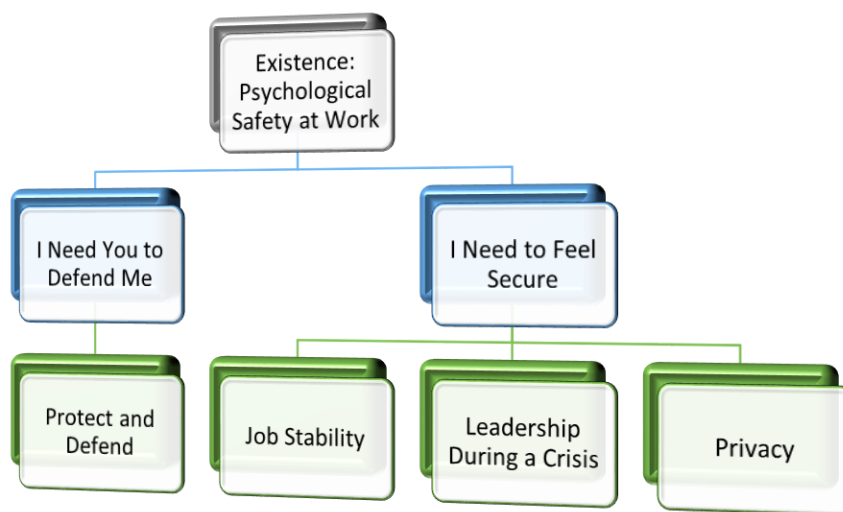


Table 3

Overview of Theme 2: Existence -Psychological Safety at Work

Sub-theme	Minor theme	Description
<i>I Need You to Defend Me</i>	Protect and Defend	Managers who use their power to defend / protect their employees in difficult situations tap into the underlying psychological need for safety at work.
<i>I Need to Feel Secure</i>	Job Stability	Employees provided with job stability / security during times of change are more able to engage with their work.
	Leadership During a Crisis	Managers who go above and beyond to meet employee support needs are highly valued by those who work for them, especially in times of crisis.
	Privacy	The virtual environment can be seen as both public or private and may need different manager support depending on the job / viewpoint of the employee.

Sub-theme 1: I Need You to Defend Me

Protect and Defend.

Psychological safety at work falls into the category of essential needs and several employees tied their expectation of defence or protection directly to their manager. Their positive and negative experiences were ultimately related to the need for support during difficult times or situations. Lauren described an incident where her manager asked her to carry out a piece of work, and when it garnered a negative reception by senior management, her manager let her take the blame, coached her to take mental health leave and essentially scapegoated her.

.... it all just all just turned to shit and blew out of proportion and became basically 'Lauren's meltdown' and then [the manager] stood me down for two weeks, some mental health leave.... and then it looked like I was having a nervous breakdown.... and I was like, oh, awesome so now I'm going to be the fall guy for everyone else's...because everybody else just freaked out and then I became the one with the problem I just basically took the fall for it, (Lauren, manager in a crown entity).

This was contrasted by Ophelia's acknowledgment that there could be problems at work, however it was important her manager stood up for her and supported her when there was an issue.

She's [the manager] really easy to get along with, but she's very open, nothing's ever a problem So, I just kind of, if there are problems (and there are lots of them) and it's a major one, she'll pretty much drop what she's doing and come If there's issues, she'll go into battle, (Ophelia, primary school teacher).

A sense of protection was also linked to the managers who operated in a flexible manner, taking circumstances into account when difficulties arose rather than strictly relying

on rules and policy. This could be classed as emotional support and an acknowledgement by the manager of the complexity of work / life stresses on the employee. Lauren described the stress of operating in the home environment early in the pandemic when many people were not set up with adequate tech and support. Something went wrong and her manager supported her by letting her off the hook, excusing the problem because of the difficult circumstances.

....and it was just hard because we're like, 'oh God we totally fucked-up' but he [the manager] was just like, 'don't worry about it it's all good'. Like a moment of reassurance when he could see that we were doing our best, and you know you can't be there in person and see the person. They just give you that reassurance in person.... he just reassured us, and he could see the effort that we were putting in, (Lauren, manager in a crown entity).

Sub-theme 2: I Need to Feel Secure

Job Stability.

Safety also came in the form of job stability, with two interviewees noting this amongst their biggest stressors. One lost his job during lockdown and the other talked about the feelings of security which came from having a financially stable organisation. Management was seen as a vital part of ensuring a secure work situation for employees.

.... having the company stable was a good thing, and working for an organisation that has money, can support the employees, you know they won't, I think like some organisations that were reducing staff hours, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Leadership During a Crisis.

Leadership during a crisis highlights those managers who took on additional responsibility or acted with a level of independence perhaps occasionally outside their official

remit to provide a sense of security to their employees. Early in the pandemic one manager was recorded as coping well with the crisis and took on the responsibility of actively working to understand what was happening, funnelling the most up-to-date information to employees. This took place alongside organisational implementation of new government health and safety regulations; the result was an easing of pressure on employees who did not feel the need to be as involved in the developing situation and could instead focus on their job.

.... he [the manager] took interest in the Covid, in what was happening as well he seemed to know what was happening in the community, and things like that. I talked to a few people after that situation who seemed to know very little or had to go away and check what was happening nice sort of that you're not having to spoon feed information to them [the management]. Yeah, so it's always good, (Dominic, manager in heavy construction).

Leadership during a crisis was also noted as important in relation to individual issues within the telework environment. In a virtual workplace, where employees' contact with the organisation may be reduced to a limited number of people, the manager was relied upon to act in a manner which recognised problems and provided support to the employees by resolving matters outside their employees' control. Nicholas referred to the need for intervention in relation to a lack of specific technology to do his job and noted his appreciation of his manager's ability to act autonomously, making decisions rather than referring the issue to a higher level of management.

Where we find that there's not enough traction, or not enough urgency given to equipment or something that we need. Then we include our team leaders and managers to escalate matters to their managers for a quicker turnover Most of the times you know [when] it's on compassionate grounds, when we need matters of

personal interest then we escalate to my team leaders or managers, but they're quite readily available to make a decision on the spot there and then, rather than escalating to somebody further above. So, that is quite good, and, also, for matters related to health and wellbeing, they are quite supportive (Nicholas, manager in local government).

The sudden declaration of a pandemic thrust many organisations into an urgent reorganisation of staff to cope with the new demands of their entire workforce working from the home environment. In one instance the manager was specifically employed in a new role for the duration of the Covid lockdowns as a single contact point for the workers. This specialised appointment assisted the interviewee, Dominic, to cope with the feelings of panic surrounding the initial stages of the pandemic. He credited the newly assigned manager for reducing stress levels through his humour and ability to successfully connect with him and other workmates.

.... as you can imagine, the panic and 'Oh-My-God we've got someone potentially with Covid working with us' he [the manager] was on the phone regularly seeing how everyone was going and making sure that everything was working well he seemed to be the conduit for everybody back to the home company He was a really good guy to work for, yeah, a really jovial guy, which was awesome. So probably a good person to go through that whole Covid process with, because he was more of a real people person, (Dominic, manager in heavy construction).

Privacy.

Privacy was associated with a feeling of security through an employee's need to have a separate space to engage with their manager. The telework environment was seen as both private and public. Arabella noted that in the office environment it could be hard to find a

private space to talk to her manager, but the virtual environment solved this problem by providing privacy through the way people communicate one-on-one virtually using communication technology.

.... being at home gives me more freedom because when I'm in the office I would be running around looking for a private room to [talk to the manager] I'll be standing outside the building and trying to do that so being at home actually gives me more freedom to say that because I know that no one's around me and I can just say whatever. (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

The contrasting perception was that ICTs created a very public situation which involved continuous group video calls in the virtual work environment. Vincent addressed the issue of privacy in this situation, where he talked about the disagreements that played out between his manager and himself and the need for both parties to take that interaction to a one-on-one communication to avoid the discomfort that arises from a public conflict.

.... I do not tend to get into confrontation-type discussions with my superiors in group sessions.... If I have to disagree then what I will generally say is 'that's an interesting perspective, let's talk about it offline' which gives both parties, the opportunity to take a step back, instead of being in a group session where it creates a whole lot of angst across the group and across the two individuals involved, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

Theme 3: Relatedness – Belonging, Being Respected and Appreciated

Relatedness needs in the telework environment were concerned with interpersonal connection and relationships and the importance of feeling a sense of belonging, respect, and appreciation. The theme and sub-themes are summarised in Figure 6 and Table 4.

Figure 6

Overview of Theme 3: Relatedness – Belonging, Being Respected and Appreciated

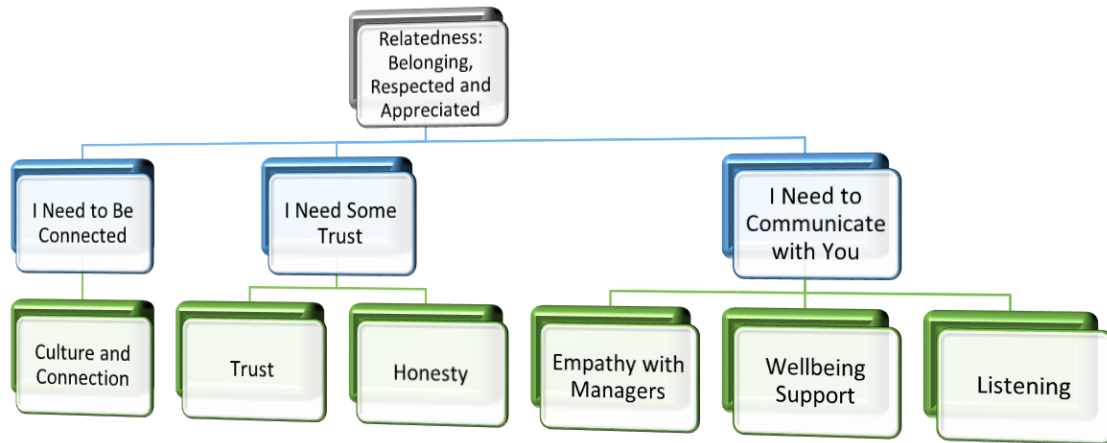


Table 4

Overview of Theme 3: Relatedness – Belonging, Being Respected and Appreciated

Sub-theme	Minor theme	Description
<i>I Need to Be Connected</i>	Culture and Connection	Managers help to create organisational culture; organisational culture supports connection between employees and managers.
<i>I Need Some Trust</i>	Trust	Trust is a two-way-flow and both parties need to commit to this idea. Managers without the trust of their employees risk toxic / disconnected relationships with them.
	Honesty	The managerial traits of honesty and transparency are closely aligned with destructive leadership when missing.

Sub-theme cont.	Minor theme cont.	Description cont.
<i>I Need to Communicate with You</i>	Empathy with Managers	Employees are searching for a way to connect with their manager. The realisation that managers are only human, combined with failure on the managers part may lead to disillusionment on the part of the employee.
	Wellbeing Support	The telework environment is lonely for some employees; managers can help mitigate this through organising social contact between manager / employee and employee / co-workers.
	Listening	Listening is a skill not always held by managers. Those who manage to practise it well (even if forced to through new ICTs) will benefit the manager / employee connection.

Sub-theme 1: I Need to be Connected

Culture and Connection.

The change from office-based to a virtual work environment impacted many underlying aspects of an organisation's functioning and a change in culture was noted by several employees. The theme is circular in nature; managers help to create organisational culture, while organisational culture supports connections between employees and managers. In one organisation where Friday beers had permanently stopped, even though many people were back in the office, the manager was reported as actively trying to build a new culture in the workplace through team-building exercises and new programs focussing on involving employees in the leadership process.

So generally, half or less of the office is actually there in the office but there's got to be something around the connectedness of people... We're trying to actually create a culture because I'm now involved in the leadership side of things. But going for Friday beers obviously that stopped, that's not a thing, and it's not come back. We've had a team building exercise recently. So, the manager has instigated that, which is

great, and senior management have been doing these leadership workshops (Michael, manager in education IT).

The importance of culture was highlighted by the same employee later in the interview when he reported joining a neighbour at her house to work during lockdowns. They worked in their own separate space and then came together for breaks and after work drinks. This was described as creating their own small organisation and culture by the employee and shows how deep the need for human connection is.

So her and I, even though we were working in the same household, we were literally in our own offices for the whole day, we would come out at lunchtime so you would have that social interaction in the morning, coffee, and then at lunchtime and then in the evenings you parted company and then on the Friday we would actually have a drink after work so tried to instigate a bit of a culture, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Sub-theme 2: I Need Some Trust

Trust.

The theme of trust was found throughout the interviews when investigating employee needs from a virtual leader. Trust was often conceptualised as a two-way flow. A situation of high trust between manager and employee needed to be developed and maintained. This should support the productivity of the employee without the need for constant supervision by the manager. Vincent reflected the idea that once this level of trust is reached the employee's need for autonomy is reduced or eliminated, instead entering a partnership of sorts.

If you've got a trusting relationship with your manager then they expect that you're being productive when working from home... everyone in a trusted relationship will

find autonomy to actually get on with stuff being done, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

Employees who lacked mutual trust with their manager risked ending up in complex and potentially toxic relationships, making it difficult to work in a productive and engaged manner. Trust was identified as one of the cornerstones in a successful employee / manager relationship. The following example illustrates a relationship with limited trust and its undermining of a sense of connection within the organisation. Lauren had a complex relationship with her manager and initially stated that he had trust in her to do her job without the need for intensive supervision.

.... he [the manager] lets me get on with my work without interfering, he doesn't micromanage, he has high trust, he's available and responsive when I need him. But he also has high expectations, (Lauren, manager in a crown entity).

However, she also noted that, as he did not take criticism or tolerate an employee making him look bad, her trust in him was extremely limited. The result was that instead of working with her manager, she accepted the problem and worked around the manager.

.... that's how it is with a lot of very senior people [in management] because, you just got to accept that about them and work around it and kind of manage them ... I always think you have to understand how to handle them rather than try and change it, because there's no point trying to change it, (Lauren, manager in a crown entity).

She went on to detail how she felt about the issue of trust after an incident where she described her manager as scapegoating her when a problem occurred at work.

.... it taught me that I can trust him [the manager] with certain things but not with everything I have enough trust in him to support me through my work if he knows

that I'm doing my best where I couldn't trust him, is if I was making him look bad
(Lauren, manager in a crown entity).

Honesty.

The managerial traits of honesty and transparency were highlighted by two interviewees and showed the need for managers to maintain specific leadership practices in the virtual environment to avoid the pitfalls of destructive leadership.

He's [the manager] a massive under the bus thrower.... They [manager and another senior executive team member] didn't actively conspire, they both just stayed silent.... massive, massive undermining of psychological safety and being safe to speak,
(Lauren, manager in a crown entity).

Counter to this negative example is Vincent's manager who collaborated with openness and transparency to create a positive employee/manager interaction.

.... our conversations were quite open and transparent.... we were able to talk to each other, take a step back, listen to each other and then define the intended new outcome in a very transparent manner, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

Sub-theme 3: I Need to Communicate with You

Empathy with Managers.

The rapid switch to a virtual workplace may have highlighted for some employees the human side of their manager. Lauren made the point that managers are human, they were also dealing with stresses related and unrelated to work and that when a problem arose with a manager sometimes there was a chance to learn from them and the situation.

They're [the managers] are all just as fallible as me and as sensitive as me.

Everyone's just human and it's not a problem. And you know I was pissed with [my

manager] for a long time, quite a while, but I got over that as well because then I was like well, he's just protecting his reputation he's just human. And it makes you understand other people's trigger points and boundaries and all that kind of shit which is helpful, (Lauren, manager in a crown entity).

Employees were searching for a way to connect with their manager, so the realisation that managers are only human, combined with failure on the manager's part may have led to disillusionment on the part of the employee. The follow-up statement was made by Lauren after becoming disconnected from her manager. She turned to her business coach for support, developed the opinion that her manager did not care about her as an employee and from that point on only expected limited support from him.

... and that's the thing he won't stick up for you, but again, you've just got to play the game. So, I think if you expect too much, these are just human beings who have their own, yeah. So, you got to be smart enough to play the game and that was what I learnt, with my coach. My coach said to me. Don't care so much... Because she knows him, she worked with them previously she's like 'yeah, he doesn't care about you or anybody'. So, she gave me a really good perspective on it, (Lauren, manager in a crown entity).

The ultimate test of empathy however may be a friendship with the boss. Even when participants talked about their need for support and connection, friendship was only mentioned once. This employee suggested that the prior friendship with her manager resulted in open communication channels between them, and a relatively easy transition to working in the virtual environment.

... I actually knew [the manager] from way back so they're kind of a friend outside of work he is very, very, good If he's not available, he'll always call me back on

the phone and stuff like that so the channel of communication with my manager during that time was much, much the same as he would if I was in an office and he would just pop up and come and talk to me, (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

Wellbeing Support.

The connection of the manager to the needs and wellbeing of the employee was emphasized as essential to the employee/manager relationship. Two of the interviewees mentioned how important regular contact was in supporting their wellbeing. One of the employees experienced regular Microsoft Teams check-ins with his manager, which served to connect team members and provide a sense of support, counteracting the pervasive stress that employees, families, and the wider community were experiencing.

There was no qualms in terms of getting people online and getting everybody communicating. Teams check-ins were established so that everybody felt connected at the end of the week because of all of the worry on families and things like that, so I think that's probably the thing that stands out for me the most was just that get up and get it running, everybody being connected, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Social contact with team members and managers was missed. Some employees recalled a sense of loneliness and that they missed casual social interactions where people bump into each in the physical office environment. The following quote comes in the summary phase of the interview, where the employee reflected on some of the most important aspects of support that were missing from his manager in his virtual work experience.

You know it's those water cooler conversations and those coffee conversations that you have face-to-face when you are in a physical environment, but when you are in an

isolated environment and you are by yourself, then you don't have the time, so you have to create time to actually do that for me it's a regular connect that would be better. Sometimes, I don't have a direct connection with my manager, except when something's needed or some clarification's required, you know, it gives me all the autonomy that I need, but sometimes just a quick check-in to say hey how you going, how's your day been, hope you're doing okay, etc, would go a long way, (Vincent – manager in primary industries).

A virtual workplace lacks many of the more traditional ways that employees connect, and some found they were down to one point of connection. This was illustrated by Ophelia, who, while working from home, only had direct contact with her immediate manager. The more senior management was not in contact with staff and the feeling was that even a social or casual check-in from them would have provided an additional level of support and comfort.

.... we got some good feedback from her [direct manager] but never from senior management we never had Zooms with management our three dropped off [the planet] completely, (Ophelia, primary school teacher).

Listening.

The study found that employees valued listening skills as they helped to mitigate the lack of social connection which can come with the physical separation of people in the telework environment. The virtual leader was required to take on a role that involved more of a personal connection with their employees. Dominic said that when he was working at home, he needed his manager to understand and connect with him while being approachable and taking a personal interest in him as well.

.... I think just by being really approachable and his [the manager's] attitude, he's quite jovial and he's quite easy to talk to. Yeah, that would just be being an approachable person and I suppose he was, yeah, he was the person that would listen and ask questions, I suppose, which was nice, also he seemed to be taking an interest in who you were and what you did, (Dominic, manager in heavy construction).

The new technology developed in the face of Covid lockdowns served the purpose of forcing one employee's manager to listen to him over video calls, as initially the new Zoom technology only let one person at a time talk and this was an improvement over his experience communicating with his manager face-to-face.

The telecommunications have gotten better as a result of Covid. Zoom was actually ahead of the game with its multi-party viewing and things like that and it forced you to listen or forced other people to listen, including my manager. There was no choice but when the person is talking that has something to say, they have to be listened to it provided an opportunity for people to listen, which is not always what necessarily happens in a face-to-face environment, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Theme 4: Relatedness – Role Clarity and Esteem Needs

Relatedness also carries the need for role clarity which helps to underpin and develop the need for esteem. The theme and sub-themes are summarised in Figure 7 and Table 5.

Figure 7

Overview of Theme 4: Relatedness- Role Clarity and Esteem Needs

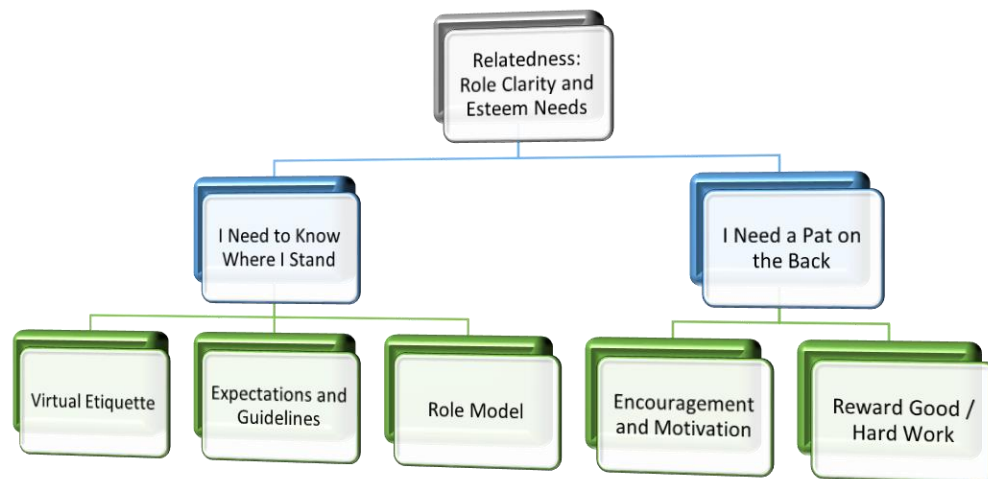


Table 5

Overview of Theme 4: Relatedness- Role Clarity and Esteem Needs

Sub-theme	Minor theme	Description
<i>I Need to Know Where I Stand</i>	Virtual Etiquette	A new working environment requires new work etiquette as technology, behaviour and social norms change. Employees need clarity around changing social norms and how to cope with new ICTs. Lack of clarity was linked to confusion and miscommunication.
	Expectations and Guidelines	Expectations and guidelines sit alongside etiquette. Employees need clarity around what their manager expects of them and how their success / failure will be measured. Also linked to confusion and miscommunication.
	Role Model	Employees like to see their manager involved and connected within their own work environment.
<i>I Need a Pat on the Back</i>	Encouragement and Motivation	Employees value a manager with a positive and friendly approach who is collaborative rather than dictatorial.

Sub-theme cont.	Minor theme cont.	Description cont.
	Reward Good / Hard work	Employee reward is defined as acknowledgement rather than remunerative. Participants wanted their managers to appreciate their work.

Sub-theme 1: I Need to Know Where I Stand

Virtual Etiquette.

Confusion over what is expected in the virtual environment was apparent with some interviewees. A new working environment required new work etiquette as technology, behaviour and social norms changed. Employees needed clarity around changing social norms and how to cope with new communication technologies, and lack of clarity was linked to confusion and miscommunication. Arabella discussed needing to inform her manager of her whereabouts, while her manager's nonchalant and trusting attitude produced feelings of confusion and insecurity.

.... I do follow the rules, you know, like when I have to go for an appointment 'oh hey, by the way, sorry I'm going to be out for half an hour because I need to go to physio' that's one of things I'm pretty good about. My boss never enforces it, he's like 'no, no, no you're fine, I trust you. You just go and do whatever, I trust you'. I'm like 'I have to tell you, you know, because when you call me and I'm not available', (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

This lack of clarity can be seen later in Arabella's interview when she detailed how her manager expected her attention at a moment's notice both inside the office and in a virtual environment. She felt that she couldn't always give her manager instant attention within the office environment but was able to cope better in the home environment because she was less distracted and could avoid picking up his phone call if she was busy.

.... it feels like I'm more engaged with him working at home than compared to when I'm in the office I don't have the luxury of switching off [in the office] because you know other things are happening in the office ... so he will feel offended because if he did say to me, 'oh it's fine that you don't want to talk to me'. I say, 'no, no, it's not that I don't want to talk to you it's just that I'm in the middle of something', (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

Participants reported needing a new way of working which could include the way they dressed, the need to avoid overworking or missing breaks, and understanding that they do not need to remain at their desks at home but can take small informal breaks which would also occur in the office environment.

... there needs to be a series of etiquettes out there in the world, etc, where people can feel comfortable that they can operate in that way. And it's okay, you don't have to be dressed up in your suit every day. Working from home comes with the fact that at some point in time you'll go and feed your kids and play with your pet, and go and do a little chore. So, it's okay to do that because that comes with the flexibility of working from home, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

In addition to new guidelines around workplace behaviour and schedules, there was the need for new ways of communicating. Issues with video technology were commonly reported e.g., inconsistent use, missed social cues or body language, miscommunication and in the case below, an inability to understand the underlying tone of the conversation. Although Arabella felt slightly uncomfortable using video technology, she understood its importance when trying to catch the subtleties of online interactions.

.... if we do not use a video call, you can't actually tell whether the situation is in conflict or not.... I do find that different managers would like to do a video call, but a

lot of the other managers, we're on Teams but we don't do a video call so, it's just mainly voice, (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

Vincent felt that the problems of video call use may be solved if managers ensured virtual communication etiquette rules were clear and followed. This included turning on video so that body language and social cues could be observed.

.... you're leading a meeting; it is only polite that you turn your video on and you're communicating with your full expression. Especially when you are in a situation where you are leading and being directive and being challenging, people need to know where you have clarity of thought and you're not questioning them, where you are being supportive of them, or where they've made statements that you have not understood that they know that you have not understood and there is a conversation that happens, to get to that level of clarity right, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

New etiquette was also linked to the development of new social norms, in this case the use of video calls as a replacement for face-to-face communication. One participant suggested employees who avoid video calls could be thought of as hiding from their manager, when both are responsible for engaging with these new social norms.

.... I believe it's on both parties, it's on the managers and it's on the person participating also, right, so you can't hide away from your manager, I believe there are a lot of people who basically hide away from their managers. So, as soon as the manager turns the video on it becomes the responsibility of the other party to reciprocate as a social norm to participate in the conversation, right.... you don't have stated policy from a work perspective, but that's why it's a norm. A norm is just

what-do-you-call, a normalized way of behaviour, that two parties should lean into right, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

Expectations and Guidelines.

The virtual work environment calls not only for new workplace etiquette, but also a new set of guidelines and expectations so employees know how their success / failure will be measured. This would also help them maximise their efficiency and decrease their levels of pressure and stress. Michael needed clear objectives to operate.

I'm not a high needs person in terms of needing stuff from the organisation or feeling that I need things, work objectives just need to be clear, (Michael, manager in education IT).

The benefits of a relaxed relationship with a manager were also reported, but alongside this leadership approach was the requirement for clarity, guidance, and agreement with the employee, especially relating to specific pieces of work.

.... I think it really depends on the relationship with the manager we can be casual and then we can be quite formal as well so the boundary is sort of little bit blurry with my manager.... there's not much that I would want more of from my manager, if anything, I would prefer that maybe we are less casual, to some degree, but in some situations I would prefer it it would be nice if we can have a bit more guidance and Yeah, clear direction... it depends on the situation, sometimes it's better that he leaves me to just run with it but sometimes it would be better if there's a little bit more clear direction and agreement that I'm going to run with this, (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

.... the way we do things sometimes it's a little bit too easy going for my company anyway just because of the nature of it it's not like a big corporate thing that's got like

documents, you know, policy for Africa and not like, oh no you can't do this or you can't do that, for us it's that kind of semi-formal on certain areas so it's good and bad, simple things ... But most of the time is also because I may not have understood what the policy meant. Sometimes I think he [the manager] does just make it up, (Arabella, manager in field service provision).

The use of clear objectives and lines of accountability were effective when implemented. For example, Vincent described the process of working with his manager during lockdown to create a new job role.

I did a job change in the middle of Covid. And it was all done through remote ways of working. It included the process of defining my new job in my new role and going through a consultation process for that I suppose at the onset, both my manager and I were very clear about the longer-term objectives that both of us were chasing. Him from a broader information technology perspective about the team structure and organisation that he was bringing to light and myself for what I was trying to create clear lines of accountability for, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

The need for clear work objectives to ensure deliverables and productivity was also identified as important as flexible working options became more commonplace.

even though we can all be back in the office it's a case of making sure that everybody has clear work objectives and deliverables so that it can be somewhat monitored in terms of are people working a full week, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Role Model.

Good role-modelling could be considered essential for leaders in both virtual and face-to-face work environments. Role modelling was described as a manager taking on

difficult aspects of an employee's job to help, rather than passing them off. Ophelia's manager shared the workload and supported her staff in a direct and tangible manner.

.... she's just a nice person and she walks the talk, I guess, at the end of the day. She does the hard yards and takes on some of the hard kids as well, rather than just fostering them out to everybody else, (Ophelia, primary school teacher).

Sub-theme 2: I Need a Pat on the Back

Encouragement and Motivation.

Employees needed support around work productivity through motivation, encouragement and rewards provided by their managers. Managers who provided positive acknowledgements for individuals served to motivate staff in the telework environment.

He [the manager] comes up with those remarks that sort of credits you. So I guess that's a positive attitude that he has. You have to motivate your staff and give a tap on your shoulder, (Nicholas, manager in local government).

The employee may also feel that when the manager can engage in a less instructional and more friendly manner, then the interaction is improved. Dominic suggested that having a collaborative approach encouraged people to engage in their job.

.... So rather than being instructed, being more encouraged to do something.... It feels more friendly and more approachable It's more about you probably haven't had any input and if you're still doing what needs to be done. It's just how they've gone around and asked you to do something. You've still done it kind of thing. I suppose you feel like you've had a bit more input and a bit more say I suppose it's trying to encourage people and engineers to be doing what they should be doing, (Dominic, manager in heavy construction).

Reward Good / Hard Work.

Reward was also important for some of the interviewees. Remuneration for successful work was not mentioned. Instead, participants discussed the importance of the acknowledgement of work in both private and public forms. Lauren described a time during lockdown when there was a failure to deliver a piece of work, and her manager acknowledged that even though the work was not a success he was aware of all the hard work that she and her team had put in.

We probably had a laugh about it afterwards, one of those moments of oh-my-fucking-God, what a mess, but he [the manager] was very aware of the effort and the hours that we were all putting in to try and get everything sorted, (Lauren, manager in a crown entity).

Michael's manager put in place regular catchups online where the week was reviewed, and successes were celebrated. This became an ongoing permanent aspect of their workplace.

We had a weekly check-in to try to celebrate the successes for the week, talk about what's going on. We still do it as well because not everybody has returned to the office full-time, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Theme 5: Growth – Esteem Needs

Esteem needs also flow through to the area of growth, where Alderfer believes the human urge for personal development is situated. The theme and sub-themes are summarised in Figure 8 and Table 6.

Figure 8

Overview of Theme 5: Growth – Esteem Needs



Table 6

Overview of Theme 5: Growth – Esteem Needs

Sub-theme	Minor theme	Description
<i>I Need to Work with You</i>	Skills and Job Experience	Managers who have knowledge surrounding their employee’s role as well as their own are well positioned to provide quality complementary support specific to the employee and to recognise when they should make changes to their own work situation.
	Collaboration	Employees need their managers to be more collaborative, less hierarchical and to be engaged in a common goal. This made employees feel valued.

Sub-theme 1: I Need to Work with You

Skills and Job Experience.

A manager's awareness of their own and their employee's skillset, was identified as helping both create a stable and supportive work environment as well as initiate change within a telework environment. This was demonstrated by one manager who operated in a way which was complementary to her employee; both employee and manager were able to achieve more together with these differing approaches.

.... she's [the manager] just a nice calm kind of.... she's way more cruisy than me. So, I'm way more militant, I like things organized and that. Whereas she's a little bit more relaxed and go with the flow. So we're quite a good match, (Ophelia, primary school teacher).

Managers who were not engaged with their employee's skillset were shown to have trouble supporting them. In Nicholas' case his manager did not have the correct legal and technical knowledge, which left him to take on these issues in his organisation to prevent future organisational liability.

.... that is where I sort of take everything on my shoulders to ensure the future, any inputs for the legal sign offs, are all in order. These the managers and our technical team leaders, they don't have that sort of background, they might have an understanding, but to get into the deep side of the legal aspects, that's where their knowledge is lacking, (Nicholas, manager in local government).

Managers were also found to be able to make personal change if there was recognition of a need for change. Michael's manager was engaged in self-improvement and aimed to change her management style to help ensure future retention of staff.

.... the boss is a hard taskmaster, you know.... she's a hard doer. She's trying to change, she's trying a new management style, she's been a bit more pleasant of recent times I think she's trying a new management style. I think she's forcing it and seeing if the outcomes change You've got to watch the revolving door of people and resources and making sure that you retain your employees... In a market where resources are available and for a reasonable rate, then you can drive people a little bit harder, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Changes to the global economy due to the pandemic, sudden differences in organisational priorities and a shift to telework may have refocussed some managers on becoming more fiscally oriented. Ultimately, when the focus shifted away from employees to a wholly financial objective, the manager / employee relationship was found to suffer. Nicholas said that when his manager and more senior management, were caught up in the bottom line, the reality of the employee's situation was then ignored.

Our general manager's motives all the time [is to] generate more income. So that's his focus, to show that now we are generating these quarterly surveys, they do every three months. They want to paint a good picture.... They want to show to their managers, hey look, these are the so many consents that we have granted, they want to get rosy pictures ...and this is what they want to portray but not telling them the trouble and the problems that we all know, (Nicholas, manager in local government).

Collaboration.

Participants reported a positive increase in the relationship with their manager when they were able to engage in a more collaborative and less hierarchical manner. The manager and employee who could maintain a more collaborative relationship could aim for a common goal, and when working towards that common goal the mechanism for success was

cooperation. When not engaged in a common outcome, the result could be achieved in a virtual work environment but at the expense of time, effort, and the additional complication of coordinating multiple meetings between two very busy schedules.

.... beyond the collaboration type of the approach, the deep dives that we did through brainstorming, through asking questions of each other to understand the rationale and the reason for how we define the job roles, that was quite open. We were able to bounce ideas off, we're able to disagree with each other, where there was tension that we needed to close out, and where we needed to really have the conversation to drive accountability and degrees of detail And both of us were invested in the outcome together. That helped, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

Collaboration was also recognized as a vital part of the communication managers had with their employees. Allowing employees to have their own input to the job was a positive step towards making someone feel as though they were a valued part of the team. Ophelia appreciated the positive and fun aspects of her manager, which fitted well with the job description of working with small children.

Our Zooms have always been very positive, positive communication, proactive, fun. So, yeah she's a very good manager, she lets everyone have their say, (Ophelia, primary school teacher).

Theme 6: Growth – Self-actualisation

Self-actualisation is the pinnacle of the growth phase, and this is evident in the telework context when employees identified needs relating to autonomy. The theme and sub-themes are summarised in Figure 9 and Table 7.

Figure 9

Overview of Theme 6: Growth – Self-actualisation

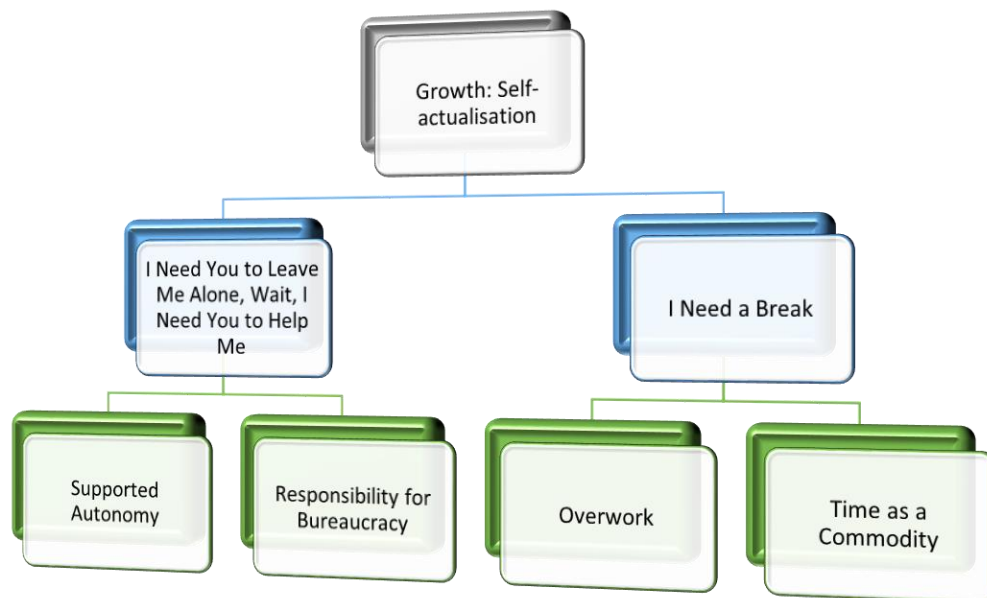


Table 7

Overview of Theme 6: Growth – Self-actualisation

Sub-theme	Minor theme	Description
<i>I Need You to Leave Me Alone, Wait, I Need You to Help Me</i>	Supported Autonomy	Employees need autonomy in the workplace and do not like to be micromanaged; at the same time they need support from their managers.
	Responsibility for Bureaucracy	Employees quite often define this as the need for managers to take on responsibility for the bureaucracy in the job.

Sub-theme cont.	Minor theme cont.	Description cont.
<i>I Need a Break</i>	Overwork	Telework sets up some employees for overwork. Managers need to be aware of the risks and create strict rules relating to availability and working hours for both managers and employees.
	Time as a Commodity	Employees teleworking may be seen as continually available. Managers should be organised, aware of the employee's schedule and respect their time, as time is a valuable commodity.

Sub-theme 1: I Need You to Leave Me Alone, Wait, I Need You to Help Me

Supported Autonomy.

One of the stronger themes to emerge from the investigation of virtual work was the idea of supported autonomy. This term described the way that employees required their manager to support them to create a sense of autonomy relating to their job. This looked different for different people and had two fundamental aspects. First, the manager was seen as an engaged and active participant in understanding the intricacies of the employee's job and in setting up the employee to successfully do their job in an autonomous manner. The second aspect centred around the need for managers to clear the way for their employees by tackling the bureaucratic aspects of the employee's job. Michael described the importance of being able to engage with his manager and then be left to carry out the work. Being able to work uninterrupted was a positive aspect of working from home for him.

.... there were probably periods where I was able to actually work on the things I needed to work on, what matters, slightly uninterrupted. So, the times in which I was engaging with my manager were generally positive going through the work that had been done or discussing next steps. And so, it's probably a bit more what I would call

asynchronous where you can have a communication online, and then you've got, in theory, you've got time to actually do the work, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Managers could also get in the way and there was a suggestion that the best course was to engage in a collaborative approach with the manager and allow them to set timelines, then for managers to enable the employee to get on with the work. This contributed to the feeling of trust and respect this employee had towards their manager.

I suppose I'm used to having people that have expectations and set expectations or give you timeframes. And that's what we really need to say, look, I need this done by here. Not having somebody chasing you every five minutes or telling you, you must do this it's, it's more, if you're asked, and you feel like you have some input, I suppose you may not have any input but you feel like you've had it, (Dominic, manager in heavy construction).

The complexity surrounding the need for this type of support from managers was illustrated by an employee's statements referencing the interactions she and her colleagues had with her manager during the first series of lockdowns. The employee recognised a change in the way her team and manager interacted during this time of uncertainty and described that they were all relatively subdued and seemed mainly in need of instruction, rather than the relaxed interaction which normally happened in a face-to-face environment. Initially they needed instructional support.

.... we were basically just listening to the instructions. 'This is what you need to do' da da da we definitely needed some direction and they needed to set expectations for what we needed to do, (Ophelia, primary school teacher).

She later went on to add that teachers need the space to get on with their job, and managers who get in the way of that have a very negative impact.

Micromanaging teachers is a recipe for disaster I mean, she's [the manager] just be confident we're all adults. Like we're all in our 40s, we know what we're doing, we're professional. We don't need to be, you know, don't check up on us. If there's a problem we will go in there and ask, (Ophelia, primary school teacher).

Responsibility for Bureaucracy.

The second important aspect of supported autonomy could be found in the widely-held belief amongst this group of employees that their manager should deal with all the administrative aspects of the job, so that they could get on with doing what they were employed to do. The ability for his manager to identify his attributes in the workplace was a part of this for Nicholas, as the manager was then able to understand what it was that he needed help with.

He [the manager] realizes the attributes that I have, and doesn't interfere day-to-day, he knows that I am well-equipped and how I can manage a one-on-one situation. So, it's only the administrative issues, which the manager has to be dragged into. That's where the matters are escalated to him, (Nicholas, manager in local government).

Dominic mentioned his manager going to meetings on his behalf, which demonstrated his manager as competent and actively involved.

.... and I didn't have to buggerise around and do that, he was filling in with going to the meetings and doing that side of it which is good, (Dominic, manager in heavy construction).

Michael referred to his manager as “running interference” whereby the manager took on some of the more bureaucratic aspects of his job with the specific intent of supporting him.

Irrespective of working from home or not it's about a manager's, it's about running interference and making sure that you know you're supported in the work that you're doing, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Sub-theme 2: I Need a Break

Overwork.

The telework environment is a place where overwork happens easily, often without managers realising that this is affecting staff. Some participants were aware of the tendency for employees to keep working if they saw that others around them, including their manager, were continuing to work outside the job's set hours.

... when people believe that someone else is working, and they need to be working because there's questions and answers and other things to be done, then there's a bit of a disconnect and it creates that social imbalance. Just because you are online - I have to be online. That's not the right balance, right, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

Michael saw the solution as ensuring regular communication, which would ensure not only that work objectives were met but also that employees were not overworked.

Working from home it's about, not necessarily being contacted frequently, I guess just checking in on the wellbeing would be something just at a personal level. Just to make sure that it's not all about the work and the objectives, it's about making sure that you're not overworked, (Michael, manager in education IT).

Time as a Commodity.

The virtual work environment can be even more intense for some employees than a physical environment. This may be due to the inability to disappear from the workplace for a

break or the lack of social interruptions which could serve as a psychological break from work. Vincent pointed out that his time is valuable and, due to the pressures to do his job as efficiently as possible, his manager needed to be organised. The manager needed to be on top of the employee's schedule so that he was not interrupting work, and his manager needed to be organised and prepared for interactions so that time was not wasted.

... Your manager needs to be organized in a way that they know where you are, and where to find you and how to get contact of you, if that's required, but also organized. If it's like, hey, I am going to meet with my manager twice a week because you're working from home and that's the thing that you have got going ... in that time twice a week he's well organized, (Vincent, manager in primary industries).

Ophelia had a great relationship with her manager, but also reported her manager's main fault was not passing on important information promptly.

... communication would be the biggest one [negative issue]. On time, do it quickly, don't leave things lying around. I suppose in that regard, that is the thing, that she can be a little bit slow to pass on information, (Ophelia, primary school teacher).

When too many managers were involved in decision-making the process could grind to a halt and did not have a clear and timely outcome.

... So, I raised this just recently, latest three weeks ago. And too many line managers, and no one makes a decision on that. No one wants to make a decision, (Nicholas, manager in local government).

Thematic analysis identified the two major themes of business as usual and supported autonomy. Within these themes were multiple related sub-themes which reflected what the interviewed employees needed from their virtual leaders within the telework environment, approximately two years post the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. These themes fitted well

within the framework of psychological needs set out by JD-R, by which demands and resources could be identified and implications for theory, practice and future research could be established.

Chapter 8: Discussion

Global work practices changed the moment the World Health Organisation declared a pandemic at the start of 2020. The result was a proliferation of telework and all the benefits and challenges that come with a new way of working. Aotearoa New Zealand was not immune to Covid-19 lockdowns, with around 40% of all employed people working from home early in 2020 (Stats NZ, 2020). Given that hybrid work looks set to become a standard option for employees negotiating their present or future jobs this topic seems to hold importance relating to both immediate research and longitudinal studies. The plan for this research came into focus as the author talked to friends, family and strangers about their experiences working away from the office. One thing became clear, everyone had the same story, and everyone had a different story. The problems people expressed ranged from the lack of a comfortable office chair to the inability to have any time out due to the barrage of online meetings, and the thread which drew everyone together was the actions of their manager. The results revealed several major findings. Employee needs in the telework environment fell into two main areas, that of business as usual and supported autonomy.

Business as Usual

Business as usual describes employee need themes which are likely to exist in both face-to-face and telework environments, although may also be impacted by the telework experience.

Early in the pandemic many organisations were struggling to pivot and engage with the changes happening around them and this led to employee pay cuts, reduction in hours and job loss (Fletcher, Prickett, & Chapple, 2022). A related underlying sense of instability was evident in participant testimony in direct discussion of the need for job and financial stability.

Also present was a pervasive need for psychological safety and security, manifested in the value and sense of trust and reliance placed on those leaders who were seen as going above and beyond their remit, protecting and defending their employees.

Apparent within this study is the possible identification of leadership styles by participants. For example it seems likely some managers displayed a level of transformational leadership by increasing their authority to carry their employees through the crisis (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). This can be seen in managers who made unilateral decisions relating to assignment of equipment and technology during the initial stages of lockdown. Interestingly, when combined with the appropriate digital skills, transformational leadership has recently been shown to correlate with greater efficiency and employee satisfaction in relation to leadership during Covid-19 (Antonopoulou, Halkiopoulos, Barlou, & Beligiannis, 2021), although it was difficult to see if this was the situation with the managers of these interviewees.

Privacy was also linked to security within this study. In an office environment a level of privacy is reasonable and accepted. However, within the telework environment, privacy was found to relate to the permeability of boundaries (Chamakiotis et al., 2021) between work and home and was mainly driven by the high reliance on ICTs, with the high potential for overload (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010). Examples which appeared in this data centred around issues such as back-to-back virtual meeting scheduling and contrasting benefits of not having to find private space within an office.

Participants' description of their experiences in association with relatedness may reflect an increase in the need for belonging, respect, and appreciation in the virtual workplace. This could also be defined as a form of workplace love/compassion, as suggested by Mayer (2021) who found that leaders who displayed love/compassion toward employees

in a work environment were able to strengthen those relationships, which in turn benefitted employee and organisation. Participants showed they were both looking for this specific type of connected support by expecting their manager to walk-the-talk with honesty and trustworthiness and by showing a genuine interest in the participants. This is supported by the idea that psychological safety is based around trust, respect and caring (Edmondson, 1999). Interviewees demonstrated a reciprocal approach by giving love/compassion in ways perhaps not seen as often in a face-to-face workplace through their acknowledgement that the managers were human too and often struggling with similar issues.

Intriguingly, many of the participants demonstrated a consistent contradiction relating to reporting positive and negative experiences with their managers, as well as a reluctance by many to express negative opinions, even when their encounters had been negative, traumatic, or they no longer worked with that manager. Support for the love/compassion concept may be considered if viewing these findings in the light of organisational power dynamics, which would consider the employees engaged in perspective-taking behaviour. Perspective-taking has been linked to the social positions of altruism and helping behaviour (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997). An alternative way of exploring the issues of relatedness between employees and leaders centres around a shift in traditional power structures due to the global environmental jolt (Covid-19), ensuing organisational disruption and perhaps the shift to a new power equilibrium (Bird, 2021; Sine & David, 2003) where employee needs increase in importance (Contreras et al., 2020). Horner-Long and Schoenberg (2002) also allude to the flattening of the organisational hierarchy and the need for virtual leaders to adopt a more collaborative approach. This is reflected to some degree in the results of this study as collaboration was evident in several minor themes, relating to the need for employee/manager collaboration as an aspect of motivation and encouragement, as well as a way for managers to

engage in a productive manner with their employees, thereby getting the work done and saving time. The act of collaboration was also viewed as a way a manager showed they valued their employee.

Social isolation figured strongly among participant needs; this came in the form of both social connection with co-workers along with connection to their manager and resulted in a sense of loneliness or disappointment if not supplied. Social connection and support exist through the physical nature of the office environment, as people have opportunities for spontaneous and social interaction (Golden & Fromen, 2011), but this disappears once the organisational connection points reduce and there is no longer that opportunity for spur-of-the-moment contact with others. One participant specifically mentioned the lack of casual connection previously enjoyed in the office. Follow-up with participants would be needed to determine if data supported extant literature linking social isolation in teleworkers to negative outcomes amongst teleworkers (Golden et al., 2008; Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022).

Supported Autonomy

Supported autonomy is an enabling model of management, which combines the paradoxical employee needs of support and autonomy and relates them to the resources of the virtual leader in the telework environment. The virtual leader is required to provide a unique type of support involving active engagement enabling autonomy, while also taking on bureaucratic work and clearing the way for the employee to do their job.

The office is a known quantity; people operate according to known social and operational systems and ways of behaving. Shifting that location means employees can no longer rely on what they know and what their workplace now looks like. The need for adequate technology and technological set up was a common theme within the data and

interviewees were concerned, early in the change, with their physical set up, Internet connection and the need for compensation relating to technology. This study found a link between uncertainty and confusion resulting in miscommunication between employee and manager, specifically surrounding coping with new ICTs, changing social norms, and role clarity. This was exacerbated by inconsistency, for example varied use of cameras by managers in video communication. This supports research by Van Wart et al. (2019) who found evidence of miscommunication within virtual leadership situations, and feeds into the idea that some participants seemed to struggle to identify some of the aspects of work which are only clear in the face-to-face workplace; for example, the type of ICT appropriate for each situation and how the choice relates to formality within the workplace. Participants also reported incidents of miscommunication relating to missed nonverbal cues while using electronic communication, a situation discussed by Wojcak, Bajzikova, Sajgalikova and Polakova (2016) in relation to communication within telework. This study found a clear need for new virtual etiquette and rules to replace those more suited to the face-to-face workplace.

The themes of time as a commodity and overwork were also identified. Participants placed value on the use of their time and reported both an awareness of the tendency for employees to keep working if they saw that others around them, including their manager, were continuing to work outside the job's set hours. They also reported falling into the overwork trap due to a lack of boundaries within the home environment. As overwork has been linked to employee exhaustion and reduction in effectiveness (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), it seems an important aspect of telework to be aware of.

To reach the point of self-actualisation or growth within their work-life, participants demonstrated a combination of seemingly contradictory needs. The first was autonomy with certainty. The study found that participants needed task clarity, guidelines, emotional

wellbeing, and social support, while at the same time requiring their manager to leave them uninterrupted to carry on with their job. This could be explained by the need for clarity surrounding a new work context, or the possibility that peoples' lives are so complicated and regulated these days that workers may no longer have the energy required to carry out the multiple tasks required. There is evident tension between the need to support the workforce in multiple ways and the need to ensure the workforce can work autonomously, because close oversight or supervision is not possible. Research by Stempel and Siestrup (2021) connects autonomy in the working from home environment to greater work engagement and a reduction in emotional exhaustion, and this study's findings support their research, demonstrating a need for autonomy as a resource. However, questions arise as to what autonomy looks like and how much is needed. The second aspect to supported autonomy is the need for managers to carry out the administrative or bureaucratic tasks related to the employee's job. The study found a link between managers who took on the burden of these administrative tasks and a consequent sense of relief by their employees. The managers who carry out these tasks seemed to demonstrate a situational style of leadership, where the employees benefitted from the actions of their manager (Arnold et al., 2016). This also highlights the shift in need and expectation surrounding administrative task responsibility from employee to manager in the telework environment. Most important is the flexible nature of supported autonomy, as need may look different for different employees and at different times.

Implications for Research and Practice

Crisis initiates adaptation (Fink, Beak, & Taddeo, 1971) within traditional leadership and now in the role of virtual leaders who are teleworking. This study supports the idea that virtual leadership is context dependent (Dinh et al., 2014), and we are now dealing with a

new context. Adding to the complexity of the telework situation is the likelihood that many leaders are unfamiliar with the concept of virtual leadership and what the new role requires. Where once leaders were in the power position, telework in combination with crisis ensures they are now operating in a similar context to their employees, dealing with the same psychological and environmental issues in their work and private lives. Organisations and researchers may consider:

- Approaching virtual leadership from the employees' point of view regarding leadership requirements and available resources.
- Implementing new rules and etiquette, with the view that workplaces may be required to operate in a telework or hybrid situation in the future.
- Providing education to virtual leaders surrounding their new role.
- Maintaining awareness of the boundaries between work and home for the purpose of preventing increases in work demands and overwork.
- Context and employee needs should be seen as primary when contemplating the structure/style of virtual leadership, as it does not fit neatly into any one of the traditional leadership styles.

Conclusion

This study proposes that the first option is to understand that virtual leadership consists of two main factors: business as usual and new context-based challenges. Business as usual pertains to the essential qualities / competencies of leaders which will be crucial in both face-to-face and virtual work environments, such as rewarding employees for good work. The second requires a more context-based approach, for example the leaders' need to understand the soft and hard technological set up required by employees. Virtual leaders are likely to benefit from a combination of different leadership theories; however a new interdependence

between leader and employee has emerged and perhaps virtual leadership could be thought of as less of a leadership style and more a special context or special working condition. The history of leadership research and theory demonstrates the ebb and flow of different styles in their popularity and this sudden change in direction calls for a change in the way leadership should be approached and studied.

This piece of research aimed to investigate virtual leadership resources through identifying what it was that employees needed from their managers when teleworking. The purpose was to identify major themes and make practical recommendations which could be used in the workplace to improve employee engagement, productivity, and wellbeing. The findings from this study suggest a permanent change in the workplace. While there may not be definitive proof of a shift in organisational power structures there is certainly evidence of a shift in the needs of employees working within the telework environment. This idea is documented through the development of supported autonomy, an enabling approach which serves to provide guidance relating to understanding teleworker needs and provision of employee resources by virtual leaders.

Limitations

The main risks and limitations identified related to a lack of willingness some individuals showed in relation to taking part in an interview which could be seen as criticism of their organisation, or their manager. This was counteracted by ensuring the provision of clear information throughout all stages of the study, while also allowing participants access to the researcher for questions at any stage. The use of CIT also helped mitigate the potential reluctance as positive emotion has been shown to be contagious, specifically in interpersonal relationships where both parties are known to each other (Gump & Kulik, 1997). Positive discussion was more likely to encourage the participant to tell their story.

It is acknowledged that the results of this study were unable to be generalised, mainly due to a small sample size and limited representation of individual differences. The study acts as the initial part of a mixed methods approach whereby subsequent research in the form of quantitative survey could be based on the themes identified and generalisable results produced by others interested in further developing this area of interest.

Future Research

Virtual leadership is a relatively new type of leadership and researchers suggest there is a need for more vigorous theoretical foundations and more experimental research in virtual leadership and organisational functioning (Contreras et al., 2020). Virtual leadership is now going through a shakeup as organisations and researchers decide how best to approach the new leadership challenges. One of the themes uncovered in this study was the recognition, by employees, of issues faced by managers themselves. Carrying out a comparison study focussed on managers who are teleworking could add to the employee telework experience. For example, what are the impacts of telework on organisational hierarchy between employees and managers? What level of understanding of virtual leadership do managers in the telework area generally have? There would be value in undertaking longitudinal work in impacts of health-oriented self and employee leadership, building on research by Efimov, Harth and Mache (2020), who investigated manager health behaviours in the telework environment.

This study posits that rather than the traditional leader focus, an employee needs-based approach could be the most effective way forward. If virtual leadership can now be thought of as context-based, then what does this mean for the connection between virtual and existing models? Given the large number of organisations now advertising services relating to virtual leadership training, research into psychological assessment and leadership training

services could start to indicate their efficacy in relation to virtual leadership and telework. Additionally, much of the existing research was carried out pre Covid-19, or immediately post its onset, therefore time is needed to understand how this area of work develops.

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Appendix A

Interview Introduction Email

Hi _____, thanks for the chance to follow up with you / I got your name from _____ and I'm looking to interview some people who are working remotely (but would normally be working in a face-to-face environment) and their experiences of leadership. I'm interested in finding out what employees really need from their leaders so that I can provide suggestions to organisations as to how leaders and manage their virtual teams. Would you be interested in having a chat about my thesis and taking part? The interview will be over Zoom and take about 20-30 minutes and I will provide more information before then if you would like to take part.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me with any questions.

Many thanks Trisha Reddy

Email: #####

Phone: ### - #####

Appendix B

Information Sheet

My name is Trisha Reddy, and I am doing my Master's at Massey University. My thesis topic looks at the role of virtual leaders in the wellbeing of employees working from home. The purpose of this study is to investigate what employees working from home really need from their leaders and to then provide suggestions to organisations in relation to how leaders can help ensure their employees' wellbeing.

I am interested in interviewing people who are working from home and who would regularly (pre-Covid-19) be in a face-to-face work environment. I want to find out about where you work, what you do and how you communicate with your manager.

The interview will take place over Zoom at a time convenient to you and be about 30 minutes long. The interview will be recorded using the Zoom program and a transcript created. This transcript will be available for you to look over for a period of 2 weeks, to make any corrections or clarifications. The transcript will then be held for 5 years in a password protected computer, accessible only to me. The information you provide will be confidential. It will be gathered, stored, and used in such a way that you, your manager and workplace are never able to be identified either within the data or any published work.

The interviews will be used to write this thesis and there is potential for an article to be published in an academic journal which summarizes the main findings of the study.

In the interview I will ask you some information about yourself and your job, then we will talk about your experience of working with your manager virtually rather than face-to-face. The interview is semi-structured, which means I will ask you a few predetermined questions,

but you also have the freedom to talk about your experiences and ideas as well. We can talk about some positive and negative experiences you have had with your manager.

The interview is voluntary, you can choose not to answer specific questions and you can withdraw at any time.

Please let me know if you would like any more information.

Many thanks Trisha Reddy

Email: #####

Phone: ### - #####

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to interview you. I'm going to ask you a few things about you and your job and then we can move on to the main interview questions and all of this should be around 30 minutes.

I am going to use the record function on this Zoom call and after that I am going to transcribe the interview. You are welcome to have both the recorded Zoom call along with the written transcript. I will delete the Zoom video once I have transcribed it and I will keep the written copy in a place that only I can access. All the information will be anonymised and won't be able to identify you, your manager or your place of work at any stage of the process or in any publication.

In this interview I may use the term telework or working from home, these mean the same things. I may also use the term virtual leader and I am referring to the way that people who work from home communicate with their manager.

I'm going to start recording now and I need to ask for your consent to record the interview. Is it ok for me to record this interview? Did you have a chance to read the information sheet?

Please let me know if you have any questions. You can stop the interview at any time.