

An Examination of Hybrid Work Models in Large U.S. Public Accounting Firms Post-Pandemic and the Multidimensional Effects on Employee Performance

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This literature review explores the multidimensional effects that hybrid work models have on public accountants working in large U.S. firms post-pandemic. Research findings reveal that employee burnout may be more prevalent within virtual working environments and the negative consequences of flexible work models include an upset of the work-life balance, increase in the risk of cyber fraud, and deterioration of internal control. The pandemic shift to computer-based work relationships is also evaluated along with the adverse effects of antisocial working environments such as productivity and knowledge spillover in addition to technology overload. Further, this study identifies methods to reduce the negative consequences of remote work as a strategic staffing guide for public accounting practitioners.

Keywords: hybrid work models, remote work, public accounting, job satisfaction, technology stress

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a large impact on accounting firms in the United States. Post-pandemic, accountants have had significantly higher intentions to leave their firms due to the remote nature of the accounting work, coupled with feelings of depersonalization and role overload (Bakarich, 2022). Hybrid work models have left accountants feeling uncertain about their futures in their professions and an increased desire to find a different job. Before one can understand the effects on employee performance, it is important to understand what a hybrid work model looks like.

THE VIRTUAL WORKPLACE

After the COVID-19 pandemic, many large accounting firms in the United States have implemented a “virtual workplace”. A virtual workplace can be defined as a place for employees to do work, not bound by the traditional limitations of time and physical space (Crandall, 1998). A virtual workplace offers the

opportunity for employees to work from home, or other locations other than the building the firm operates within. While this flexibility may seem advantageous on the surface level, many issues revolve around a virtual workplace.

A virtual workplace poses challenges for employees. Issues that accounting firms may encounter while implementing this model have mainly to do with communication and trust between managers and employees. To start, managers need training in supervising and coaching off site workers, and employees need time management and technology training (Crandall, 1998). Employees may need to be sold on the flexibility and autonomy they will gain from a virtual workplace, and they may need training in the technology that will enable them to do their jobs. One of the main issues that remote workers face is the feeling of burnout.

EMPLOYEE BURNOUT IN PUBLIC ACCOUNTING

Accountants have become increasingly burned out in their roles due to hybrid working models. The American Psychological Association (n.d.) noted that ineffective remote communication has left employees uncertain about their work expectations, resulting in increased stress and work-related burnout from 2019 to 2020 (Bakarich, 2022). Remote communication in the workplace leads to increased feelings of ambiguity, negatively impacting job performance. Employee burnout has become more prevalent under remote working environments.

Employees are significantly more burned out by working remotely. Research performed on a group of individuals shows that 86% of employees who work from home full-time experience burnout, 67% of remote workers report feeling pressured to be available all the time, and 45% of employees working remotely due to the pandemic report working more hours than before (McCain, 2023). By working from home, employees become burned out quicker than they would be in the office. However, the level of burnout does differ between employee roles at accounting firms.

Different levels of burnout can be seen depending on what level the accountant is at within their firm. A survey conducted on accountants in a large public firm shows that the partners reported lower levels of role ambiguity and conflict, as compared to staff, seniors and managers. In effect, accountants in higher ranking positions experience lower levels of burnout than those in lower rank positions (Bakarich, 2022). In other words, firm tenure is inversely related to turnover intention. The higher levels of burnout seen in lower ranking employees can also be attributable to the new, virtual dynamic of work relationships.

MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Shifting from in-person to virtual communication in the workplace has a negative effect on employee performance with regards to accountants working in public firms. While interviewing a group of employees at a large accounting firm, it was reported that new online platforms allowed much closer monitoring of employees than before. For instance, supervisors are able to receive a notification in Microsoft Teams whenever employees change their status. Of those interviewed, some indicated that they would immediately receive a call from their supervisor the moment they changed status, which they perceived as very controlling (Delfino, 2021). Overall, employees felt more controlled, and indicated that this was a step backwards towards traditional styles of management. Along with tensions pertaining to remote management styles, the development of relationships between client and accountants has become increasingly difficult.

With remote work becoming more prevalent in accounting firms, it is important to note the change in accountant to client relationships. Many accounting firms have invested significantly in building client relationships over remote platforms, but for some, this is more challenging than building relationships in person. Being on site allows auditors to get to know their clients better, focus the staff, and increase visibility around an audit (Lee, 2022). Without being face to face, auditors face challenges with building trust, connections, and gaining valuable insight on the company they are auditing. Focusing even farther down the workforce, interns at large public accounting firms have felt negative effects of virtual communication.

Interns within public accounting firms who had to work from home due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic faced many challenges. Research was conducted through a case study involving semi-structured interviews with seven students having earned Bachelor's degrees in accounting and completed internships. The responses show that work engagement can influence the employees' effective commitment to work. The interns need good interactions with other interns and supervisors to receive sufficient feedback on their performance and build good rapport (Ahmad, 2021). By not being in the office, interns lack the ability to receive necessary interactions with their supervisors. Interns are also at risk for an unfulfilling internship experience.

Working from home can inhibit quality interaction, and result in an unfulfilling internship experience. Research shows that 48% of remote workers feel as though they have no emotional support from their employers (McCain, 2023). Having emotional support at the beginning of one's career with a firm is important for making sure employees want to stay. Without sufficient feedback and emotional support, accounting firms face lower rates of employee retention. Virtual communication and relationships can also make the employee feel disconnected from the firm as a whole.

Under a hybrid work model, employees are unable to feel as connected to a firm as they could before the pandemic. For example, some of the youngest employees in public accounting firms have never met their supervisors in person, and as a result, feel less of a connection to the firm as they have not experienced its culture (Bakarich, 2022). The ability to feel a part of something bigger offers intrinsic value to employees, and this intrinsic reward is limited under virtual working conditions. There is a direct relationship between job performance and remote work productivity.

Research in Italy has also shown a significant direct relationship between overall job performance and remote work productivity. The data noted that accountants' perceptions of their productivity tend to be related to the performance they exhibit. When faced with a major change in how they work, such as the shift to remote work prompted by the pandemic, respondents noted that their productivity decreased (Toscano, 2021). Working from home is a big change for accountants, and as a result of coping with this change, they become less productive. Under a hybrid work model, employees are disconnected from their peers, and their homes often become their offices. Along with lower productivity levels, working from home can increase tension in the family life of accountants.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE TENSIONS

Working from home can negatively impact employee performance due to the increased exposure to family tensions. The COVID-19 pandemic filled the workspace necessary for remote work with the presence of employees' partners and children. The home setting is often unsuitable to host the whole family, who are engaged in full-time study and work activities. Ultimately, it generates a distracting environment (Toscano, 2021). As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted remote work with an increased family-work conflict, thereby negatively affecting job productivity. Research also shows that 46% of remote workers say they miss the clear boundaries that in-office work sets between their work and personal lives (McCain, 2023). Setting a line between work and family life is an important goal for many accountants. Working from home creates a challenge for employees who are used to congregating with their peers in the office (McCain, 2023). While this tension is prevalent in male accountants, working from home has an even greater impact on female accountants.

Women have traditionally been the main caregivers for children in the United States, and that can lead to stress under a hybrid work model. Despite an increase in workforce participation, caregiving and household work are still considered women's duties. This creates stress for women who are trying to do the best thing for their careers, while also navigating an unfair role in society and at home (Molla, 2021). By working from home, women experience more stress than they would be in the office. This data is also true for women in the field of accounting.

Women in accounting have faced adversity while working remotely. The hybrid work landscape for females is argued to have changed more dramatically as family responsibilities have increased. This may have, in turn, caused increased feelings of role stress and/or burnout within females' work experiences

(Bakarich, 2022). Given evidence of the voluntary departure of women from the workforce, female accountants may express a higher intention to leave their current firms than males. While the comparison between male and female experiences bears importance, the effects of hybrid work models on auditors versus tax accountants should be acknowledged as well.

HYBRID WORK MODELS AND AUDITORS

Working from home inhibits auditors from generating quality work, such as sufficient audit evidence. A study conducted on a group of auditors at large firms showed that most auditors were not confident in their work quality, nor were they able to meet deadlines like they could prior to the pandemic. The responses also showed that many auditors received less feedback from their audit managers and partners in a hybrid work environment (Rabea Baatwah, 2022). The remote work environment had a significant impact on the auditors' abilities to produce quality work in a timely manner. Along with being unable to provide sufficient audit evidence, auditors are unable to maintain professional skepticism.

Remote work environments post-pandemic poses a challenge for auditors in maintaining professional skepticism. By shifting to remote audit work, there is a negative impact on professional skepticism without purposeful safeguards. Sorensen (2021) conducted an experiment on Social Presence Theory using senior auditors from the top four accounting firms in the nation. Social Presence Theory can be defined as the degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication. Research showed that social presence was found to be a significant predictor of audience satisfaction within a computer-mediated form of communication (Minnesota State University). In Sorensen's research, she examined how the perceived level of social presence influences an auditor's professional skepticism. Under a remote audit environment, the lack of social presence decreases one's feeling of accountability (Sorensen, 2021). She concluded that there is a challenge for auditors to remain skeptical in a remote audit environment. Similar to remaining skeptic, auditors must remain observant in audit procedures in order to gather sufficient audit evidence.

The ability for auditors to perform walkthroughs and be observant of their clients is limited under a remote working environment. One important procedure in obtaining audit evidence is observation. Observation involves auditors looking at a process or procedure being performed by employees within the company they are auditing. Observation can also involve a physical examination of inventory (Messier, 2023). Using observations for controls related to physical security, logical security, automated controls, and data center hardware is best practice (Hyatt, 2020). Auditors are unable to perform observation without being on site of their client's company. Without performing observations, auditors may not be able to gather sufficient audit evidence and issue an unqualified audit opinion. Unlike auditors, tax accountants are less concerned with professional skepticism and observation of their clients. However, there are struggles nonetheless within the tax profession under a hybrid work environment.

HYBRID WORK MODELS AND TAX ACCOUNTANTS

Tax professionals in public accounting firms have faced challenges under post-pandemic hybrid work models. Historically, tax professionals have conducted their work mostly from their offices, not making as many client site visits as compared to their audit counterparts. Thus, the shift to remote work may have been easier for these professionals and their clients. However, tax professionals faced repeated delays in tax deadlines, as well as a multitude of new legislation to sift through related to COVID-19 business relief, which expanded the scope of their services (Bakarich, 2022). Although they have been historically more exposed to remote working styles, tax professionals have still been struggling to keep up with the changes the pandemic has brought. By being at home, many tax accountants have felt as though their work life never ends.

Due to working from home, tax professionals have had to overcome the feeling of isolation. Tax professionals of large national and international CPA firms were interviewed. The research shows that during the early stages of the COVID outbreak, more stress during the busy season was reported. Many tax

professionals commented that even with the extension of the federal income tax due date to July 15, 2020, it resulted in a never-ending busy season. Staying at home also inhibited vacation days for employees, resulting in their inability to mentally escape from their work. The isolation from clients and supervisors under a remote working environment also added stress (Guo, 2022). This research further proves that working from home can blur the lines between work and regular life. It contributes to feelings of isolation and stress. There are other factors attributable to this stress. One problem that affects both auditors and tax accountants equally, is the increased risk of cyber fraud post-pandemic.

INCREASED RISKS OF CYBER FRAUD

The world of accounting has seen many changes post-pandemic, including technological changes. Accountants were forced to adapt to new advancements in order to succeed in the new work environment. Post-pandemic, firms had to shift to a remote work environment and although many were prepared, many were not. Many firms had to update their technological systems, especially cloud-based systems. Those who were cloud-based transitioned more easily. However, the degree to which clients were comfortable with technology also had a huge impact on the success of shifting to a remote work environment (Lee, 2020). Having to be familiarized with new technologies can increase stress levels in accountants and hinder performance. New technological advancements also require the need for cybersecurity.

Accountants in hybrid work environments have been faced with more cyber security threats than ever before. Many cybersecurity leaders have reported that malicious threats are increasing as firms shift from in-person to virtual offices. The majority of the cybercrimes are targeted towards financial institutions such as public accounting firms. According to a study of large-scale breaches, cybercrime increased in the first quarter of 2020 by 273% compared to 2019. In another study, 71% of IT and cybersecurity professionals worldwide reported increased cybersecurity threats and attacks since the onset of the pandemic (Hubbard, 2021). Cybercrimes have been easier to commit since the pandemic because many employees work from home. Home Wi-Fi systems are easier to compromise than secure systems within firm offices.

Cyber-attacks affect public accountants in the United States who work from a home office. With the sudden shift to large-scale remote work, organizations rapidly expanded remote access with virtual private networks. However, these networks are easily compromised. A single enterprise may operate several internal networks, remote offices with their own local infrastructure, and cloud services. This complexity has outstripped previous methods of perimeter-based network security, as there is no single, easily identified perimeter for the enterprise (Hubbard, 2021). Having multiple networks spread out beyond the firm makes the security system weaker, allowing cyber-attacks to be made easier. Accountants are also held accountable for allowing cyber-attacks to infiltrate their systems.

Since many accountants are responsible for detecting these threats on their devices, the increase in cybercrime creates a stressful work environment. By lacking the correct tools and technology to fight cybercrime, accountants have faced setbacks within their work environment. The need for increased cyber security post-pandemic versus pre-pandemic has caused many accountants to experience burnout in the field (Yodzis, 2021). These cyber-attacks affect many public accountants in the United States, and hinders their ability to conduct sufficient work from home. Shifting to hybrid work models has had a detrimental effect on the security of accounting work and the well-being of many accountants. Along with cyber fraud, there has been an increase in fraudulent activities of employees' post-pandemic.

HYBRID WORK MODELS AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

During the pandemic, social isolation and additional family responsibilities posed challenges for online learning. When colleges restricted in-person access, students were taking exams in their bedrooms, with access to cellphones and other technology. Educators say this allowed academic dishonesty to increase and take on different forms (Dey, 2021). Remote learning gives students an easier capability of cheating. A rise in cheating can be seen in the recent surge in Chegg Subscriptions. Chegg is a subscription-based platform that students can use to get answers on homework assignments and exams. Chegg reported 4.9 million

subscribers as of the end of June 2021, which is a 31% year-over-year increase. Chegg also reported a 30% year-over-year quarterly revenue increase of \$198.5 million (Symms Gallagher, 2021). Data shows that the implementation of online learning has led to an increase in academic dishonesty. Accountants coming out of an era of increased academic dishonesty may translate into the workplace. This dishonesty can be recently seen in employees at Ernst & Young.

Working remotely can increase the capability of accountants to act unethically. With the rise in virtual work and schooling, it is important to compare the rise of ethical dilemmas. In 2022, accountants working for a large accounting firm, Ernst & Young LLP, were caught cheating on the CPA exam. Employees were sharing answers through email. An employee reported to a manager that a professional in the firm's audit group had emailed the employee answers to a CPA ethics exam (Going Concern, 2022). Under no supervision, employees were able to pass answers to each other. This is an ongoing trend in the world of virtual work and learning. Dishonesty in the classroom can translate into the accounting workplace, especially in a hybrid work model.

Research suggests that ethical behavior is less common outside of the public eye. Unmonitored individuals are more likely to act dishonestly, without the influence of others around them. Although public scrutiny does not directly remind people to tell the truth, it reminds them that ethical behavior is the norm (Ostermaier & Uhl, 2017). Within a public setting, individuals are more likely to act ethically than those in a private setting. This research can offer potential answers for why accountants have become more dishonest in the age of hybrid work models. Along with the lack of honesty in the workplace, the lack of internal control is prevalent in a hybrid work model.

INTERNAL CONTROL IN HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Accounting firms must make changes in order to maintain internal control in a remote work environment. Remote work poses many difficulties in regards to maintaining internal control (Mamand & Alagoz, 2021). As previously mentioned, privacy, security and confidentiality are negatively affected under remote working conditions. This directly hinders the quality of internal control. Remote work can also produce difficulties such as the scale of control.

Working remotely reduces the quality and frequency of communications between the site and the controller. Difficulties arise when trying to establish a proper schedule for meetings and discussion, which is an important aspect of internal control. Along with this, working in teams is limited in a remote environment, and the ability to track the tasks the teams carry out is difficult (Mamand & Alagoz, 2021). Overall, internal control models under remote work environments face problems with remote management, risk assessment, control activities, information and communication, and observation. Without a solid internal control system in place, there is an inability to generate a positive control environment, which is crucial for positive employee performance.

An effective control environment within an accounting firm has a direct effect on employee performance. The control environment sets the tone of the firm and highlights the firm's values, attitudes, beliefs, and well-being of its employees. Similarly, the firm's control environment is affected by the firm's organizational structure and personnel-related practices and policies. (Messier, 2023). When those hired to perform certain roles within the firm are unable to perform adequately, the control environment deteriorates. As previously stated, working remotely leaves employees detached from their superiors, unsure of their responsibilities, and unmotivated to produce quality work. Under an organization where remote work is encouraged in the control environment, employees are left feeling isolated and incompetent.

An ineffective control environment can lead to feelings of isolation. Kimball (1999) noted that many accountants are frustrated with working remotely. He explained that before the pandemic, accountants signed up for a job where they were going to be working with a big team in a conference room, solving problems, under a team environment. Now, he states that accountants are working at their kitchen table. He explained that doing this for a week or two is not that bad, but working from home for many months becomes challenging (McAdory, 2020). Accountants have experienced challenges with team work under a remote working environment. Effective communication and collaboration are essential for a positive control

environment and positive employee performance. Being closely involved with coworkers at the workplace pressures accountants to get more work done.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

By having social interaction in the workplace, accountants have been proven to be more productive. This phenomenon can be defined as “productivity spillover”, which is the nature of humans to be more productive in the midst of human interaction. Research conducted by Cornelissen showed that there are two important factors that cause increased productivity in an environment where social interaction is exhibited. The two important channels of productivity spillover are peer pressure and knowledge spillover. Peer pressure can be more closely defined as social pressure. Peer pressure is rooted in the comparison of individual versus co-worker productivity, and occurs if workers feel socially obliged to increase their own productivity if it falls behind that of their co-workers (Cornelissen, 2016). Being exposed to co-workers in the workplace can increase productivity due to the nature of humans to compare themselves to one another. If one sees that a team member is farther ahead on their designated task, it influences the other team member to work diligently to keep up. The second channel of productivity is known as knowledge spillover.

Productivity spillover is also attributable to knowledge spillover. Knowledge spillover can be defined as learning from co-workers. Knowledge spillover captures the idea that by communicating and observing each other at work, workers learn from each other and build up skills they would otherwise not have (Cornelissen, 2016). In other words, by working side by side in the workplace, employees can benefit by receiving training from more knowledgeable coworkers. Social interaction can also help eliminate the problem of free riders in team work.

Social interaction can prevent issues in group work within accounting firms. While working in a team, employees can often fall short of their individual duties, and let their peers do most of the work. This is known as free-riding. By being face to face with team members, employees are held more accountable for their actions rather than if they were working from home. When workers react to these social incentives, it can help alleviate free-rider problems in teams (Cornelissen, 2016). Peer pressure can help combat the free-rider problems in teams and create a more productive work environment. Both peer pressure and knowledge sharing cause employees to be more productive in the workplace.

Accountants are more productive than they would be under a remote work environment due to close connectivity with their peers. Total productivity within the workforce is higher due to peer pressure and knowledge spillover, which is only possible when employees work together within firms rather than from home (Cornelissen, 2016). When firms create spaces and occasions for social interaction, these spaces facilitate knowledge spillover, social comparisons, and peer pressure. Lastly, the free rider problem in team groups can be eliminated when employees are put in close arrangements with their coworkers. Overall, by not working at home, employees are able to be more productive with their own work and with team work. At home, employees are not positively influenced by peers, but instead are negatively distracted by technology.

TECHNOLOGY DISTRACTIONS IN A HYBRID WORKPLACE

Working remotely results in increased technology distractions for employees. Research by Bourne shows 35% of employees interviewed do not have all the software they need to do their jobs, and 53% of employees struggle with slow-running devices (IE, 2020). Employees who are not well equipped to work remotely face delays in connection to their computers and work. This allows employees to become distracted. Joblist surveyed more than 1,000 workers across the United States, and more than one in 10 individuals admitted being distracted by playing video games during the workday (Mendoza, 2021). By having easy access to technology, such as gaming consoles, televisions, and smartphones, accountants are more likely to become distracted from their work. This phenomenon can be known as technology overload.

Accountants face the issue of technology overload while working from home. Portable devices offer tremendous opportunities for individuals to connect to anyone at any time. However, this is not beneficial

in the workplace. Post-pandemic, accountants have faced new job responsibilities in order to keep up with technological advances. These responsibilities have caused overwhelming feelings of stress, otherwise known as technostress (Boyer-Davis, 2019). A survey performed on professional accountants showed that a relationship exists between technology stress and job turnover intention in the accounting profession (Boyer-Davis, 2019). As technostress increases, the intention for accountants to leave their firms also increases. The feelings of technostress can be attributed to the increased availability of technology in the workplace.

Accountants face the issue of receiving messages on their laptops, smartphones, and tablets all at once, which provokes digital overload and a loss of concentration. The higher the level of interruption overload is, the lower the employee's productivity (Orhan, 2021). Constant communication in the workplace results in frequent interruption, hindering employee productivity. Research also shows that technology overload can have lasting negative effects. Accountants may face increased stress, work-life imbalance, and burnout due to being constantly connected to technology (Orhan, 2021). By being unable to distinguish between work life and private life due to technology overload, accountants face the inability to reflect on their work. Reflection is an important part of an individual's work life, and without reflection, it can feel as though a work day never ends. Overall, technology overload increases job stress, and decreases individual productivity and job satisfaction. Virtual meetings are one of the key factors of technology overload. In a virtual meeting, accountants are more likely to become distracted than if they were in an in-person meeting.

Virtual meetings are less successful for accountants due to the Ringelmann Effect. In 1913, a French engineer known as Max Ringelmann studied the productivity of humans and animals. Ringelmann found that groups often outperform individuals, but that the addition of each new member to a group yields less of a gain in productivity (Rond, 2014). Put simply, group size has an inverse relationship to group productivity. Counterproductivity can begin in groups as small as three people. When accounting firms host zoom meetings, there is a capability of having over one hundred attendees. Traditionally, in-person conference rooms have not been capable of holding meetings of this caliber.

In virtual meetings, the Ringelmann effect is magnified. When an individual is not in the room for the meeting, one feels less motivated to listen and participate (Gershman, 2021). The less an employee feels needed, the more distracted they will become, and the less effort will be exerted by that individual. Additionally, the less an individual contributes, the less fulfilling the experience. The constant effects of distractions in the workplace can also have an effect on self-regulation.

Increased exposure to technology can have an adverse effect on self-regulation. Self-regulation can be defined as the ability to properly control emotions and behaviors in situations that demand emotional awareness (Child Mind Institute, 2023). Increased technology distraction can deplete an employee's self-regulatory strength by over exposure to a multitude of simultaneous demands. Such demands include emails and other forms of parallel communication in a remote workplace (Orhan, 2021). By having increased distractions in remote work environments, it can cause employees to undermine one's self control, impairing self-regulation. Concludingly, the effects of technology distractions post-pandemic can be detrimental and long lasting to accountants. There are ways to regain self-regulatory strength and overcome the effects of a hybrid work model.

COMBATTING THE EFFECTS OF REMOTE WORKING

Although limited, there are ways to avoid the negative effects that remote work poses for accountants. Workers are more engaged at work in situations when they are more psychologically available (Orhan, 2021). Remote work requires purposeful and planned communication in order to be more psychologically available. Accountants should create an agenda of what they would like to discuss before attending a virtual meeting. Accountants must document what information is discussed in virtual meetings, in order to stay focused (Prokopets, 2021). By planning and documenting, individuals will face less distractions and have reasonable timelines for getting everyday work and special projects completed (Pavlik, 2020). Accountants must be psychologically available under a hybrid work model in order to prevent burnout. Burnout can also be prevented by limiting tension between work and family life.

One important way to avoid burnout under a hybrid work model is to establish boundaries between work life and private life. Respecting a good work life balance can reduce feelings of burnout (Cruise, 2011). By limiting remote work, one can reestablish the line between work and home life. Another way to create boundaries as a remote worker is by creating a workspace in which one can physically remove themselves from (Prokopets, 2021). When accountants are able to be physically disconnected from remote work, they will have a lower chance of burnout. Physically disconnecting can also limit technology overload.

As previously discussed, technology overload is a negative side effect of remote work. In order to limit technological overload, employees can distance themselves from work electronics. A key way of doing this would be to turn off computer work-related notifications in the evening and on weekends (Prokopets, 2021). By limiting the frequency of work notifications, one can limit technology overload. Having decreased levels of technology can limit burnout for accountants.

Technology use should be limited in the workplace in order to combat job turnover in the accounting profession. Management must be aware that stress caused by technology can lead to job dissatisfaction, and cause job turnover. In order to combat technostress, managers should avoid contacting employees outside of normal working hours, and try to limit their own technology consumption (Boyer-Davis, 2019). In doing so, managers will mitigate the overwhelming feelings of stress imposed on employees. Technology, in moderation, can have a positive effect on employee performance.

HYBRID WORK MODELS AND EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

Working from home can be beneficial for accountants. By working from home, some accountants can be less distracted. If an accountant does not have a spouse, kids, or pets, a home office may be their most peaceful place to conduct work. However, if an employee does have children, working from home may offer flexibility in caring for them. Studies have shown that individuals working remotely have been able to be more involved in the lives of their children and attend events that they have historically missed (Lee, 2022). Employees are also able to spend more time with their kids by taking them to school.

Many accountants are able to take their kids to and from school under a hybrid work model, due to the lack of constraints in their schedule. One resource that all employees appreciate is time. Fortunately, working remotely with an accounting firm enables everyone to use their time wisely (Lee, 2022). This can limit stress and allow for more productivity. By being in charge of their own schedules, accountants can be more productive.

Evidence has shown that employees who are in charge of their own schedules are more motivated to work. By offering employees the flexibility to create their own schedules, improved employee retention rates and better business outcomes are likely to result (Akhter, 2022). If an employee does not conform to a traditional 9-to-5 work day, hybrid work models can increase their productivity. Some individuals are more productive at later hours of the day, and hybrid work models allow for this flexibility. Along with benefits for the employee, the accounting firm can also benefit from a hybrid work model.

By adopting a hybrid work model, accounting firms can save on real estate. Companies can save thousands of dollars on real estate expenses by downsizing for a hybrid model, especially in areas where real estate is expensive. Research showed that 56% of workplace leaders anticipate saving on costs due to reducing their physical workplace footprint (Akhter, 2022). Without the need for accountants in the office, real estate square footage can be minimized. Having employees work from home can save companies money on office infrastructure costs. Along with real estate costs, accounting firms can also save on utility expenses.

Having fewer workers in the office can save accounting firms money on utility costs. With less need for desks, computers, printers, or other office supplies, there will be a decrease in utility costs (Akhter, 2022). Accounting firms can save money by having their employees work from home. Ultimately, when firms save money, it can have a positive impact on employee performance.

A more profitable accounting firm allows for more productive employees. Having more money within the company can potentially result in bigger employee bonuses. These bonuses can incentivize employees

and increase productivity (Akhter, 2022). When a firm is doing well financially, employees will benefit. Overall, there are positive effects on employee performance under a hybrid work environment.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research is necessary in order to analyze the ongoing effects of hybrid work models. Research should be conducted on the long-lasting effects of hybrid work models. Job retention, performance, and satisfaction should be measured in the future to determine if the effects are long term. Other demographics should also be included in ongoing research such as race, religion, and those struggling with mental health.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The research provided in this paper was derived from previously conducted studies and observations. The research is limited to responses from public accountants that participated in these studies, and does not reflect the accounting profession as a whole. Although the target population was evaluated, a potential bias exists in regards to those who participated in surveys. The research conducted focuses on a short time frame only three years post-pandemic. The research does not include the long-term effects of hybrid work models. The findings were substantive in regards to the initial hypothesis, however, the opposing argument is addressed and analyzed.

CONCLUSION

Although hybrid work models have positive effects on employee performance, the negative effects are more prevalent. Some positive effects are the flexibility of one's work schedule which results in increased time spent with family, and the costs spared by accounting firms. The negative effects discussed include employee burnout in male and female accountants in both audit and tax, tensions within home life, the struggles of virtual relationships, the increased risk of cyber fraud and ethical dilemmas, issues with internal control and social interactions, and technology distractions. Overall, the effect on accountants is multidimensional, but mostly negative.

Although hybrid work models can have negative effects on employee performance, it is up to the accountant to remain resilient under hybrid work models post-pandemic. Many firm representatives say the duty falls on CPAs and other employees to be proactive about their own career development. Employees are not talking about their career plans as often as they were before they were remote (Meyer, 2022). Accountants have to be intentional, and take control of their career, and make opportunities happen, which is harder to do solely in front of your computer. Accounting firms can also implement strategies for remote working success.

In the future, firms must incorporate strategies to ensure the success of their remotely working employees. In the 2021 CFO Survey, in partnership with Grant Thornton Public Sector, suggestions are offered for a multitude of areas. These solutions include agile and centralized response teams, transparency, budget planning, staff competencies, telework, and competition for resources, such as PPE (The Journal of Government Financial Management, 2021). Areas like these can offer guidance for accountants under hybrid work environments. By focusing on these areas, accountants and other financial professionals can stay resilient in the midst of adversity. Employee performance within public accounting firms has and will change as a result of the pandemic in the United States.

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