



**Home Office Workplaces for a Better Employees' Work-Life Balance  
and Cost Reduction for Companies**



**SUBMITTED AS A PARTIAL FULFILLMENT REQUIRED FOR  
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**This independent study report has been approved to be a partial fulfillment in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program.**

*ln7.*

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jom' followed by a stylized flourish.

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## ABSTRACT

**Research Title :** Home office workplaces for a better employees' work-life balance and cost reduction for companies

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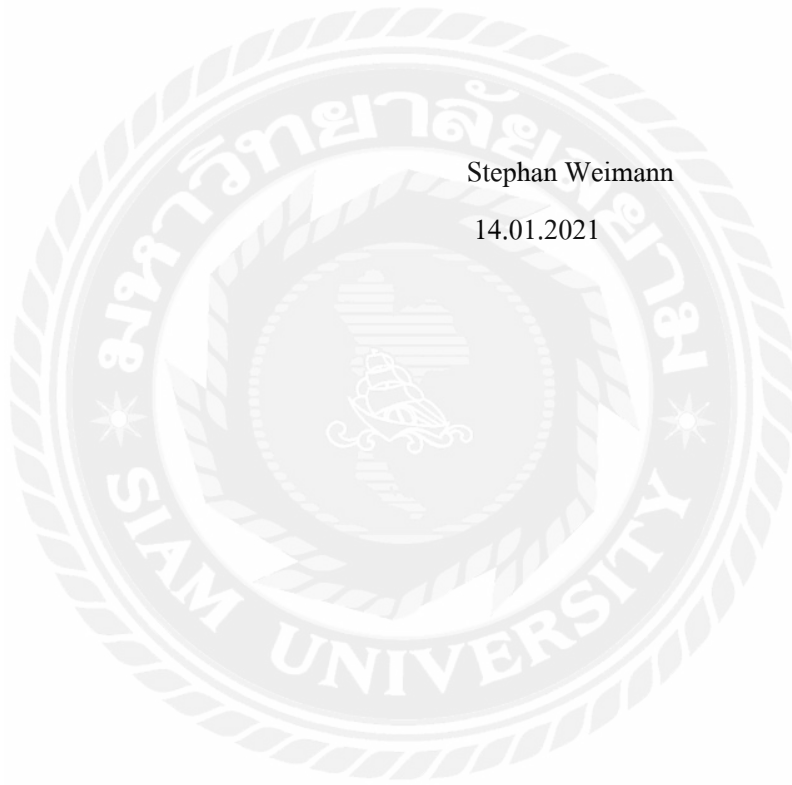
With the COVID 19 pandemic that hit in late 2019 / early 2020, the world of work has experienced an unprecedented, accelerated transformation. New rules, restrictions and lockdowns forced companies and their employees to shift from the usual way of going to work, to the home office (HO) and working from home in a very short period of time. The goal of this research was to analyze these unique circumstances with the thesis that by implementing these new circumstances on a permanent basis, companies and employees actually benefit from them. Employees potentially have a better work-life balance (WLB) due to the possibility to work from home and companies can potentially save on their overall costs in the long run due to new, improved work options for their workforce. This paper is a documentary research based on previous studies by various researchers such as books, magazines, journals, newspapers and online electronic sources. The result of this study shows that there is a strong relationship between working from HO and better WLB. The majority of employees showed improved performance, motivation, efficiency and satisfaction with working from home after a short period of time, which in the second step has an equally positive impact on the company and its performance and growth. This study also proves that companies with an HO working model can save on overall costs such as rent, operating and even labor costs in the long term.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Research Background**

The COVID 19 pandemic emerging in late 2019 / early 2020 has confronted the world of work and business with unprecedented shifts. In almost all countries, political leaders had to take protective measures for the populations, which affected almost all areas of public life and the world of work. In concrete terms, various restrictions, quarantines, lockdowns, travel restrictions and even entry bans were imposed on a temporary to permanent basis. One consequence of this for the working world was, that millions of employees worldwide - as far as possible - moved their workplace home to work from a digital home office instead of from the company (World Health Organization, 2021).

In today's 27 EU countries, the percentage of the workforce working from home has more than doubled. While the average in the 15-64 age group working mostly at home was 5.1% from 2010 to 2019, the share rose to 12.3% in 2020 (11.5% men, 13.2% women). The frontrunner in 2020 was Finland with 25.1%, which, however, already had an above-average figure beforehand with an average of 11.34% (2010 - 2019). In Germany, the most populous country within the EU, the proportion nearly quadrupled from 3.84% (2010 - 2019) to 14.8% in 2020 (Eurostat, 2020).

A November 2020 analysis by the McKinsey Global Institute on remote work examined 2,000 tasks and 800 jobs in China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Spain, the UK and the US. It found that the ability to offer remote working to employees depends on whether an employee needs to physically complete a task and requires fixed machinery or equipment that is not mobile. For many physical or manual tasks, such as nursing, operating machinery or using laboratory equipment, the home office option is out of the question. In contrast, activities such as programming, data collection and

processing, communications, or consulting can be performed from home with the appropriate technical equipment (Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit 2020).

The new possibility of working is also generally well received by employees. In a survey conducted by the Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) for the German Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in July/August 2020, the majority of employees surveyed said they were more than satisfied to very satisfied with currently working in a home office (scale 0 - 10, where 10 means very satisfied; cumulative response 8, 9, and 10 = 74% who used the home office during the pre-Corona period; 56% who started the home office during the Corona period) (Bonin, 2020).

In addition to higher employee satisfaction, work activity in the home office also improved during lockdowns. A global survey by the National Bureau of Economic Research of approximately 3.1 million employees from 16 metropolitan areas showed an increase of 8.2%, or nearly 49 minutes, per workday (Statista, 2020).

Indispensable to the realization of a decentralized workplace, as already noted in Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit, 2020, is technical equipment. The increasing digitization of recent years, the expansion of the mobile network and Internet connectivity, and the constant growth in mobile technology such as cell phones, tablets and laptops are promoting and improving the effectiveness of virtual teams (Szelwach & Todd, 2021).

## **1.2 Research Problems**

As described in the Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit, 2020 analysis, only certain groups of employees still have the opportunity to work from home. Socially, this may lead to a further increase in inequality in the long term, if better educated and better paid employees are able to work from home. At the same time, those whose jobs do not allow

them to work from home or vulnerable families who do not have sufficient space or Internet access will be socially disadvantaged (Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit, 2020).

Moreover, the increases and total number of workers who worked from home in 2020 and 2021 will adjust back to lower levels once enough people are vaccinated, and normalcy returns to the workforce to a large extent. According to the latest Office Re-Entry Index, 70% of the 350 chief executive officers, chief operating officers, and human resources and finance leaders surveyed plan to send their employees back to the office by this fall (2021) (LaSalle Network, 2021).

For the overall economy, the increased use of work-from-home in 2020 is already showing negative effects as well. According to an analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers ("Economic impact of Covid-19 induced Home Office"), the home office effect could reduce Germany's gross domestic product by 15 billion euros or 0.3% in 2020. The study bases this on industries and service providers that are dependent on home office workers, commuters, etc. in the value chain. These include, for example, catering businesses, transport companies, retailers, cleaning companies or IT agencies (Tagesschau, 2021).

Optimizing work-life balance also does not necessarily work for all workers, according to a survey by Lloyd's Register (2021). 69% of respondents reported suffering higher levels of work-related stress as a result of working from home. The reasons for this are increased workload and changes in habitual work patterns to meet job demands (White, 2020).

Moreover, working from home can also have a negative effect on the environment, as a study by BT Group Plc, the UK's largest broadband provider, revealed in 2016. While reducing the use of cars to get to work reduces CO2 emissions, the study found that household energy consumption increases by 20 percent when people work where they



live. Instead of one large room for many people in the company, sometimes only one room for one person is heated in the home office, which can result in a negative balance in total (Shankleman, 2016).

### **1.3 Objective of the study**

This study focuses on exploring the benefits of increasing home office use and, if possible, proving them. The COVID 19 pandemic has led to an increasing share of home office work for millions of employees worldwide (see Research Background). The study aims to show that this type of new way of working has benefits for workers, allowing them to achieve a better work-life balance and thus work more effectively and productively.

In addition to making employees more effective and productive for companies, the study also aims to show that a higher proportion of work from the home office also leads to cost savings for companies, ultimately reducing overall costs.

### **1.4 Scope of the study**

This study aims to use primary data, stakeholder surveys, and previous research findings to answer, to the extent possible, the question of whether greater use of the home office can be beneficial to both parties - the company and the employer. This work is a documentary research based on primary sources, existing studies, journals, magazines, books, newspapers, etc. and electrical sources that focus on the topic of home office, work-life balance and its study in terms of cost reduction.

### **1.5 Research Significance**

This study will be useful for the companies that want to achieve higher labor productivity of their employees with a reduction in overall costs. Working from a home

office and achieving a better work-life balance can increase employee productivity and efficiency, which in turn has a positive impact on employee output. In addition, companies can benefit from achieving increased employee motivation and reducing employee turnover.

In addition to the benefits of these cost savings of reduced employee turnover and increased output of work performance, there are further cost savings for real estate needs, office equipment, travel allowances as a benefit for the companies. and possibly labor costs as a benefit for the companies.

## **2. Literatures Review**

### **2.1 Home Office**

A home office is "a room or area in someone's home that they use to work at their job" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). With the digital transformation and the digital infrastructure of hardware (fiber optic and mobile networks, servers, routers, PCs and laptops) and software (hosting and cloud computing, programs, online applications, websites) largely integrated into everyday life and private households, a large number of jobs are no longer tied to a specific location (see Research Background) and can be performed remotely from one's own house or apartment - the home office (Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit 2020).

A study on the "Home Office and Its Influence on Employee Motivation" confirmed several positive perceptions of home office employees in the areas of time savings and a sense of freedom. However, the study also says that many of the home office employees surveyed can confirm social isolation, which in turn can have a negative impact on

employee motivation. In addition, some of the respondents were able to identify the problem of procrastination among themselves in the home office. Nevertheless, this did not ultimately lead to low efficiency in the home office. On the contrary, many employees stated that they find their work from home more efficient than in the office (Bočková & Lajčín, 2021).

For employees, working from home offers the possibility of a better balance between working hours and private life - a work-life balance. A survey for a research paper of the German Economic and Social Research Institute (WSI) of the Hans Böckler Foundation, "Home office improves work-life balance", the majority positively supported this thesis. 48% ("no") of respondents do not agree with the statement, 34% ("yes") fully agree, while 18% ("yes, but the boundaries between work and leisure are blurring") agree with the statement in principle but have concerns about the separation of work and leisure (Lott, 2020).

An important requirement for long-term use and efficient work in the home office is the equipment of the workplace. In the research report "Home office in times of Corona: Use, obstacles and future wishes" for the Leibniz Information Centre for Economics, two-thirds of home office users (67%) stated that they had a fixed workstation at home, most of whom even had a separate office room (42%). This contrasts with just under one-third (31%) of employees who work mainly at a dining or kitchen table. This is presumably due to a lack of space in the apartment/house or also to a necessary division within the family and possibly children in homeschooling. Other places of work such as sitting without a table, on the other hand, hardly play a role at around 2 percent. These figures illustrate the need for long-term solutions for workplace equipment in the home office. Especially in the case of regular, extensive work from home, adequate workplace equipment is important and, here in Germany as an example, must also meet the

standards required by the Workplace Ordinance in order to prevent long-term damage to health, among other things. The question of the extent to which companies will have to bear these costs, and the form in which they can be taken into account for tax purposes in the future, still needs to be clarified by politicians and social partners in the near future (Frodermann, Grunau, Haas & Müller, 2021).

From a company's perspective, one of the most important requirements for long-term use of its employees' home office is the issue of cybersecurity. In their article "Working from home during COVID-19 crisis: a cyber security culture assessment survey" for the Security Journal, Georgiadou, Mouzakitis & Askounis note that one of four employees cannot work remotely due to cybersecurity. Furthermore, one of three employees does not have a collaboration mechanism for working remotely. Nearly half of the hardware used for working from home lacks strong security rules or meets minimal security guidelines. Even unprotected hardware can still be found. For example, one in two people report that there is no automatic locking mechanism for their digital workstations. Lastly, most notable was that 53% of participants reported not receiving any security policies for working from home from their employers during this COVID-crisis (Georgiadou, Mouzakitis & Askounis, 2021).

## **2.2 Work-Life Balance**

The term work-life balance goes back to the philosopher Lillian Moller Gilbreth and stands for a state in which work and private life are in harmony. In the working world, the focus is on physical and mental productivity, while in private life, time management combined with reduced stress, an efficiently managed home, and time for family and leisure are the primary requirements. The growth in the number of women in the workforce and leadership positions in recent decades, along with the concurrent more

active role of men in the home and in childcare, has been a driving force for this concept (Nocks, L. (2021).

S. Roopavathi, in his research paper "The impact of work-life balance on employee performance", found a strong relationship between work-life balance and employee performance. Work-life balance has a critical impact on the productivity and growth of both the individual employee and, as a result, the organization. A good work-life balance has a positive impact on an employee's effectiveness, while an imbalance between work and personal life leads to stress and thus has a negative impact on the employee's productivity. A healthy work environment and culture, which an employer can influence, help employees perform better and also play an important role in their motivation (Roopavathi, 2020).

According to the WSI's research paper ("Home office improves work-life balance"), research to date concludes that workers who work in a home office are more engaged and satisfied with their jobs compared to workers who do not work in a home office. There is also evidence that, in addition to higher performance and engagement, home office is also associated with fewer intentions to quit, with the mere offer of being able to work from home being sufficient to achieve higher satisfaction and productivity among employees. The ability to work from home strengthens the trust between the employer and the employees. However, the research paper also states that the state of research on the connection between home office and work-life balance is not yet clear. The company's framework conditions play a significant role in the home office option. The studies co- investigated show that the frequency and duration of home office, control over working hours or location, perceived support from supervisors and the company, clear appraisal criteria, and universally applicable and negotiable arrangements all

contribute to whether or not home office is associated with work-life balance problems (Lott, 2020).

The results of the study, "Employees' Work-Life Balance Reviewed From Home Aspect During COVID-19 Pandemic," show that working from home has a positive and significant effect on work-life balance. The higher the use of home-based work, the higher an employee's work-life balance and performance. Special attention to the productive effect of work-life balance can be shown by the positive response to the questionnaire question "I do not feel depressed at work or in activities outside work" (Putri & Amran, 2021).

In his master's thesis in the Department of Psychology at Lund University Libraries, Gabriel Moscoso-Nilsson explores the thesis: "When the home becomes our office - The relation between personality, perceived work engagement and work-life balance during a new wave of work from home". His conclusion is that the respondents in the home office either had very positive experiences in terms of work-life balance - better sleep, more time - or mentioned rather negative aspects. Besides a worse work-life balance due to the poorer separation between work and private life, having less free time due to finishing work later, isolation up to being depressed. Moscoso-Nilsson points out as his finding of his study that research here is just beginning and more long-term research is needed. However, his findings indicate that employers need to adapt to the individual needs of their employees in order to ensure that a productive work-life balance can also be successfully managed from the home office and does not have a negative impact on motivation and performance, depending on the personality of the employee (Moscoso-Nilsson, 2021).

## 2.3 Cost Reduction

Cost reduction refers to all measures within the framework of corporate cost management that are aimed at reducing overall costs. With no change in output, a reduction in costs leads to an increase in productivity, which in turn can result in improved profitability. Personnel costs form a significant cost factor in many companies, so that savings in personnel costs are often associated with redundancies. Through effective cost reduction measures, a company can achieve or maintain cost leadership. This strategy can be justified by the observation that a company can still make a profit after a price war even if all other competitors have fallen into the red (Porter, 1990).

For companies, the costs of office space use often represent the second-largest cost block after personnel costs. The savings potential and thus the cost advantage for companies is therefore correspondingly high. However, there is also a risk that the costs are just shifted from the companies to their employees. Employees in the home office may have to pay for upgrades due to a lack of space in the home, costs for new technical equipment or other office equipment such as chairs suitable for long-term use, desks, etc. (Hammermann & Voigtländer, 2020).

According to a Global Work-from-Home Experience Survey by Global Workplace Analytics, not only can you see a dramatic reduction in traffic, congestion and pollution during the COVID pandemic. Specifically, for executives who instead of taking business trips to meetings, conferences, company locations, etc., and take them virtually from the home office, a typical employer can save about \$11,000/year for each person who works remotely only half the time. Employees who work from the home office half the time can privately save between \$2,500 and \$4,000/year. If they work from home full time and move to a less expensive area, these savings can be even higher (Lister, 2020).

Baruch Silvermann, an American CEO and founder, addresses the question, "Does Working From Home Save Companies Money?" in an article for business.com. In addition to improved employee retention and higher productivity, he also sees lower payroll costs as an employer, as surveys show that nearly one-third of employees would prefer working from home over a pay raise. In addition, he also references a study in his article (Global WorkplaceAnalytics, 2015) that states that about 6 in 10 employers see cost savings as one of the most important benefits of remote work. Examples given include rent, utilities and cleaning services for office space. In addition, reduced food costs for employee cafeterias or fruits/snacks as employee benefits. Lastly, employers can also reduce their tax burden because they have to pay lower taxes as a result of saved wage costs / salary increases (Silvermann, 2020).

Jochen Möbert (2020) has examined three possible cases for home office employees in terms of cost reduction in the "Working World of the Future": Case 1: Office employees work partly in a home office, living and working in the same city. Case 2: Office employees work partly in a home office, with the traditional office located in the core city of a metropolitan region, but the home office located in another city in the same metropolitan region. Case 3: Office employees work partially in a home office, where the traditional office is in a city of a metropolitan region, but the home office is located in a rural area in the same metropolitan region. The analysis showed that employers would have to spend significantly less money on real estate, if necessary, and thus save overall costs for the company if more employees work in a home office. In case 1 + 2 the expenses decrease already, but the biggest savings are achieved in case 3. The annual average cost savings amount to a few hundred, in some cities even a few thousand euros per employee. The different levels of potential savings per employee are due to the different rental prices per city in Germany (Möbert, 2020).



### **3. Past Research**

Under the conditions of a non-physical or location-specific role and the suitable technical equipment, most jobs can be performed from the home office today (Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit 2020).

In the long term, not only the technical equipment but also the space and ergonomic conditions must be ensured in order to prevent damage to employees' health (Frodermann, Grunau, Haas & Müller, 2021). Furthermore, for regular use of the home office, cybersecurity must be ensured for the company in addition to the technical and workplace equipment for the employees. This shows that even basic security aspects are often barely guaranteed at present, let alone that every workstation in the home office is adequately secured (Georgiadou, Mouzakis & Askounis, 2021).

In the long term, companies benefit from employees in the home office, who have a better work-life balance (WLB), a higher level of performance, productivity and efficiency, and are also more motivated (Roopavathi, 2020). In addition, with a better WLB, the commitment and enthusiasm for the job also increases, which in turn reduces the intention of employees to change jobs. The possibility to use the home office also strengthens the trust in the employer (Lott, 2020).

In addition to the positive consequences of better WLF, such as better sleep and more time, employees in the home office may also find it more difficult to make a clear separation between work and private life. As a result, they work longer hours and feel isolated without the personal contact with colleagues, which in the worst case can lead to depression. Whether the home office has a positive or even negative impact on WLB ultimately depends on each individual employee and their personality (Moscoso-Nilsson, 2021).

For companies, in addition to potentially more satisfied employees, the home office also offers the major business advantage of cost reduction. The more employees work from the home office in the long term, the less office space is needed (Hammermann & Voigtländer, 2020) and the more costs can be saved on rent, utilities (Möbert, 2020) and cleaning services. Furthermore, many employees even prefer the option of a home office over a salary increase, which can save additional costs for the company (Silvermann, 2020). In addition, virtual meetings save companies a significant amount of money in travel costs, and employees can also reduce their annual expenses privately if they can move to more rural areas by having more flexibility in finding homes and apartments (Lister, 2020).

#### 4. Finding

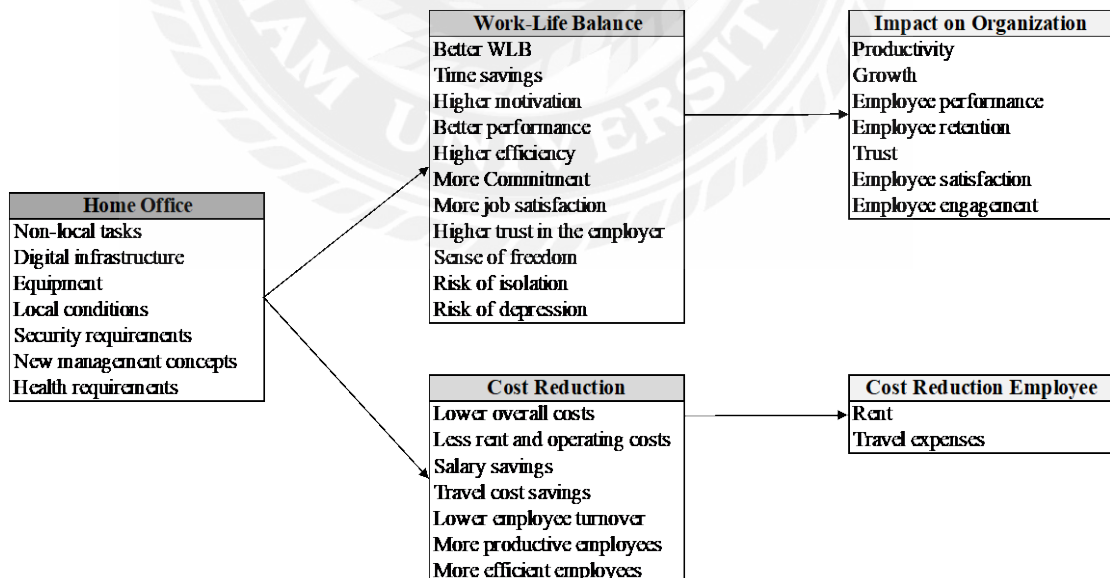


Figure 1: (Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit 2020), (Frodermann, Grunau, Haas & Müller, 2021), (Georgiadou, Mouzakitis & Askounis, 2021), (Roopavathi, 2020), (Lott, 2020), (Moscoso-Nilsson, 2021), (Hammermann & Voigtländer, 2020), (Möbert, 2020), (Silvermann, 2020), (Lister, 2020).

The COVID 19 pandemic has transformed the world of work and business at an unprecedented pace worldwide (World Health Organisation, 2021), (Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit 2020). While the home office was previously only an option for a few employees, the number of professionals in the EU working from home has nearly quadrupled in just one year (Eurostat, 2020). As far as the respective tasks of the employees allow (Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit 2020) and the new conditions associated with the home office (Frodermann, Grunau, Haas & Müller, 2021), (Georgiadou, Mouzakitis & Askounis, 2021), (Szelwach & Todd, 2021) are met, previous studies show that the home office has predominantly positive effects on employees and their WLB (Roopavathi, 2020), (Lott, 2020), (Putri & Amran, 2021), (Moscoso-Nilsson, 2021). However, depending on the individual's personality, HO can also have negative effects, such as poorer separation of work and personal life, isolation, and even depressive illness (Moscoso-Nilsson, 2021).

Companies can benefit in the long run from having more employees in home offices, mainly by reducing overall costs due to lower rental, operational, travel, and even labor costs. In addition, higher performing and more productive employees also impact business performance and growth due to better WLB, which ultimately has a positive and cost-effective impact on the operating result (Hammermann & Voigtländer, 2020), (Lister, 2020), (Silvermann, 2020), (Möbert, 2020). However, there is currently a lack of information on how companies are adjusting to the long-term aftermath of the pandemic in terms of employees in the HO. As studies show, companies can save costs in the long term by consistently focusing on the HO.

In addition, the home office can also have a positive impact on an organization as an add-on effect, as well as being privately cost-reducing for employees in the HO.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study, "Home office workplaces for a better employees' work-life balance and cost reduction for companies", has come to the conclusion that home office (HO) is permanently possible for certain job groups and with the corresponding requirements, shows predominantly advantages for the work-life balance (WLB) of employees and can lead to cost reductions for companies in the long term. Non-location-bound employees with standardized digital infrastructure and set-up in the HO, benefit from the positive effects of better WLB such as performance, motivation, efficiency, satisfaction, etc. after only a short time.

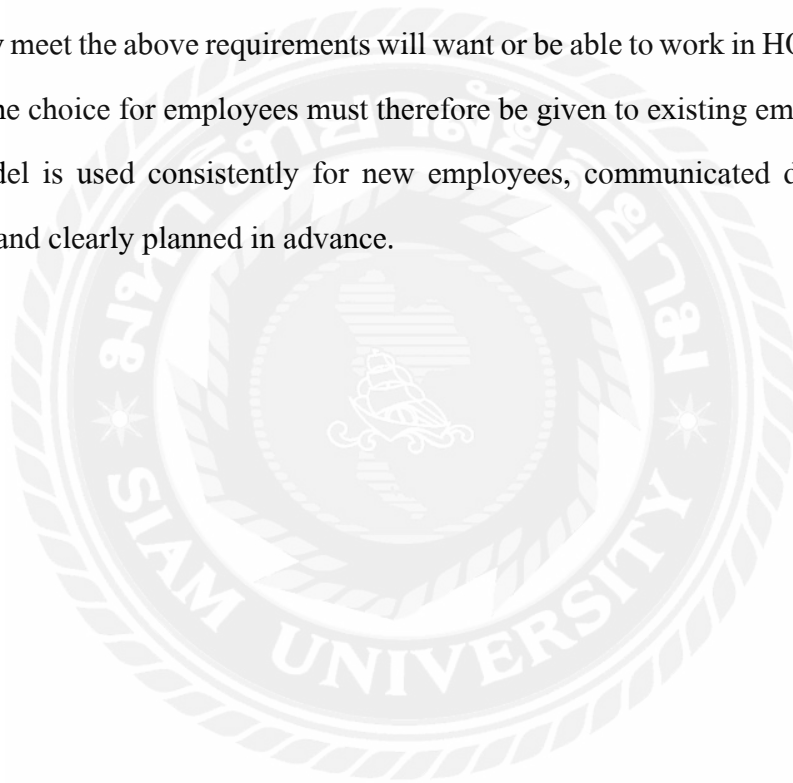
For the world of work, the pandemic can thus be used as a field test to permanently implement new working models and conditions. As in numerous other systems, processes and (business) models, the technical possibilities of digitization can also be used disruptively in the world of work to create new, improved work offerings that have positive effects on employees, their WLB and subsequently also for the companies after only a short time.

Today, companies must make consistent, long-term decisions for both of the independent variables examined in the study if they want to profit from the respective benefits. The technical conditions for the HO have not yet been comprehensively created with the ad hoc changeover in the pandemic and require further investment in long-term equipment, infrastructure and cyber security. Organizationally, companies must also adapt to new management processes and workflows, although these have already been intensively tested and practiced in recent months.

Once this decision has been made in favor of a wide-area HO model for employees, cost reductions will also occur in the long term, with some delay. Office space that is no

longer needed can mostly only be phased out step by step and will disappear from the balance sheets as a cost factor. In the short term, however, companies are already benefiting from a more efficient and productive workforce, as well as potential savings in travel and operating costs.

However, companies must set up a variable HO system when making a positive decision to adopt a new workplace model. Not all employees and individual personalities who basically meet the above requirements will want or be able to work in HO on a permanent basis. The choice for employees must therefore be given to existing employees or, if the HO model is used consistently for new employees, communicated during the hiring process and clearly planned in advance.



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