Work Redesigned: Avoiding Burnout in Hybrid Work Environments

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How Can We Organize Work to Promote Wellbeing and Organizational Performance?

**Equity questions
re: gender and race too**

Also interested in equity re:
age, national origin or
background, and more

OVERLOAD

HOW GOOD JOBS WENT BAD
AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT
Erin L. Kelly and Phyllis Moen

Research team, funders, & more at www.workfamilyhealthnetwork.org

Remote Work in Last Year & What's Next?

Today's Session

1. Research guidance on flexible, hybrid work
2. Principles for setting up and understanding hybrid work today and going forward
3. Q&A plus your reflections

Research Findings → Guiding Principles

OVERLOAD
HOW GOOD JOBS WENT BAD AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT
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5 years, ~1000 employees and managers, Fortune 500 firm (US sites)

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Terminology Clarification

- **On site exclusively**

- **Hybrid and Fixed Schedule**

- **Hybrid and Flexible = what we have studied most fully and our recommended model**

- **Exclusive remote work**

A Quick Poll

- **Given the way things are today, how do you feel about your work?**
 - One word or phrase into chat
  - First response!

Current Ways of Working Don't Seem Sustainable

- **Overload defined: Too Much to Do with Too Few Resources**

- **Company concerns –** retention, recruitment, burnout and associated decreases in quality & innovation

- **Employee concerns –** burnout & decreased job satisfaction, health & sleep problems, family time squeeze

- **Driven by intensified work & specific work practices**

"Given the way things are today, how do you feel?" – Free response from >25 teams in IT division of Fortune 500 firm (before COVID-19)

"Given the way things are today, how do you feel?" – Overload vs. Work-Life Conflicts
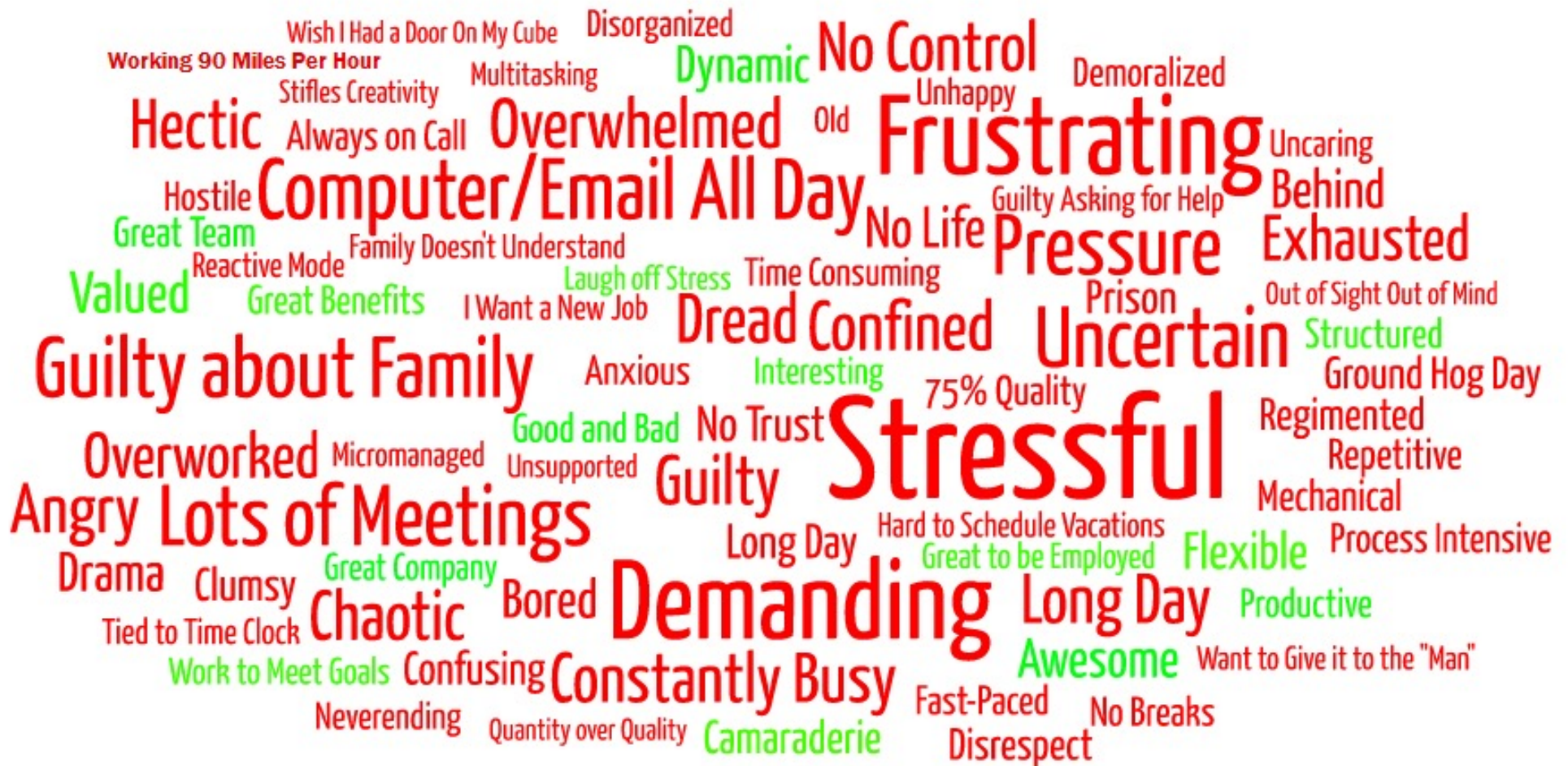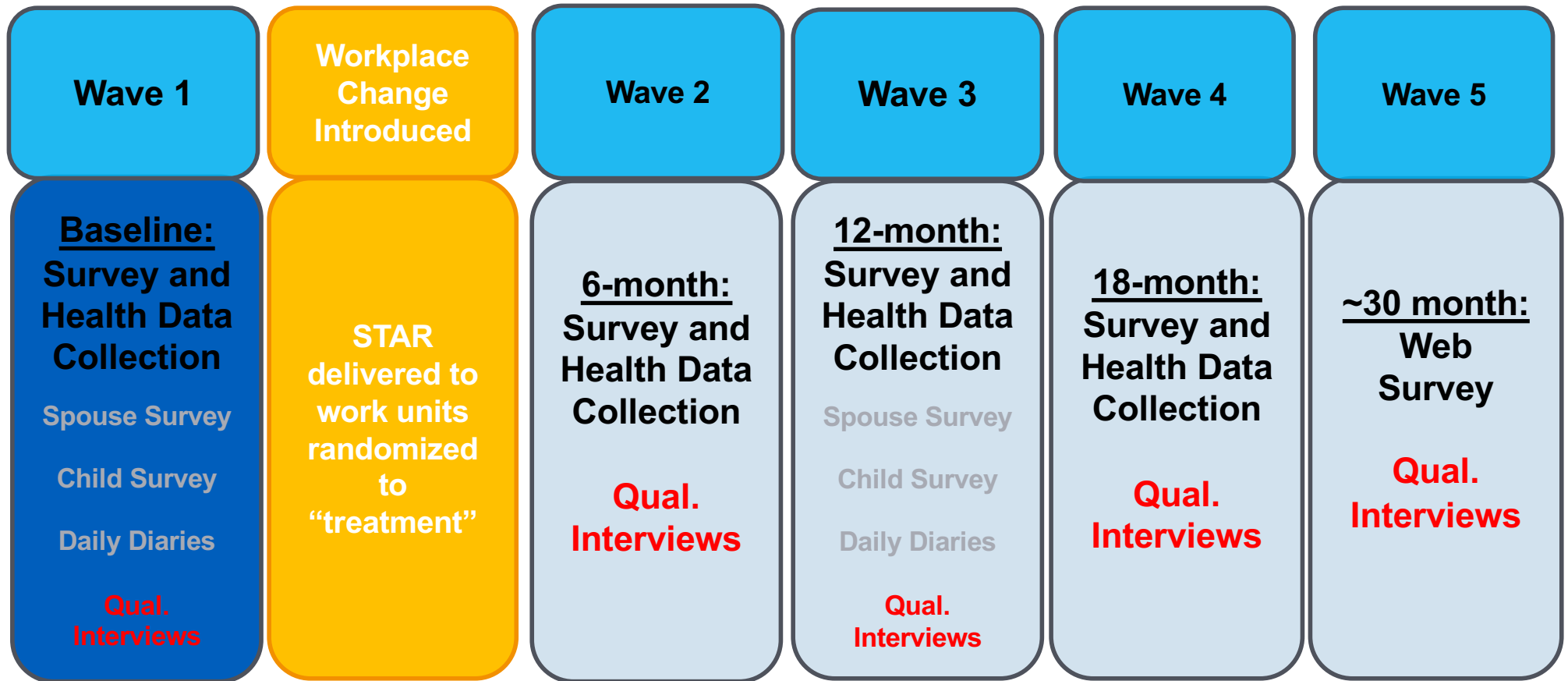
Evaluating a Work Redesign Approach (called STAR Initiative in our study)

- **Dual agenda goals –** good for company & employees

- **Opportunity to work from home and adjust schedules** – make flexibility the new normal vs. a negotiated "accommodation"
  - Averaged 55% of work hours in office; **varied by person**

- **Team conversations about when, where, & how work**

- **Help managers develop skills, confidence in new role**

Toolkit (workshops, facilitation guide) at
www.workfamilyhealthnetwork.org

Study Design: Group-Randomized Trial in IT Division of a Fortune 500 Firm

Wave 1	Workplace Change Introduced	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
Baseline: Survey and Health Data Collection Spouse Survey Child Survey Daily Diaries Qual. Interviews	STAR delivered to work units randomized to "treatment"	6-month: Survey and Health Data Collection Qual. Interviews	12-month: Survey and Health Data Collection Spouse Survey Child Survey Daily Diaries Qual. Interviews	18-month: Survey and Health Data Collection Qual. Interviews	~30 month: Web Survey Qual. Interviews

N at baseline: 1044 employees and managers nested in 56 work units

Benefits for Employees

- **Higher job satisfaction**
- **Reduced burnout**
- **Better sleep**
- **Better work-life integration**
  - More likely to say "enough time" with family
  - Fewer conflicts between work & family responsibilities

- **Better mental health**
  - Less stress
  - Less psychological distress
  - **Women higher baseline, so helped more**
- **Better cardiometabolic health**
  - Among older workers, those with higher risks at beginning of study

Publications at workfamilyhealthnetwork.org or email elkelly@mit.edu

Benefits for the Organization

- No impacts on internal measures of productivity or quality

- Employees in initiative are 40% less likely to quit

- High ROI (return on investment):
    About $1.60 saved for every $1 spent

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2. **Principles for setting up and understanding hybrid work today and in the near future**
3. **Q&A plus your reflections**

Five Principles for Healthy Hybrid & Flexible Work

1. **Remote work is only part of the equation**
   - Tackle **when, where, and how people work** in an integrated way
   - **Team conversations** to engage people in figuring out new norms
   - A simple work from home policy is not sufficient

Five Principles for Healthy Hybrid & Flexible Work

2. **Remote work isn't the critical driver of these benefits**

   – Psychological mechanisms behind benefits:

      • **Choice or control** on part of employees

      • **Support** from managers and colleagues for personal life

   – A blanket strategy of closing office or sending people in some roles home is quite risky

Five Principles for Healthy Hybrid & Flexible Work

3. **Decisions about remote work depend on the work itself**

   – Solve for both work effectiveness and work-life balance

   – Previous research: Moderate remote work is sweet spot for satisfaction, relationships with coworkers, job performance.

Collaboration Concerns & New Findings

nature human behaviour

Check for updates

The effects of remote work on collaboration among information workers

Longqi Yang [1✉], David Holtz [2,3], Sonia Jaffe [1], Siddharth Suri [1], Shilpi Sinha[1], Jeffrey Weston[1], Connor Joyce[1], Neha Shah[1], Kevin Sherman [1], Brent Hecht [1] and Jaime Teevan [1]

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic caused a rapid shift to full-time remote work for many information workers. Viewing this shift as a natural experiment in which some workers were already working remotely before the pandemic enables us to separate the effects of firm-wide remote work from other pandemic-related confounding factors. Here, we use rich data on the emails, calendars, instant messages, video/audio calls and workweek hours of 61,182 US Microsoft employees over the first six months of 2020 to estimate the causal effects of firm-wide remote work on collaboration and communication. Our results show that firm-wide remote work caused the collaboration network of workers to become more static and siloed, with fewer bridges between disparate parts. Furthermore, there was a decrease in synchronous communication and an increase in asynchronous communication. Together, these effects may make it harder for employees to acquire and share new information across the network.

Collaboration Concerns & New Findings

- "firm-wide [exclusive] remote work caused the collaboration network of workers to become more static and siloed, with fewer bridges between disparate parts"
- Also found an increase in asynchronous communication
- "Together, these effects may make it harder for employees to acquire and share new information across the network." → **quality of work, innovation**
  - Junior employees' development?
  - Those who were less integrated previously?

Five Principles for Healthy Hybrid & Flexible Work

4. **Remote work can easily increase overload and burnout unless there is explicit encouragement to set boundaries**

   – Blurred space & time, pressure to be "always on"

   – German data across many workforces: benefits when do work in normal or contractual hours & higher turnover intentions when WFH extends beyond normal hours

   – Team conversations & manager clarity that speedy responses, virtual "face time" are not good measures of performance

Five Principles for Healthy Hybrid & Flexible Work

5. **Collect data to learn and adapt as you go**
   - Organizational performance
   - Employee engagement and wellbeing
   - Equity and inclusion
     - In the past, many companies treated flexibility as "an accommodation." Options on the books – but not seen as fully legitimate.
     - Women pursued formal flexibility options more often despite that, so **flexibility policies often reinforced gender inequality**
     - Normalized with broadened use in past year? But remain vigilant…

U.S. Data – Race & gender differences in preferences for going back to office...

Who Wants To Return To The Office?

By Angelica Puzio

Filed under COVID-19

White men are more eager to return to in-person work

Share of American knowledge workers who answered "always" when asked how much of the work week they wanted to spend in a company or client location, by race and gender
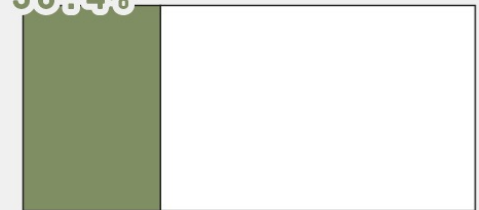
Black men
15..9%

White men
30..4%

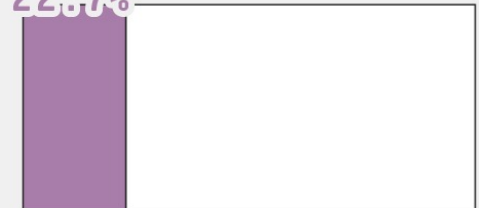Black men are the least enthusiastic about returning full time to the workplace.

Black women
22..5%

White women
22..7%

Based on a survey of 5,085 respondents classified as "knowledge workers" — or anyone who handles information for a living — and who work full-time, between April 26 and May 6, 2021.

FiveThirtyEight   SOURCES: FUTURE FORUM/QUALTRICS

Five Principles for Healthy Hybrid & Flexible Work

5. **Collect data to learn and adapt as you go**
   – Organizational performance
   – Employee engagement and wellbeing
   – **Equity and inclusion implications of hybrid work?**
     - In the past, many companies treated flexibility as "an accommodation." Options on the books – but not seen as fully legitimate.
     - Women pursued formal flexibility options more often despite that, so **flexibility policies often reinforced gender inequality**
     - **Normalized with broadened use in past year? But need to remain vigilant against "flexibility stigma" or career penalties for remote work.**

Five Principles from Research for the Late / Post Pandemic Period

This is an exciting moment to reimagine the future of work…

1. Remote work is only part of the equation
2. Remote work isn't the critical driver for the benefits – choice and support are
3. Decisions about remote work depend on the work itself
4. Remote work can easily increase overload and burnout unless there is explicit encouragement to set boundaries
5. Collect data to learn and adapt as you go

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