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The impact of teleworking during COVID-19 on perceived performance of employees: a qualitative study

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Abstract

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of teleworking employees. The purpose of this study was to investigate the way employee's perceived performance changed because of these increased hours of teleworking and to determine which bottlenecks and opportunities they experienced while teleworking. The research question is '*How do teleworking employees experience their performance in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what do they perceive as opportunities and what are the bottlenecks they experience?*' The data was collected by conducting twelve interviews with employees that had to work more hours from home due to the pandemic. Participants were found through referral sampling. The results showed that respondents had a negative experience with working more hours from home considering their performance. It was also found that there are opportunities when working from home, such as less travel time and more flexibility in planning working hours. There also were bottlenecks such as social isolation and decreasing health that changed the perceived performance of employees negatively, resulting in a lower perceived performance. It became visible that employees became used to teleworking and were less bothered by it over time. Furthermore, employees perceived the bottlenecks as more intense when they worked from home full-time compared to part-time. When interpreting the results, it should be considered that the sample was small and selected through referral sampling, this could result in biased outcomes. The research outcomes could be used to improve working conditions of teleworking employees.

Keywords: Performance, Teleworking, COVID-19, Career shock, Pandemic

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of employees working from home has increased significantly. Whereas before the pandemic about one in three employees in the Netherlands worked from home, during the pandemic this increased to 45% (Hamersma et al., 2020). This percentage increased because working from home has for many organizations been the only way to make sure the organization sustains during the lockdowns (Seema et al., 2020). Events that are extraordinary like the COVID-19 pandemic, that significantly alter peoples (work) lives, can be described as career shocks (Akkermans et al., 2018). COVID-19 altered people's lives as there were measurements put into place to prevent the virus from spreading. An example of these measurements is the government forcing people to work from home as much as possible (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2021). In general working from home can change the way employees perceive their performance both in a positive and a negative manner. For example, when working from home, employees often have more autonomy with regards to how they fill in their working day, which increases their flexibility (Govindaraju & Sward, 2005). However, teleworking can also have negative influences on employees' perceived performance because working in teams via online platforms from home is considered to make communicating more difficult than in real life settings at the office (Pérez Pérez et al., 2004). Furthermore, people who work from home experience more social isolation and complain about a lack of support such as technical support more often (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). This lack of technical support is problematic, as Gray (1995) states that "support is the key to successful teleworking" (p. 106). The current existing literature provides insight into the influences of working from home on employee performance. For example, Rupietta and Beckmann (2017) argue that employees working from home have a higher intrinsic motivation because of the high autonomy they have, however this research has been done before working from home was mandatory.

Even though research has been done with regards to working from home, most of the existing research on this topic has been conducted in pre-COVID times, where working from the office was the norm. The situation drastically changed due to the pandemic, when organizations suddenly had to ask their employees to work from home, without time to acquire the necessary experience or expertise on how to carry this out properly (Bolisani et al., 2020). The mandatory increase in teleworking hours that followed can be problematic for employees, as this has been proven by early research on the topic to worsen the disadvantages of teleworking, like social isolation and a decrease in mental health. This implies that when there

is no effort made to help the employees in their teleworking situation, their performance will suffer from the disadvantages that come with full time teleworking during a pandemic (International Labour Organization, 2021).

So, even though there is knowledge with regards to working from home and its advantages and disadvantages, there has not yet been studied how the perceptions of employees changed with regards to their perceived performance during a pandemic. As there is evidence that the increase in teleworking hours due to the pandemic could increase the intensity with which employees perceive disadvantages of teleworking, it is valuable to investigate whether the employees think their performance changed due to the mandatory teleworking, which disadvantages they suffer from the most, and what could help them to perform better despite the increase of teleworking. It is important to gain knowledge about this as this could be used in the future when other career shocks arise, to understand how to deal with them and maintain employees' perceived performance in the best possible way.

This paper goes into depth on the change in perceptions that this sudden change from working environment has on the perceived performance of employees, to fill the gap of knowledge on this topic, that has emerged because of the sudden changes with regards to working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this paper the focus will be on the way employees have perceived their performance through 2020 and the first quarter of 2021.

The main research question of this paper is: *'How do teleworking employees experience their performance in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, what do they perceive as opportunities, and what are the bottlenecks they experience?'*

In this paper will be researched how employees experienced teleworking during a pandemic, and how it changed their performance. This will be done by conducting interviews to gain in debt insight in the way that COVID-19 as a career shock changes employees' perceived performance. Furthermore, there will be research done to find out what teleworkers perceive as opportunities in this situation and what they perceive as bottlenecks. This paper contributes to currently existing literature by adding new knowledge on the perceptions of employees with regards to working from home due to a career shock such as Covid-19, it also aims to add knowledge on the bottlenecks and opportunities employees experienced while teleworking. With this newly gained knowledge this paper aims to fill the knowledge gap within the literature on teleworking during a pandemic and its impact on employees' perceived performance, while until now there has been little research done on linking COVID-19 and teleworking yet (Bolisani et al., 2020). With this new knowledge this paper could give insight in the bottlenecks that teleworkers say they experience when working at home. With this new

knowledge gained organizations and managers are now aware of the bottlenecks that can change the performance of their employees while teleworking in times of a career shock. As now is known which bottlenecks are occurring, organizations can search more specifically for solutions to decrease their change on the perceived performance of employees. Moreover, with the knowledge on opportunities, organizations can ensure to create more of these opportunities to give teleworking employees a better working experience at home.

Following the introduction, the overview of the literature about working from home and how it changes the experiences of employees with regards to their perceived performance will be explained. Thereafter the research methods used in this thesis will be discussed. Subsequently, the results of the conducted interviews will be described. Lastly the conclusion and discussion will be presented.

Theoretical framework

Work Performance

In this research, the central concept is performance at one's job. Viswesvaran and Ones (2000) define work performance as: "scalable actions, behavior and outcomes that employees engage in or bring about that are linked with and contribute to organizational goals" (p. 216). The importance of work performance is stressed by Craig (2018) as he states that the performance of an organizations' employees is seen as the cornerstone for an organization, this implies that it is important to keep the performance of their employees as high as possible. Koopmans et al. (2011) argue that there are four dimensions of performance in their article which are: task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, and counterproductive work behavior. Task performance is defined by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) as "the proficiency with which incumbents perform activities that are formally recognized as part of their jobs; activities that contribute to the organization's technical core either directly by implementing a part of its technological process, or indirectly by providing it with needed materials or services" (p. 73). Contextual performance is defined by Koopmans et al. (2011) as: "Individual behaviors that support the organizational, social, and psychological environment in which the technical core must function" (p. 861). Griffin et al. (2007) describe adaptability as: "an employee's ability to adapt to changes in a work system or work roles" (p. 329). Koopmans et al. (2011) define counterproductive work behavior as "behavior that harms the wellbeing of the organization" (p. 858).

COVID-19 as a career shock

COVID-19 was first found in November of 2019. Within a very short time this virus spread and became a worldwide crisis. Because of safety reasons lockdowns were initiated by the governments of countries all over the world. Due to these lockdowns employers had to ask their employees to work from home as much as possible. As Kniffin et al. (2021) state in their article the influence COVID-19 has had on employees and their workplaces is huge. The virus has many negative effects on people such as losing income, less job security, lower productivity, and increased anxiety (Akkermans et al., 2020). In their working life many people come across career shocks such as COVID-19. These career shocks can for example have a significant effect on someone's career and thus performance (Hirschi, 2010). Akkermans et al. (2018) define a career shock as:

"... a disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one's career. The occurrence of a career shock can vary in terms of predictability and can be

either positively or negatively valanced" (p. 4). Career shocks are known to be relatively rare and uncommon events with varying manageability and predictability, and individuals can assess these shocks both negatively and positively (Akkermans et al., 2018). Examples of negative career shocks could be getting fired or losing a befriended co-worker. Career shocks that employees could consider to be positive could be getting promoted or having a pay raise. In current literature on career shocks, it became apparent that negative career shocks could be associated with negative outcomes whereas positive career shocks could be associated with positive outcomes (Seibert et al., 2013).

When comparing the characteristics of COVID-19 with the definition of Akkermans et al. (2018) on career shocks, COVID-19 can be seen as a career shock because it is a highly disruptive and extraordinary event as it completely changed the way most employees worked. They went from working their hours completely or partly at the office to working them solely from home. This is very extraordinary as this has never happened before in history. Furthermore, COVID-19 is caused by factors outside the individual's control as they did not have any influence on the virus being created. Furthermore, it triggers a deliberate thought process concerning someone's career, because people suddenly saw their job from a very different perspective, as everything around it such as contact with colleagues decreased significantly.

Baruch et al. (2016) agree with this and state that career shocks can motivate employees to think critically about their career development process and adjust the assessment of their career in their working years to come. According to Akkermans et al. (2020) these thought processes and changes in career do not directly mean that a career shock always leads to negative outcomes in the long run. While for example unemployment could be seen as a negative influence of a career shock, it also can give an employee the chance of new opportunities with regards to their career. Akkermans et al. (2020) state that COVID-19 can influence employees on the short term and the long term. It also can affect employees differently depending on their age and the phase of their career that they are in. Kraimer et al. (2019) stated that younger workers can perceive other effects than older workers when facing a career shock such as COVID-19. An example of this is given by Birditt et al. (2020) who found that older employees experienced less stress, suffered less from social isolation, and experienced less change in their lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic than younger employees.

Akkermans et al. (2018) state that career shocks can not only occur at the workplace, but also in private life. In this paper there will be a focus on how employees perceive COVID-19 as a career shock mostly in their workplace as this has significantly changed due to the

COVID-19 measurements that were put in place. In this paper I will investigate how employees of different ages and with different demographics perceived COVID-19 as a career shock and which consequences it had for them the past months with regards to their performance at work.

An interesting theory to link COVID-19 as a career shock to performance is through the work-home resource model (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). This model consists of a work domain which consists of the work demands, the work resources and the work outcomes. Furthermore, it consists of a home domain which consists of the home demands, the home resources, and the home outcomes. The central point of attention is the individual with its personal resources. These resources are supplemented by resources from the workplace and from home and used up to meet demands from work and home. The way the resources and demands are balanced determines the work- and home outcomes. The work outcomes could in the light of this research be seen as the performance of an employee as outcomes at work are often measured in terms of productivity or performance, of which the latter consists of four different dimensions as described above. In this paper research will be conducted to determine whether and how the perceived performance of employees changed due to mandatory teleworking because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As performance consists of four dimensions all these dimensions will be investigated to give a complete representation of the concept. In the work-home resource model, it is stated that the more resources in relation to the demands someone has, the better it is for the work outcomes and therefore for the performance of an employee. So, these resources are playing a significant role in the perception of an employee when considering their performance.

Teleworking

As the career shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way employees work and caused them to work from home much more than before, this part will investigate the theory on teleworking.

Defining teleworking

Although teleworking is quite a new phenomenon, its development started around 50 years ago in the 1970's (Nilles, 1975). There has not yet been a broadly accepted definition of teleworking, however The International Labour Organization (2021) defines teleworking as "the use of information and communication technologies, such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and/or desktop computers, for work that is performed outside the employer's premises" (p. 2). This implies that teleworking does not have to be from home but can also be performed from other locations outside the office.

The International Labour Organization (2017) makes a distinction between different modalities of teleworking namely regular home-based teleworking, high mobile telework and occasional telework. Regular home-based teleworking involves the employees that work from their homes and that are using information and communications technologies (ICTs) frequently. Furthermore, the International Labour Organization considers high mobile telework as a different way of teleworking, in this modality belong the employees that work in different places frequently and thus are highly mobile and make much use of ICT. Moreover, there is the modality of occasional telework, this modality consists of employees that work in either one or more different places outside the office, however, do this just occasionally and are less mobile that the high mobile telework group. In this paper the focus will lay on the regular home-based teleworking employees, as working from different locations such as cafés are not or barely possible during the COVID-pandemic.

Telework as a term is based on various telework characteristics (Madsen, 2003). The telework experience can for example depend on the telework intensity, or in other words how many hours employees work from another location than the office. In this paper I will only look at how many hours employees work from home, as during the COVID-19 pandemic many other teleworking locations were closed. When an employee always works outside the office this is described as full-time telework (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). When an employee works partially from home and partly from the office this is described as part-time teleworking, also described as multi-site telework by Huws (1997). Another form of teleworking is adhoc teleworking, which means that an employee only works from home because of certain occasions for example because of sickness (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). In this paper I will investigate full-time and part-time teleworking, as adhoc teleworking is not expected to occur in this situation because of the COVID-19 measurements.

Opportunities of teleworking

There are many different opportunities that employees can experience while working from home. According to Butler et al. (2007) telework influences productivity. Because teleworkers get less distracted by colleagues, they get more productive on both the short-term and the long-term, when comparing them to colleagues that work at the office. Shin et al. (2000) are less convinced of this link; they believe that this increase in productivity might also come from the employees working more hours due to lack of travel time. According to Van Veldhoven and Van Gelder (2020) the three most important opportunities for working from home are that employees experience that the atmosphere at home is better than in the office.

Furthermore, in this article is stated that employees find themselves to be more efficient when working from home, causing them to have more time left to do other things that bring them joy, or do other tasks for their job they normally do not have time for. The third opportunity that is described in this article is that employees experience more autonomy within their working day and the division of work and deciding when to take breaks or have a lunch. As people who work from home have more autonomy, this leads to higher job satisfaction (Harpaz, 2002). Higher job satisfaction raises employees' productivity (Morgan, 2004; Pratt, 1999). Another opportunity linked to this autonomy is that when working from home there is the option for employees to work when they are most productive, giving them more control over their working hours (Tremblay and Genin, 2007). Moreover, when employees work from home, they are able to take care of their kids or other family members, giving them the opportunity to handle family issues when they occur and thus helping to balance the work-family time (Ammons and Markham, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007) Telework also reduces unproductive interactions with coworkers, which has been identified as a major benefit of teleworking (Baruch, 2000; Martin and MacDonnell, 2012; Khalifa and Davison, 2000) that is correlated with fewer interruptions (Bailey and Kurland, 2002). Reduced contact with coworkers is thought to provide additional time resources, resulting in increased productivity. Furthermore, it is interesting to investigate whether an employee works from home during traditional hours or not. Non-traditional working hours are working hours that employees normally would not work at the office, for example during evenings or weekends (Nakrošienė & Butkevičienė, 2016). When employees get the opportunity to work more flexible hours, this can be seen as a work resource because when people get more flexibility with regards to their job, their personal resources will grow as well (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

In the work-home resources model multiple categories of resources are mentioned in which the ones listed above could be categorized. One of the categories stated in the model is personal resources, these resources could be physical (e.g., energy and health), psychological (e.g., focus, concentration), intellectual (e.g., knowledge, skills, and experience), affective (e.g., positive emotions) and capital (e.g., money, time). Personal resources can be used to understand how workers can use resources occurring in their environment to achieve different purposes (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). A personal resource can for example be saving time. When employees work from home, they do not have to travel to their offices which saves them time. With this time saved employees can invest this extra time in various activities such as taking care of family members or having more leisure time. Furthermore, multiple different contextual resources have been found in literature in both the work domain as the home domain

(Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Examples of contextual resources could be social support either emotionally or practically, from a colleague or family member and opportunities for further development and feedback. The resources of employees can in this research thus be seen as the opportunities employees encounter while working from home.

Bottlenecks of teleworking

There are various bottlenecks that employees can experience while working from home. According to Van Veldhoven and Van Gelder (2020) one of the most important bottlenecks when working from home within a pandemic is that employees mention that they feel like they have less room to maneuver. They miss leaving the house, because they must be inside all day due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, employees perceive a lower quality and quantity of work. The quality of work decreases because of less interesting work and the quantity of work decreases because of the lack of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, employees described that they did not possess the right equipment to do their work properly from home (Van Veldhoven & Van Gelder, 2020).

Another negative consequence of working from home is found by Crandall and Gao (2005). When employees are teleworking, they often have less contact with their colleagues. Because of the lack of conversations with their colleagues they may start to feel isolated. Golden et al. (2008) state that isolated teleworkers often are less confident about the abilities and knowledge they possess, influencing their performance negatively. Because of this, isolation is seen as one of the most important bottlenecks of working from home. (Baruch, 2001; Wilson and Greenhill, 2004). Lapierre et al. (2015) elaborate on this view by stating that employees that work a lot from home get less support from supervisors and colleagues at their job. Because of this reduction of communication with colleagues, employees that work from home thus tend to experience social isolation. Lastly problems with accessing documents and technology needed for one's job can be seen as a bottleneck of working from home (Perez, et al., 2003). Telework has been seen to be more successful within companies that provide their teleworking employees with the right technology and access to documents from home, than within companies that do not (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001).

What also could be interesting to consider when studying telework is the amount of time spent teleworking. Caldwell (1997) for example, states that the more time employees spent teleworking, and being away from the office, the bigger the influence on the work outcomes that are mentioned in the work-home resource model. This means that the more time an employee works from home the greater the negative influence of isolation on their work

outcomes and thus their performance. As the number of employees that are working from home increased significantly within the COVID-19 pandemic from 33% to 45% (Hamersma et al., 2020), it is plausible that the chances of workers feeling isolated and thus suffering from a decline in personal resources and lower performance increased, due to an increase in the work- and sometimes also home demands, as mentioned in the work-home resource model (Crandall & Gao, 2005; Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

Furthermore, in the work-home resource model the authors elaborate on contextual demands. These contextual demands can either be from the work- or home domain. Examples of these demands are quantitative demands (whether you experience an overload) this can happen at work when someone has a high workload or deadlines and in the home domain when you have many chores to do and little time to carry them out. Emotional demands are very personal to the employee causing emotional draining due to certain problems either at the work floor or at home. Physical demands entail tasks either at home or at one's job that need physical effort. With cognitive demands tasks are meant for which an individual needs a lot of focus either at home or at work. When demands in one of these domains wear out one's personal resources this can result in a work-home conflict which can be the cause of worse outcomes in the other domain. This means that the contextual demands and resources can be seen as the reason of either conflict or enrichment, the personal resources one has create the connection between both the work and home domains (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

When suddenly working more hours from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic the demands of the work domain could abruptly change. Employees could experience an increase in demands at the work domain as well as the home domain, as they might have to take care of their children while trying to find out how to efficiently work from home. The different demand categories such as quantitative or emotional demands can change resulting in a work-home conflict, and worse outcomes both at work and at home (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). When the demands change it is likely that the outcomes will change as well. Employees could perceive themselves as less productive or experience less job satisfaction. Furthermore, suddenly working from home can change the resources employees have to perform their job. They might not have the necessary documents or office necessities available at home that they used to have at their offices. The bottlenecks employees describe in this research can be seen as the demands in the work-home resource model as they cause employees to use their resources, or they can be seen as a decrease in resources as some necessities might not be accessible at home. Both the increase in demand and the decrease in resources could lead to a lower productivity and thus performance (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

Method

Research Design

In this paper qualitative research has been conducted to answer the main research question which was: *'How do teleworking employees experience their performance in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, what do they perceive as opportunities, and what are the bottlenecks they experience?'*

A qualitative research method has been chosen because it goes into depth on the experiences people have and it helps the researcher to find out what people consider as important (Silverman, 2006). As I tried to gain in depth knowledge about experiences employees have had regarding working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity to keep asking questions and dive deeper into a topic with the interviewees made that I chose for qualitative research, which was conducted by means of a template analysis, using previously conducted research from the theoretical framework and complement this with new findings in the collected data. As this research was interested in the way employees perceived change in their performance it was centered on the individual's experiences. To answer the research question twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted between the 16th and 20th week of 2021, with employees from different organizations that had to work (more) from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were chosen, because according to McNamara (1999) interviews are useful to gain more information on the story behind the experiences of an interviewee. As I wanted to go in depth and figure out what caused people to perceive their performance a certain way, interviews were very useful to gain this knowledge. The questions of the interviews were open-ended to ensure that participants had the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings, which is an advantage of qualitative research compared to quantitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Sample

In this paper the focus laid on individual employees from different organizations that had to work more hours from home than before the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample technique that was used to collect the data for this research was non-probability sampling, while the participants were not selected at random (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The participants were selected through referral sampling as it was difficult to reach many teleworking employees in my own network. Referral sampling was done by asking participants whether they knew other possible participants that could be interviewed. Finally, 12 different respondents were selected to participate in this research. In Table 1 the characteristics of the

respondents are described. The gender of the respondents was quite equally distributed as 58% was male and 42% was female. The average age of the participants was 40.42 years (SD = 14.01). The average tenure was 10.44 years (SD = 10.14). The average amount of contract hours was 35.58 (SD = 5.41). All but one respondent usually worked from the office. One respondent usually worked from a classroom at a school.

Table 1

Characteristics of the sample

Respondent Number (n = 12)	Name	Gender	Age	Function Title	Level of Education	Tenure (Years)	Contract Hours
1	Interviewee 1	Female	25	Trainee absenteeism coordinator	High	< 1	40
2	Interviewee 2	Female	53	Regional Manager	High	4	36
3	Interviewee 3	Male	51	QHSE-Manager	High	24	40
4	Interviewee 4	Male	55	Environment manager	High	25	32
5	Interviewee 5	Female	55	Project Employee	Low	13	27
6	Interviewee 6	Male	55	Software Engineer	High	16	40
7	Interviewee 7	Male	56	Productmanager	High	26	36
8	Interviewee 8	Female	34	Instructor (Secondary Education)	High	4	24
9	Interviewee 9	Female	26	Policy Supporter	High	1	32
10	Interviewee 10	Male	26	Packaging coordinator	High	1	40
11	Interviewee 11	Male	23	Legal Assistant/ Teacher	High	< 1	40
12	Interviewee 12	Male	26	Accountmanager	High	< 1	40
			40,42				

Instruments

The instruments that were used in this paper were semi-structured interviews, which were conducted via videocall due to the COVID-19 safety measures, except for one that was conducted face-to-face. Conducting interviews via videocall might lead to the loss of non-verbal communication (Saunders et al., 2004). On the other hand, it could reduce the amount of socially desirable answers given by interviewees (Emans, 1990). Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they gave interviewees the opportunity to vary more in their answers,

increasing the chances that the answers differed more between participants (Fylan, 2005). It also gave the researcher the opportunity to go deeper into interesting answers to gain more knowledge on those topics. All interviewees were asked to draw their performance over time, starting in December 2019 until the first quarter of 2021. Based on their drawings, questions were asked to find out more about why they experienced their performance to be a certain way and which opportunities and bottlenecks they experienced during that specific period. The questions were created beforehand to make the researcher able to continue asking questions to elaborate more on the interesting topics. With the use of thoroughly studied literature the guideline was developed with questions to dive deeper into the experiences of the participants based on the drawings they made. During the interviews notes were made and the interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. This ensured that the researcher was able to focus the attention fully on the responses of the interviewees. With the aid of this material the interviews have been transcribed.

It is often stated that ensuring reliability within qualitative research can be hard for various reasons. To ensure that this research has the best quality, validity and reliability of the data, member checks have been carried out (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). This was done by sending the interviewees summaries of the research findings, for them to check and approve. This technique ensured that my interpretation of the information given by the interviewees was verified, which increased the credibility of the data of this research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, the verifiability of the research, has been guaranteed because the working method of the researcher has been described thoroughly and has been transparent, which makes it possible for other researchers to conduct the research again, making it verifiable (De Jong et al., 2003). Lastly during this interview, the interviewer has used a topic guide with open ended questions to ensure that all participants have been asked about the same topics.

Procedure

The process of collecting the necessary data involved multiple different steps. During the first step the topic guide was created in which the topics that would be discussed during the interviews were written down. As shown in appendix A the topic guide goes into the general experience of employees in COVID times, the bottlenecks, and opportunities they experience while working from home, and the perceived change in their performance. Furthermore, contact was made with the first interviewee. The interviewee was sent an email to plan an appointment for conducting the interview. Then the semi- structured interview was conducted with the first respondent. Hereafter all other respondents were selected one by one,

and they also received a mail to schedule an appointment. At the start of every interview the interviewer made sure to introduce themselves, to introduce the research, and the topics that would be discussed within the interview. Furthermore, she made sure to make the interviewees feel as comfortable as possible and ensured them of their anonymity to increase credibility, and decrease socially desired answers (Symon & Cassel, 2012). The interviewer also ensured the interviewees that they could always interrupt the interview for questions or to quit when they felt uncomfortable. Moreover, every participant was asked for permission to record the interview and they were all sent permission forms to fill in. At the end of the interview the participants have been thanked for their participation and were asked whether they would like to see the final thesis. The recordings were transcribed and thereafter analyzed using ATLAS.ti.

Analysis

Before the data that has been found could be analyzed, the interviews first had to be transcribed. The interviews have been verbatim transcribed, this implies that the verbal data that was found within the interviews have been reproduced word-for-word, making the transcription an exact copy of the words that were said by the interviewees (Poland 1995). The interviews were transcribed and analyzed shortly after conducting the interviews, to ensure that as much details as possible were still present, and the subjectivity was as low as possible.

When analyzing the collected data, the data was first sorted then named, categorized, and finally connected (Gelissen, 2010). The data was analyzed by means of a template analysis. The data collected from the interviews was both coded and analyzed by using ATLAS.ti. Based on the knowledge found within the literature as is visible in the theoretical framework, the preliminary codes were obtained to start the analysis with. Initially the three main codes were 'career shock', 'productivity' and 'working conditions of teleworking' with the latter consisting of the opportunities and bottlenecks. The initial subcodes were created with the use of the research question and the literature within the theoretical framework. The data was then coded with the use of the initial coding scheme and new codes were added when necessary. For example, two interviewees mentioned sleeping more as an opportunity of working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a new code namely 'being able to sleep more'. Every opinion or statement the interviewees gave with regards to the topic were labelled with an appropriate code. After this process the final coding scheme was created with the initial codes and the codes that were newly added through the process of coding the data. Then the data was compared and interpreted, and the results will be presented in the following part of

the paper. The initial coding scheme is visible in appendix B and the final coding scheme is presented in appendix C.

Results

COVID as a Career Shock

Even though the respondents often did not literally mention the characteristics of a career shock while talking about COVID-19, it became apparent within the context of the conversations that every respondent spoke about COVID-19 as if it were a career shock. For example, none of the participants could have predicted the pandemic and the consequences it would have for their working life, as they had never encountered something like this before. One participant said: "*And yeah, Corona, I did not expect that either.*" (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator). Furthermore, none of the employees had much control over the situation as they had to work according to the COVID-19 safety measurements that were put in place by their employers and the Dutch government. One respondent said: "*We weren't allowed, uh... If you didn't have a good reason, you couldn't come to the office.*" (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator). As is visible in the quote, the control about the working days of employees was partly taken away. They often could not decide themselves whether they wanted to work from home or from the office, this was determined by the government and the organization they worked for. Moreover, the respondents considered COVID-19 as disruptive as it completely changed the way they were able to do their jobs and extraordinary as they said they have never in their life experienced something like this before. Although everyone experienced it differently, they all agreed that they had never encountered something that changed their working life as much as COVID-19. One respondent said: "*I think yeah… I have never encountered something that had as much impact as this.*" (Male, 56, Product manager). This quote illustrates how impactful employees experienced the COVID-19 pandemic to be and the way it changed their jobs. There were no participants that perceived COVID-19 as something insignificant.

Three employees started to actively reconsider their career, and in the end, they even chose to switch jobs because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the way it changed their working life. The reason they quit their job was that often the parts that they perceived as most fun about the job, were gone, the participants perceived their job as less enjoyable. One respondent said: "*No more colleagues and actually in that job it was the case that the colleagues made it the most fun for me... Other than that, I didn't really like that job as a customer service employee. So that, uh, then my motivation for it actually went down to just do it and I was already thinking about switching jobs.*" (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator).

Because of the actions some employees took such as quitting or switching jobs, it can be assumed that they had a deliberate thought process concerning one's career, as it is not

likely that they would leave a company within a pandemic without considering it well. When looking into the data it is visible that all respondents experience several characteristics of career shocks when working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there is a difference with regards to the degree with which these characteristics are experienced by the respondents as some experienced more characteristics or perceived them to be more intense than others.

Productivity

As described in the theoretical framework productivity can change due to career shocks, opportunities, and bottlenecks (Hirschi, 2010; Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). In the next part I will go deeper into the findings with regards to the perceived performance of the respondents.

High productivity

What became visible when respondents were drawing how their productivity changed during the COVID-19 pandemic was that the moments respondents perceived their productivity to be high were often in-between the lockdowns. Most of them got the opportunity to work some hours from the office in between the lockdowns and see their colleagues again. Their productivity went up more in-between lockdowns than the productivity of those who were not able to work from the office in between lockdowns. Furthermore, employees explained that they perceived themselves to be more productive when the workload was higher. They perceived the increase in workload as an incentive to work harder which then increased their productivity. One respondent said for example: "*Yes, usually the busier I am, the more productive I can work.*" (Female, 26, Policy supporter). Several employees considered this to be the most important aspect that changed their productivity for the better in between those lockdowns, for the others this depended more on the increase of social contact. Furthermore, it became clear that the longer the respondents were teleworking the more they were getting used to it and the less the lockdown changed their performance. A respondent said: "*I think that that indeed has to do with yeah the resources you have uh… that from June on you will find out that you have to do it a certain way.*" (Male, 55, Environment manager). Over time they got used to less contact with colleagues, digital meetings and the programs that were used to carry out these meetings. Many of them got office supplies and other support facilitated by their employers and coworkers. When being more used to teleworking some respondents even said that they felt more productive at home. For example, one respondent said: "*Once you have it all back on track, you can also be very productive from the home office.*" (Male, 56, Product

manager). Three other respondents agreed with this statement. The other respondents felt that even though they did get used to teleworking more, they still were more productive when working from the office.

Low productivity

Low or lower productivity has been mentioned by every interviewee multiple times. The moments where the most respondents considered themselves to be unproductive or less productive where most often during the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, when they had to work from home full-time. A reason for the drop in productivity for example was not being used to teleworking yet. A respondent said: *"And that drop that is in it is mainly due to being uncomfortable with working from home."* (Male, 51, QHSE manager). Other reasons for a decrease in productivity that were given by respondents were, having technical difficulties with working from home (experienced by two respondents), not having support from their employer (experienced by five respondents), having low motivation to perform (experienced by one respondent), and having a low workload (experienced by four respondents). One respondent said for example: *"Well in the beginning my productivity was a bit low, because I didn't have much to do, and I indicated that."* (Female, 26, Policy supporter). One respondent even explained that at certain moment she was not even able to carry out her job at all due to the circumstance caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. She said: *"Yeah, so I couldn't do anything at all. I just couldn't do my job."* (Female, 55, Project Employee). She could not do her job, because her job was to organize training courses. Due to COVID-19 these training courses were not allowed to take place anymore, leaving her with no tasks to carry out, except for cancelling the training courses.

What was interesting was that while the second lockdown consisted of more measurements to keep COVID-19 under control, for example the curfew, the second lockdown was perceived by the respondents as less invasive with regards to their productivity (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2021). The reason various respondents gave for this was that they had experienced a lockdown before, and they knew what to do when the second lockdown arrived. One respondent said: *"It didn't affect that anymore, because everyone was fully prepared for it."* (Male, 51, QHSE-Manager). So, the second lockdown was not as invasive for the respondents as they already had gotten used to teleworking.

Neutral productivity

Several respondents also stated that there were moments that certain events or changes did not change their productivity or even stabilized their perceived productivity, meaning they

did not perceive their productivity as either increasing or decreasing. There were multiple reasons given by the respondents why this occurred. One respondent said for example: *"Uh I think that indeed has to do with uh yes just the resources you have uh, from June on you will find out that you have to do it a certain way."* (Male, 55, Environment manager). Two other respondents explicitly agreed with this statement.

Furthermore, what became apparent was that while the first lockdown was often perceived as lowering their productivity, multiple respondents claimed that they experienced no change in productivity when the second lockdown was proclaimed. They knew what they had to work with and had become more adapted to teleworking. One respondent said for example: "*It just stays the same, so it just got stabilized. You'll have to deal with this and that's it, so I'm not going to buy a huge computer or anything like that to be faster."* (Male, 55, Environment manager). It seems that as time goes on and employees get more and more used to teleworking and the way it changes their working life, it is not perceived as something that changes their productivity significantly anymore, or at least way less than it did when the COVID-19 pandemic had just started.

Working conditions while teleworking

To determine the causes of the occurred change in productivity I will describe the working conditions of the respondents. These will be categorized as opportunities and bottlenecks and will be described in the following part.

Opportunities

The respondents have experienced many different opportunities while teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic. These opportunities can be seen as the work resources the employee has. The more opportunities the employee has, the better they can perform at work and the higher their work outcomes will be. The most discussed opportunity was getting support from their employer while teleworking. This support could be through facilitating the office necessities to properly work at home with or through other gifts or mental support programs. Most of the respondents were very satisfied with the support they got from their employer. One respondent said: "*So we got... well we already had a laptop, but we also got another headset that was a bit better, we also got a second screen and a mobile phone to call with."* (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator). Getting support from the employer was extra important as some employees did not have any experience with working from home, nor the supplies to do so. The employer fulfilled an important role in providing them with those supplies, but also with mental support. Some respondents said however that they would have

preferred a little more support from their employer, mostly during the first lockdown. One respondent who experienced this said: *"Yes, in particular I have missed the role of the employer a bit euh. An active role in uh... that she just, that your manager just calls once and says how are you doing? I missed that, yes."* (Female, 55, Project employee). As this respondent was not used to working from home it was remarkable to see that this employer in particular did not support its employees enough, as they needed most help getting used to it.

Not only support from the employer was mentioned by respondents a lot, also support from colleagues was greatly appreciated. One respondent said: *"Yes, of course they just help you if you get stuck somewhere or explain it yeah."* (Male, 26, Packaging coordinator). This help could be with planning in digital meetings with colleagues to do activities, having a conversation or colleagues helping each other understanding the technology behind teleworking. Employees that mentioned that they got support from their colleagues mentioned social isolation less, as they had more contact with their colleagues.

Moreover, some respondents mentioned that switching jobs increased their productivity, this was mostly because they did not enjoy the job they had before due to reasons such as social isolation, which led to the decrease in productivity. During the COVID-19 pandemic they had to perform their job without all the things that could make it more enjoyable such as nice colleagues and Friday afternoon drinks and came to realize that they in fact did not like the job itself as much, whereafter they decided to quit. When finding a new job that they did like, their productivity often increased despite still working from home and being in a pandemic. One respondent said for example: *"And well in February I got a new job of course, well there, from there productivity grows again in that sense."* (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator).

Another opportunity of teleworking that was often mentioned by respondents was the decrease of travel time. Where normally people would have to travel to their offices and maybe even experience traffic jams, they now could work from their homes, greatly decreasing their travel time as most of them just had to walk the stairs to go to their working space. Because of this some respondents experienced better sleep as they did not have to get up so early to drive to the office. A respondent said for example: *"Sleeping is actually an opportunity, yes, that you... you used to be woken by the alarm clock and now you often wake up before that alarm goes off."* (Male, 55, Software engineer).

Moreover, respondents were also positive about the increase in flexibility in working hours. Almost every respondent could plan their working hours the way they preferred to when teleworking, which was seen as a big opportunity by multiple respondents as they could take

care of their children, do laundry, go to a store in between working hours, or work out more, which gave them more freedom. One respondent said: *"You can say I'm going to do some shopping now and I'm going to do some work tonight from eight to ten o'clock. You can just... you can organize your time differently, so you now have more time for other things."* (Male, 55, Software engineer). Other opportunities that were mentioned multiple times by the respondents were being less distracted by others such as colleagues, receiving support from their partner, and receiving training or new tasks to perform.

Bottlenecks

In addition to the opportunities they experienced, the respondents also discussed the bottlenecks they experienced while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. These bottlenecks can be seen as the increase of work demands or the decrease in resources of an employee. The more demands they have in comparison to their resources, the lower their work outcome will be. The bottleneck that without a doubt has been mentioned the most by respondents was social isolation. All respondents have mentioned to feel socially isolated during the COVID-19 pandemic various times, leading to loneliness or even depressed feelings. They missed contact with their colleagues while grabbing a cup of coffee or printing a file or had difficulty with the online way of meeting via Zoom or Teams. One respondent did not see her colleagues at all for some time, not even digitally as they did not make use of Zoom or Teams yet at her job, she said: *"So I was mainly emailing and calling and uh I really didn't see anyone anymore, not even on screen."* (Female, 55, Project employee).

Furthermore, respondents mentioned many times that they experienced a lack of support, mostly from their employers. This lack of support was mostly mentioned when respondents were talking about the first lockdown as they felt like they did not get enough physical and mental support to properly deal with the sudden changes due to the pandemic. Two employees would have liked to be called by their manager and asked how they are doing and if they needed something. Most of them however, directly stated that they did understand that their employees needed some time to arrange the support and said it got better over time and eventually almost every respondent claimed to be happy with the support they got in the end. One respondent said: *"And nobody actually inquired how I was doing or uh no, so I think the employer left something there. But I do understand that it was also difficult for the employer because it was new for them too."* (Female, 55, Project employee).

Moreover, several respondents claimed to not be familiar with teleworking and that they had never teleworked before the COVID-19 pandemic started. They claimed to be less

productive while getting used to teleworking because they needed extra time to get used to teleworking and the programs used to carry this out such as Teams or Zoom. As this time was used for other purposes instead of work, respondents could not be as productive as they used to be before the pandemic started. One respondent said: *"Yes, that will definitely have an impact. If as a result you can simply arrange things less well with each other and attune to each other. Then it goes slower."* (Male, 56, Product manager). What made it even harder was the fact that if they wanted help from colleagues with something they found difficult, they could not just walk by their desks, but instead had to call or videocall them for help. However, as time went by, they got more and more used to teleworking and the programs and devices used to do so, and the productivity inclined again for most of them. A respondent said for example: *"Yes, that you notice that all the work, all the questions you get are becoming increasingly easier to do from home."* (Male, 51,   QHSE manager).

Furthermore, some respondents claimed that their physical health declined due to the teleworking. They felt like they sat more and moved less which decreased their perceived performance. Some respondents cycled or walked to their offices before teleworking started, so they moved less during the day. A respondent said for example: *"So, let's say the movement I had sometimes one day was from where I was working, to the living room and back again. So, you are moving less."* (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator). Another reason for the decline in physical health some respondents experienced was having bad posture while working due to a lack of good office supplies such as a good chair to sit on. A respondent that experienced this said: *"Yes, and my body still suffers, yes, I still go to the physiotherapist for my shoulders and my neck, because I've been sitting wrong on my chair all this time."* (Female, 55, Project Employee).

Moreover, another reason respondent gave for their low or decreasing productivity was the decrease in workload due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As there was not a lot of work to do the productivity declined because employees simply did not have enough work to carry out throughout the day which decreased their performance temporarily. A respondent said for example: *"Well in the beginning my productivity was a bit low, because I didn't have much to do, and I indicated that."* (Female, 26, Policy supporter)

Lastly, multiple respondents had trouble with digital meetings for various reasons. One respondent for example had encountered some technical issues with the digital meeting platform. Another respondent had trouble with discussing the topics via a digital meeting as the topic was not suitable to be discussed in that manner due to lots of small numbers. It was so difficult they still decided to go to the office mid-meeting to finish it properly. She said:

"Not every consultation is suitable for digital and especially with us the consultations about figures and budget, because we also tried that via Share Screen, but then those figures are too small, so they cannot be read. So, it's happened twice that I had a meeting with the controller, and they tried to discuss the finances and that halfway through they said I'm coming to the office because this doesn't work like that." (Female, 53, Regional manager).

Other bottlenecks that were mentioned multiple times by respondents were takin care of children, having no perspective with regards to the future, disliking one's job and decreasing mental health.

Teleworking hours

Because of the career shock COVID-19 and the measurements put in place by the Dutch government employees had to work from home. The participants were asked how much they were teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic. Four of the participants worked full time from home, the other eight worked full-time from home during the lockdowns and part-time from home in between the lockdowns. One respondent said: *"The offices actually didn't close, but it was still recommended to work from home and so we all followed that as much as possible. And that indeed means that you now do all that kind of work at home."* (Male, 55, Environment manager). Some participants had been teleworking before the COVID-19 pandemic, others where not familiar with teleworking at all. Most of the participants were not forced to work from home, but instead it was recommended by the employer. What became apparent in the interviews with the respondents and the drawings they made was that when the employees were full time teleworking, which was mostly in times of the lockdowns, they perceived their productivity to be lower than in times where they worked part-time from home. One respondent said: *"I hear a lot of people say uh, oh I work, I'm much more productive at home. Uh, not me. I notice that, and that is partly because it takes longer now, I find it difficult to concentrate, I am easily distracted."* (Female, 55, Project employee). As the lockdowns became longer the bottlenecks made it more difficult for the employees to perform their job, which decreased their perceived performance. The second lockdown, however, was mostly perceived as less challenging, because many respondents felt that they had gotten used to full-time teleworking more. Still, it became obvious that employees working full-time from home were more pessimistic about their performance than employees that worked from home part-time.

Conclusion

This research sought an answer to the question: *'How do teleworking employees experience their performance in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what do they perceive as opportunities, and what are the bottlenecks they experience?'* to fill the gap of knowledge on this topic, that has emerged because of the sudden changes with regards to working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To answer this question qualitative research has been conducted focusing on twelve employees that had to work more hours from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When looking into the results it can be concluded that COVID-19 can be seen as a career shock as the respondents mentioned most of the career shock characteristics when speaking about the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it can be concluded that overall employees had a negative experience with working more hours at home with regards to their performance. Even though their performance changed throughout the year, the employees perceived themselves as less productive than before the increase in teleworking hours due to COVID-19, mostly during lockdowns. This negative perception was due to several different bottlenecks they experienced, for example social isolation, lack of support, and missing small talk with colleagues. Even though they stated within the interviews that they did experience opportunities such as more flexibility in working hours, less travel time, and less distraction, this was not enough for most of the employees to perceive this as positive with regards to their performance.

Discussion

Despite the previous conclusion that COVID-19 can be seen as a career shock, not every respondent experienced all characteristics of a career shock when referring to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, only three respondents started to actively reconsider their career. However, as the respondents did meet all other career shock characteristics when talking about the COVID-19 pandemic, the conclusion was made that COVID-19 could be seen as a career shock in this case. Respondents indirectly mentioned the characteristics of career shocks while talking about COVID-19, they did however experience the intensity of the careers chock differently. These findings are in line with the link between COVID-19 and career shocks found in the literature based on the definition of Akkermans et al. (2018) that was discussed in the theoretical framework. Moreover, these findings are in line with the statement of Nalis et al. (2021) who state that every individual can experience a career shock in a different way. This became visible in this paper when interviewing the respondents. All respondents considered the career shock as impactful and most of them also considered it to be a negative shock. One respondent however seemed to perceive the shock as something positive. Where the other respondents experienced the social isolation as a bottleneck, this respondent did not seem to be bothered much by it. This might depend on the personality type of this individual as Hannay (2016) states that introverted people are a better match for teleworking than extroverted people as social isolation in telework suits the introversion personality better.

Furthermore, this paper investigated the perceived performance of the respondents. As in the results was discussed the employees overall had a negative experience with working more hours at home during the COVID-19 pandemic with regards to their performance. They perceived themselves to be less productive than before the COVID-19 pandemic, although their reasons were varying a lot. This finding is in line with the findings earlier described in the literature with regards to career shocks. In the article of Akkermans et al. (2020) was stated that the Corona virus has many negative effects on people such as a lower productivity. It became clear in this research that the respondents perceived their performance to be lower within lockdowns. An explanation for this could be an increase in distraction, which three employees recognized and mentioned as a bottleneck. Yunita and Saputra (2019) stated that employees that are not able to concentrate on their jobs have a decreased performance. When the lockdowns were put in place, it caused several employees to have children at home, which could be a distraction that they would not have outside of lockdowns. This could be a reason why employees perceived their performance to be lower within lockdowns.

What also became obvious in this research is that several respondents explained that they thought their performance decreased more within the first lockdown compared to the second lockdown. They had become used to teleworking more and this habituation seemed to decrease the perceived impact on their performance within the second lockdown. This finding is in line with the statement of Akkermans et al. (2018) as in this research is mentioned that competences can help people in dealing with situations in which they have little control. It looks like the employees gained some competences with which they can cope better with the teleworking situation within the second lockdown.

Moreover, this research investigated the bottlenecks that were experienced by the employees when working from home. The bottleneck that was mentioned the most by the respondents of this research was social isolation. This is in line with the findings of Crandall and Gao (2005) who state that the lack of conversations with colleagues when working from home can lead to the feelings of isolation. In this case the respondents might have been even more socially isolated as other social activities such as going out for dinner were not possible due to the measurements that were put in place by the government (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020). Another bottleneck that was mentioned several times was the lack of support from either colleagues or supervisors often combined with problems with accessing new technology such as digital meetings. It became visible that the employees that were not used to teleworking yet needed more support from their colleagues and supervisor to ensure that they could perform their jobs properly. Some respondents still had a hard time getting used to the technology and the new way of working remotely. This might have been because they got less support from colleagues and supervisors than the other respondents. In line with this finding the International Labour Organization (2020) stresses the importance of a dialogue between the employer and its workers to discover problems with tools or technology and help employees perform better. When this dialogue lacks this might lead to more difficulties when teleworking for employees that are new to this. Another reason that some respondents may have had a more difficult time getting used to telework could be that they suffered from anxiety about the adoption of the telework. Donati et al. (2021) state in their research that employees that are less familiar with telework will have more anxiety to adopt the technology than employees that are more familiar with remote work. Employees that had a harder time getting used to teleworking may thus have been less familiar with teleworking causing them to be anxious when adopting it.

Furthermore, the opportunities that employees experienced while working from home were investigated. The opportunity that was mentioned the most by the respondents of this

research was experiencing support from their employer. This is an interesting finding as there is a clear line between one group of respondents that experienced a supporting employer and the other group that experienced little support. It became visible that the workers that had support from their employer had less difficulty with the transition to full time teleworking than the employees that had little support. This is in line with the findings in literature as Gray (1995) states that support is the most important aspect to successful teleworking (p.106). Another opportunity that was mentioned often by the respondents was the decrease in travel time. Several respondents saw this as a great opportunity to spend the time they did not have to use for traveling doing other things such as working out. This is in line with the statement of Clark et al. (2019) that the lack of travel time, via teleworking, is associated with an increase in job satisfaction and leisure time satisfaction. One respondent interestingly mentioned that the decrease in travel time caused him to be able to sleep longer. It can be assumed that this increase in sleeping hours can improve someone's health as Parvin (2017) states that sleeping enough hours a night has many benefits.

When comparing these results with the work-home resource model, it became obvious that the work outcomes changed were perceived more negatively, as the employees considered themselves to be less productive. They mentioned a long list of bottlenecks which could be seen as an increase in demands or a decrease in resources with regards to their job, but also at home for example when they had to take care of their kids due to the lockdown. However, respondents have also mentioned several different opportunities, which could be seen as resources charging employee's personal batteries (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). For example, having an informal videocall with colleagues to charge their social batteries again. Although there were many resources to charge, in the end the increase in demand and decrease in resources resulted in a lower perceived performance, and thus lower outcomes mostly during lockdowns.

Lastly there have been found some contradictories with the literature in this research. In the existing literature it is stated that teleworking leads to a better home- and work life balance (Ammons and Markham, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007). This paper however, found that this is not always the case. Some respondents experienced a worse home- and work life balance as they did not experience a separation anymore between work and home as they worked from home every day. Furthermore, in the theory was stated that working from home would decrease the distractions that employees encountered (Butler et al., 2007). Although this is partly agreed on by the respondents, some of them considered themselves to be more distracted as they were in their own home, they sometimes had the urge to do some chores in-between work,

distracting them from the job itself. Moreover, in the literature it is stated that an opportunity of teleworking is taking care of family members (Ammons & Markham, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007). This could however also be seen as a bottleneck as taking care of your family or kids could be a great distraction when trying to perform your job. This paper thus partly contradicts the existing literature. Further research could give more insight whether the possibility of taking care of family members could be seen as an opportunity or bottleneck, or if it depends on the context in which occurs.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that will be discussed below. One of the limitations of this research is the sample that was used collecting the data from. The sample only consisted of twelve respondents which were confronted with COVID-19 which caused them to work more hours from home than before. Most of the respondents were highly educated, only one respondent was lower educated. Furthermore, almost all respondents were either in their fifties or their twenties. As the sample consisted of only people in their twenties and fifties and one respondent in her thirties, and all but one respondent were highly educated, this sample might not reflect the population properly, even though the respondents did have varying jobs, and all worked at different organizations (Omair, 2014). The sample of respondents was selected through referral sampling. As with referral sampling respondents are not chosen based on random selection, there could potentially be biases in the sample because of under- or over representation of certain subgroups such as participants all having a certain age. This makes it impossible to generalize the knowledge gained from the sample to the targeted population (Ritchi & Lewis, 2003; Sharma, 2017). Due to these potential biases the assumptions that were based on this research can only be made about the sample that was used in this study. For future research I would recommend ensuring that the sample is chosen randomly, and that the researcher makes sure to represent people from all different demographics.

Another limitation of this research was that due to the timeframe given for this study, I was only able to look at the short-term changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the long-term changes uninvestigated. I would suggest future research, which could investigate the long-term changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic both still within the pandemic itself and after the pandemic ends, to paint a clear picture of both the short- and long-term changes caused by COVID-19. A longitudinal research design covering the pandemic as a whole and the first year after it ends has the advantage to follow change over time in an individual and to relate events and behavior to specific exposures (Caruana et al., 2015). As some employees

may have to keep working from home more than others it could be interesting to compare these groups with each other as well with regards to their perceived productivity to see whether there occur any differences between these two groups.

Lastly a limitation of this study is that the COVID-19 pandemic is still occurring when this research is finished. This means that although this research investigates how people perceived their performance to change within the year 2020, and the first months of 2021, it is not investigated how the rest of the COVID-19 pandemic will change their perceived performance. Akkermans et al. (2018) state that the longer the duration of a career shock, the more consequences it has for people. This indicates that you could expect that there will occur more changes and consequences in working life as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. Therefore, I would propose future research that could investigate what other changes in working life employees encounter in the times to come with regards to working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic and how this changes their perceived performance.

Another possibility for future investigation could be how the experiences of teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic differ between the employees that already are used to working from home and employees that have never worked from home before the pandemic. As in the interviews there appeared to be a difference between these groups with regards to how they experienced the bottlenecks and the number of bottlenecks they experienced. In the data collected through the interviews there seems to be a connection between the intensity of the bottlenecks that are experienced and how much employees are used to teleworking. Due to this research being qualitative, this connection between the intensity of the bottlenecks and how used to teleworking employees is unsure and should be further investigated in quantitative research finding out if there is really a linkage and what causes this relationship.

Practical implications

This research contributes to practice with the following practical implications. To start this research reveals that COVID-19 is indeed perceived as a career shock by the respondents, although in different levels. This is in line with what was to be expected when comparing the pandemic to the definition of a career shock by Akkermans et al. (2018). Furthermore, this research revealed that the career shock COVID-19 does in fact change the perceived performance of employees, which is in line with the statement that career shocks can have a significant effect on someone's career and thus performance (Hirschi, 2010). Specifically, this research found that the perceived performance of the employees was the lowest while working

from home during a lockdown compared to in-between lockdowns, which indicates that working from home during a career shock was perceived as changing the perceived performance the most. Moreover, this research found that the bottlenecks that employees experience while teleworking during a career shock such as COVID-19 mostly outweigh the opportunities that it creates, as perceived performance decreased. As described in the work-home resource model work outcomes are a result of personal resources which are supplemented by home- and work resources and diminished by work and home demands (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). As for most respondents the bottlenecks and decrease in resources outweighed the new resources they gained, it seems important to decrease the bottlenecks and prevent the decrease in resources as much as possible to keep the performance during a career shock as high as possible. To ensure this I would suggest that managers and organizations use these results to improve the way in which they handle the COVID-19 pandemic with regards to helping their employees. They could take the three most mentioned bottlenecks which were: social isolation, lack of support, and decreased physical health and put measures in place to decrease the intensity of the bottlenecks such as: planning informal zoom meetings to let colleagues chat with each other about things outside the workplace, support the employees with workplace equipment and mental support and providing employees with a standing desk or a home trainer to ensure their physical health stays as well as possible.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introductie

Goede morgen/middag, bedankt dat u mee wil werken aan dit interview. Dit interview gaat over de manier waarop u het thuiswerken ten tijde van COVID-19 ervaart en de invloed die het heeft op uw werkprestaties en de knelpunten en kansen die u ervaart als gevolg hiervan.

Ik zal me eerst even kort aan u voorstellen, ik ben Danielle Tinneveld, 22 jaar en ik studeer momenteel aan de Radboud Universiteit, waar ik de Masteropleiding Strategic Human Resource Leadership volg. Voor mijn Masterthesis ben ik bezig met een onderzoek naar de invloed van thuiswerken ten tijde van COVID-19 op de door werknemers ervaren prestaties en de kansen en knelpunten die zij ervaren. Om hier meer kennis over te verzamelen zal ik een aantal interviews gaan afnemen, waarvan dit er een is.

De verwachting is dat dit interview ongeveer 60 minuten in beslag zal nemen. Om uw antwoorden op de vragen op een later moment goed te kunnen verwerken zou ik u willen vragen of dit interview opgenomen mag worden. Ik wil vragen of u hiervoor een toestemmingsformulier zou willen invullen en ondertekenen. Dit interview zal vervolgens worden geanonimiseerd en worden verwerkt, waarna de audio opname weer zal worden verwijderd. Mochten er vragen of opmerkingen tussendoor zijn dan mag u mij ten alle tijden onderbreken, ook mag u op elk moment besluiten het interview te stoppen wanneer u zich hier niet meer prettig bij voelt.

Heeft u vooraf nog vragen of opmerkingen?

Dan gaan we nu beginnen, eerst heb ik een aantal algemene vragen die ik u zou willen stellen.

Algemene vragen

1.   Wat is uw leeftijd?
2.   Wat is uw functietitel?
3.   Hoe lang werkt u al bij uw huidige werkgever?
4.   Wat zijn uw huidige werkzaamheden

Uitleg voor het tekenen van de productiviteit

Ik zou u nu willen vragen of u zou kunnen uittekenen hoe uw productiviteit door de tijd heen veranderd is tussen december 2019 en nu, neemt u hiervoor rustig de tijd. Verder wil ik u vragen om op de plekken van belangrijke veranderingen en gebeurtenissen een punt te zetten in de tijdlijn, zodat we daar verder op in kunnen gaan.

Mogelijke vragen om te stellen om door te vragen op een onderwerp

Algemene doorvragen

1. Welke gebeurtenissen zijn volgens u het meeste van invloed geweest op uw productiviteit?
2. Welke gebeurtenissen hadden meer invloed op uw productiviteit dan u vooraf verwacht had?

Stijgende productiviteit

3. Ik zie dat u hier aangeeft dat uw productiviteit stijgt, wat is hier de reden van volgens u?
4. Heeft u op dit punt acties ondernomen waardoor de productiviteit stijgt?
5. Heeft u hier hulp gehad, waardoor u aangeeft dat de productiviteit stijgt?
6. Heeft u nieuwe kansen ervaren tijdens de stijging van uw productiviteit?
7. Wat is volgens u de oorzaak ervan dat hier de productiviteit van een dalende lijn naar een stijgende lijn gaat?

Dalende productiviteit

8. Ik zie dat u hier aangeeft dat uw productiviteit daalt, wat is hier de reden van volgens u?
9. Welke knelpunten heeft u ervaren op het moment dat u aangeeft dat de productiviteit daalt?
10. Wat is volgens u de oorzaak ervan dat hier de productiviteit van een stijgende lijn naar een dalende lijn gaat?

Appendix B: Initial Coding Scheme

Code	Categories	Sub-categories	Definition
Career Shock			A disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one's career. The occurrence of a career shock can vary in terms of predictability and can be either positively or negatively valenced (Akkermans et al., 2018, p. 4).
	COVID-19	• Disruptive and extraordinary • Non Disruptive and extraordinary • Control over factors • No Control over factors • Deliberate thought process concerning one's career • No Deliberate thought process concerning one's career • Predicatable • Unpredictable • Positively perceived by employees • Negatively perceived by employees	
Productivity			Individual behaviors that support the organizational, social, and psychological environment in which the technical core must function (Koopmans et al., 2011, p. 861).
	High	• High productivity • Increasing Productivity • Higher productivity • No change in productivity	Productivity that is perceived as high or inclining
	Low	• Low Productivity • Decreasing Productivity • Lower Productivity • No change in productivity	Productivity that is perceived as low or declining
Working conditions of Teleworking			The use of information and communication technologies, such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and/or desktop computers, for work that is performed outside the employer's premises (International labour organization, 2020, p. 3).

	Opportunities	• More Flexibility in working hours • Better home- and worklife balance • Suitable working place • Possibility to access organization's documents • Ability to take care of family members • Ability to work when most productive • Little distraction • Fewer interruptions • Support Partner • Support Family • Support Friends • Support Employer • Support Colleagues	Opportunities that arise from teleworking
	Bottlenecks	• Social isolation • Less room to maneuver • Lower work quality • Lower work quantity • Lack of support • Blurring Boundaries • No suitable working place • No possibility to access organization's documents **No support** • No support Partner • No support Family • No support Friends • No support Employer • No Support Colleagues	Bottlenecks that arise form teleworking
	Teleworking hours	• Full-time teleworking • Part-time teleworking • Adhoc teleworking	Hours spend teleworking

Appendix C: Final Coding Scheme

Code	Categories	Sub-categories	Definition	Example quote
Career shock			A disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one's career. The occurrence of a career shock can vary in terms of predictability and can be either positively or negatively valenced (Akkermans et al., 2018, p. 4).	
	COVID-19	• Disruptive and extraordinary • Non Disruptive and extraordinary • Control over factors • No Control over factors • Deliberate thought process concerning one's career • No Deliberate thought process concerning one's career • Predictable • Unpredictable • Positively perceived by employees • Negatively perceived by employees • Being fed up with COVID-19 • Canceling Tasks • Changing tasks • First lockdown	How employees perceive COVID-19	And yeah, Corona, I did not expect that either. (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator) And then I dropped even further, then I really didn't see it anymore. And then I thought what now? (Female, 55, project employee) Yes, in terms of material. Normally at school we just have live animals where they can work with, we make flower arrangements, we are in the cooking class, and we could have them do some things at home. You didn't know whether the parents were home or not. (Female, 34, Instructor)
Productivity			Individual behaviors that support the organizational, social, and psychological environment in which the technical core must function (Koopmans et al., 2011, p. 861).	

	High	• High productivity • Increasing Productivity • Higher productivity	Productivity that is perceived as high or inclining	And well, after December or in February I got a new job, of course, well there, from there productivity grows again. (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator) I noticed that people also become a bit more self-reliant in their work. I think that too positively impacted productivity (Female, 53, Regional manager)
	Low	• Low Productivity • Decreasing Productivity • Lower Productivity	Productivity that is perceived as low or declining	But then in my opinion my productivity went down a bit. Then it also became a bit less busy with the health insurance. (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator) And then I dropped even further, then I really didn't see it anymore. And then I thought what now? (Female, 55, project employee)
	Neutral	• No change in productivity • Stabilizing productivity	Productivity that doesn't change or stops changing	It just stays the same uh so it just stabilized. You'll have to deal with that and that's it, so uh. I'm not going to buy a huge computer or anything like that to be able to do it faster." (Male, 55, Environment manager)
Working Conditions			The use of information and communication technologies, such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and/or desktop computers, for work that is performed outside the employer's premises (International labour organization, 2020, p. 3).	

	Opportunities		Opportunities that arise from teleworking	
		• More Flexibility in working hours		While I'm at home, yeah, I can really organize my day there and if I want to sleep in, I can do that and if I'm tired, you can just rest. (Male, 23, Legal assistant/Teacher)
		• Better home- and worklife balance		
		• Suitable working place		
		• Possibility to access organization's documents		
		• Ability to take care of family members		
		• Ability to work when most productive		
		• Less Distraction		That you can get hold of someone faster, if you need someone, or you throw it into the group of Teams like, "Who's in trouble with this? Or who knows this?" Otherwise, you would visit those people separately. And now you throw it in a group, and it reacts much faster, someone reacts. (Male, 55, Software Engineer)
		• Support Partner		
		• Support Family		
		• Support Friends		
		• Support Employer		
		• Support Colleagues		
		• Being able to sleep more		
		• Enjoying teleworking		
		• Having perspective		
		• Helping employees		
		• Higher Motivation		
		• Increasing fysical health		
		• Increasing motivation		And that also has to do with working from home that you are not distracted. (Female, 53, Regional manager)
		• Less travel time		
		• Little distraction		
		• More contact with colleagues		
		• More efficiënt meetings		
		• More time to work out		
		• New Job opportunities		
		• Shorter meetingsTraining		I think so, because they have, what I also said is that I had a pilot project thrown at me. (Male, 26, packaging Coordinator)
		• Understanding employer		
		• informal meetings with colleagues		
		• Liking one's job		
		• New Job		
		• New task		
		• More work experience		
		• Being used to teleworking		
		• Increased self-reliance		
		• Getting used to teleworking		
		• More scheduled meetings		
		• Teleworking fits with the personality of the employee		
		• Job is suitable for teleworking		

		- Teleworking Facilitated by employer - Having good facilities to work from home		
	Bottlenecks	- Social isolation - Less room to maneuver - Lower work quality - Lower work quantity - Lack of support - Blurring Boundaries - No suitable working place - No possibility to access organization's documents **No Support** - No support Partner - No support Family - No support Friends - No support Employer - No Support Colleagues - Being easily distracted - Being less concentrated - Decreasing physical health - Decreasing mental health - Difficulty asking questions to colleagues - Difficulty carrying out one's job - Difficulty in contact with colleagues - Disliking one's job - Enjoying one's job less - Having no perspective - Less communication - Less meetings - Less resting time - Less smalltalk with colleagues - Longer meetings - Low physical health - Low motivation - More conflicts	Bottlenecks that arise form teleworking	Because yes, and also uh yes, with working with Teams we were not actually guided or helped at all. (Female, 55, project employee) And, well, it also has an impact on your personal life in that sense, because of course you no longer go to the office, you no longer have those colleagues around you. Uh and you just work all day, you actually just sit at home. (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator) So, I was mainly emailing and calling and uh I really saw no one at all, not even on screen. (Female, 55, project employee) Yes, so that's more so because of the problems with working from home, the technical solutions. (Male, 51, QHSE manager) Yes, motivation is of course, motivation often also comes from outside controlling factors.

		- No stated goals - Not being able to carry out job as usual - Not being used to digital meetings - Not being used to teleworking - Taking care of children - Technical difficulties - Worse home-and worklife balance - Low supervision - No working experience - Quitting job - Increased teleworking hours - More digital meetings - Teleworking does not fit with the personality of the employee - Job is not suitable for teleworking - Teleworking not Facilitated by Employer - Not having good facilities to work from home		Someone does not have a lot without goals or perspective. (Male, 26, Accountmanager)
	Teleworking hours	- Full-time teleworking - Part-time teleworking - Adhoc teleworking	How much an employee works from home	We weren't allowed, uh... If you didn't have a good reason, you couldn't come to the office. (Female, 25, Trainee absenteeism coordinator)