Keep Calm and Work from Home: Strategies Used by Dual-Earner Households with School-Age Children[1]

ABSTRACT

We examine how dual-earner couples with school-age children who worked from home during the COVID-19 lockdown adjusted to the changes it brought to their lives. To do so, we conducted a qualitative study of 28 dual-earner households who had at least one school-age child, resided in China, Iran, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, or the United States, and worked from home during the lockdown. In each household, we interviewed the parents (56 in total), and we asked at least one child to draw their work-from-home experience and narrate the drawing. Informed by resource-based work-home interface and family stress models, we outline the resources and demands generated by working at home as a family, as well as the strategies families employed to manage their collective work-from-home. Families adopted collaborative, attentive, and relational strategies to fit their demands and their resources, while using delegative and negligent strategies to manage their unmet demands. We extend the work-from-home scholarship to a collective level, and wed it with the family stress model to explain the dynamics of collective work-from-home. At a practical level, the strategies presented in our work can inform employers of dual-earner couples and families experiencing similar dynamics.

Keywords:

Home-based telework, telecommuting, work from home, remote work, pandemic, dual-earner couple

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[1] The second and third authors contributed to this work equally.

Keep Calm and Work from Home: Strategies Developed by Dual-Earner Households with School-Age Children

The first quarter of 2020 was the onset of a time during which individuals in many countries were required to fulfill their professional responsibilities remotely from their homes due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. For many families, homes served—with no prior notice or preparation—as workplaces, schools, and nurseries, as well as living spaces. Media, professional meetings, staff communication boards, and daily conversations overflowed with extensive work-from-home accounts and advice (Fuscaldo, 2020; Gurchiek, 2020; Larson, Vroman, & Makarius, 2020) to help employees adjust. However, such advice required caution, as the phenomenon of work-from-home as a collective[2] has yet to be unpacked. Work-from-home has thus far been examined as an individual-level experience (Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2019), and we know very little about the dynamics of working from home when individuals engage with it collectively or as a family (Powell, 2020). We explore this understudied phenomenon by examining how dual-earner couples who had school-age children and worked from home during the lockdown adjusted to the dramatic changes this brought to their lives.

Work-from-home, also known as telecommuting, telework, remote work, and virtual work,[3] is an alternative work arrangement that involves individual workers performing tasks from home, away from their primary offices, using information and communication technologies to interact with others inside and outside their organization (Spreitzer, Cameron, & Garrett, 2017). The existing research addressing the changes for employees occasioned by work-from-

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[2]. We refer to a collective as a small-in-number group of interdependent actors who recognize themselves as a unit, reside in the same physical space, and have different roles and responsibilities (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006).
[3]. The common definitions of these terms imply that the work is remote from the employer and, therefore, not necessarily in the home.

home can be summarized in terms of the resources and demands it generates. For example, working from home saves employees the time spent on commuting to and from home (Hartig, Kylin, & Johansson, 2007; Wang & Ozbilen, 2020), and it requires the investment of attention and effort to create and maintain social ties with colleagues and others at the office (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016). Researchers have also discussed how the flexibility surrounding work-from-home provides psychological control to telecommuters regarding their work time and location (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė, & Goštautaitė, 2019). Such temporal and locational flexibility can induce demands such as working long hours simply because it is possible to do, so or because of a felt need to overcompensate for absence from the office (Kelliher & Anderson, 2009). Also, working from home may engender psychological pressures from the risk of career stagnation or of missing office-based learning and development opportunities (Cooper & Kurland, 2002). However, there is a dearth of research on the resources and demands generated by working from home as a collective (in our case, family) addressing, which is the first objective of this study.

With regard to managing work-from-home, the existing literature has highlighted the role of technology in facilitating work interactions and relationships with colleagues and supervisors (Golden & Raghuram, 2010). This line of research has also underscored the role of behavioral skills (e.g., establishing guidelines, developing trust, coordinating information, using media) in fostering a successful work-from-home experience (Makarius & Larson, 2017). What these studies miss is that, in a collective, individual resources and demands can overlap, which impacts how the existing resources fit demands. We were unable to identify any studies that examined strategies used by families to manage work-from-home, except for a few studies that incorporated inputs from teleworkers' spouses in their data collection (Raghuram, Wiesenfeld, &

Garud, 2003; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). This is despite the evidence available in family studies that have widely established the family as a collective entity, which actively adjusts to new situations, changes, and environmental demands (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Walker, 1985). Scholars have called for work-from-home research to acknowledge the role of family, given its potential role to impact teleworkers' work outcomes (Bolino, Kelemen, & Matthews, 2020). Following previous studies that have included family accounts to understand work-family dynamics (Beckman & Stanko, 2020), we consider family as a unit that manages work-from-home. Consequently, our second objective is to explore the strategies families deploy to fit the resources available to them with their demands and to manage their collective work-from-home. We conducted a qualitative study among 28 dual-earner households, who resided in China, Iran, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, or the United States, had at least one school-age child, and worked from home during the COVID-19 lockdown. In each household, we interviewed the parents and requested that at least one child draw their work-from-home experience and narrate the drawing. Informed by resource-based work-home interface models (Greenhaus & ten Brummelhuis, 2013; Voydanoff, 2005), we characterized the demands and resources generated by a collective's work-from-home. To theorize how families managed collective work-from-home, we borrowed from McCubbin and Patterson's (1983) model of family stress, which explains the application of resources and coping strategies in the process of adapting to a stressor event, new situation, or environmental demands.

It is noteworthy that extant work-nonwork literature draws on work-family boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) to establish that individuals use separation or integration strategies to manage the permeability of work and nonwork boundaries in a way that works for them (Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016; Delanoeije, Verbruggen, & Germeys, 2019).

This has motivated research on how these strategies impact telecommuting outcomes, alleviate work-family conflict and job-related stress (Lapierre, van Steenbergen, Peeters, & Kluwer, 2016), and increase work-life balance (Kim, Henly, Golden, & Lambert, 2020). However, in our case, the employees were forced to work from home regardless of their boundary management preferences and without opting or preparing for it. In addition, different members of a household can have different perceptions of their work-family conflict and work-life balance, depending on their individual work or nonwork requirements and contingencies. Therefore, being informed by the family stress model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), we use the terms *adjustment* and *adaptation* to explain the outcomes of collective work-from-home experience.

This research contributes to work-from-home scholarship in three ways. First, we extend work-from-home scholarship to a collective level and wed it with resource-based work-home models to outline the resources and demands that collective work-from-home can generate. Second, we theorize five salient strategies—namely collaborative, attentive, relational, delegative, and negligent—that families devised to fit resources to meet their demands or to manage their unmet demands as they adjusted to work-from-home. Third, by gathering data from households residing in five countries during the pandemic and focusing on their commonalities, we present a set of strategies that can inform employers of dual-earner couples and families with similar dynamics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-from-home is an alternative work arrangement that involves employees performing tasks from home, away from their primary offices, using information and communication technologies to interact with others inside and outside their organization (Spreitzer et al., 2017). It can be practiced both as a full-time arrangement; in which employees work from home for five

or more days a week, and as a part-time arrangement, in which workers alternate days working at home with days at a central office location (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Researchers have examined various degrees of work-from-home, including high and low intensity, to provide a nuanced understanding of teleworking's outcomes (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). For example, several studies have found that job satisfaction is highest among individuals who work from home a moderate amount, compared to those who work from home either a small amount or more extensively (Virick, DaSilva, & Arrington, 2010). Also, high-intensity work-from-home has been associated with a high commitment to the organization and low turnover intentions (Ongaki, 2019). Recently, researchers have turned their attention to remote work experiences that may be involuntary in nature (i.e., employees are given no choice but to work somewhere other than their offices) (Johnson, Andrey, & Shaw, 2007; Kaduk, Genadek, Kelly, & Moen, 2019). Employees involuntarily working from home reported higher strain-based work-family conflict (Lapierre et al., 2016).

Scholars have recognized and acknowledged some definitional difficulties and inconsistencies within the extant work-from-home literature because researchers from different disciplines have used varying terminologies (Raghuram et al., 2019). Despite divergent terminologies, it is commonly agreed that work-from-home practices involve some degree of temporal flexibility (also captured by terms such as flextime, flexible work schedule, and schedule control), wherein work tasks completed at home vary in schedule from day to day or are partially carried out during what is considered nonstandard work hours in the telecommuter's work organization (Tammy D Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015). Another key feature of work-from-home is locational flexibility (also captured by terms such as telework, remote work, distributed work, and flexplace), which has been associated with increased autonomy and

perception of control among telecommuters (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Nakrošienė et al., 2019). Work-from-home literature also acknowledges technology dependence for conducting work remotely and the need for appropriate infrastructure and support (Raghuram et al., 2019). Although the available literature has characterized work-from-home to a noticeable extent, the existing features that have been grounded in individual practices may not fully explain a collective's work-from-home experience. Given that our research was explorative and inductive, during the data analysis phase, we identified two theoretical anchors, namely resource-based work-home interface models (Greenhaus & ten Brummelhuis, 2013; Voydanoff, 2005) and the family stress model (1983), that enabled us to explain the collective work-from-home experience. Below, we describe how each lens has informed our work.

Resources and Demands: Resource-Based Work-Home Interface Models

Work-from-home involves working away from central offices, which is associated with two processes that explain the changes it creates for employees. The first is a resource generation process, which refers to the notion that work-from-home enables workers to save resources from less commute time to manage their family demands (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gajendran, Harrison, & Delaney-Klinger, 2015). The second is a demand generation process, in which work-from-home imposes additional stressors or generates resource losses that inhibit employees from benefiting from the flexible work arrangement (Baruch, 2001; Biron & van Veldhoven, 2016). Both resource and demand generation are compatible with Greenhaus and ten Brummelhuis's (2013) work-home interface model, which captures the resource enrichment (i.e., individuals gain resources during role engagement in work or home domains) and depletion (i.e., role engagement in work or home domains may drain overall personal resources). Inspired by Voydanoff's (2005) work-family fit and balance model, which emphasizes the role of fit between

demands and resources as the precursor to balance, we argue that meeting family needs while working from home requires a degree of fit between demands and resources. Accordingly, demands are defined as anything that competes for individual resources (e.g., role requirements, expectations, and activities), while resources are structural or psychological assets that may be used to facilitate performance, reduce demands, or generate additional resources (Voydanoff, 2004). While we recognize the existing ways to describe work-from-home, we focus on resources and demands that working from home as a collective generates.

Strategies: The Family Stress and Adaptation Model

Research on work-from-home suggests that work at home may be relatively more fluid and unstructured than work in the office environment. For instance, at home, the time to begin or end the workday is less clearly defined, and pressures to react to office cues such as emails may be lower (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006). Competing nonwork demands, which may be more salient and accessible than they would be in a centralized office environment, intensify the fluidity of the work environment. As a result, the boundaries between work and nonwork life may be blurred for teleworkers whose work and home domains occupy the same physical space (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). Under these conditions, one factor discussed by researchers is teleworkers' ability to self-manage (Raghuram et al., 2003). However, very few studies have examined the strategies or actions used by workers to manage their work-from-home experience and to optimize favorable outcomes. Noticeable exceptions are Sullivan and Lewis (2001), which suggested that combining work and family by teleworkers was a "deliberate strategy" (p. 137), and Raghuram et al. (2003), which showed that structuring behaviors moderate the positive association between telecommuter self-efficacy and adjustment. We take the cue from these researchers to study the strategies families use to work from home collectively. Although the role

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of strategies related to managing work-from-home as a family has not been explicitly developed in past research, this notion is consistent with McCubbin and Patterson's (1983) model for family stress and adaptation. It argues that after the occurrence of a change or stressor event in a family's environment, families draw upon psychological, social, and intra-familial resources to address demands generated by the event, in addition to other stressors. Family resources, including their strategies, shape the course of the family's adaptation (Walker, 1985). We suggest that families develop strategies as they try to cope, overcome, and face the challenges of collective work-from-home (Moen & Wethington, 1992).

Previous studies have applied McCubbin and Patterson's (1983) model to organizational contexts and have examined stressor events facing employees and their families (Jaskiewicz, Combs, Shanine, & Kacmar, 2017). For example, Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, and Bross (1998) found that an expatriate's family's adjustment to their host country mediated the relationship between family characteristics and the expatriate's work adjustment. Along the same lines, family members' maladjustment to the new location was related to an expatriate's decision to end an assignment early (Lavee, McCubbin, & Patterson, 1985). Leiter (1990) showed that family coping resources were independent of and complementary to the organizational resources that helped employees deal with stressor events. However, without enough family coping resources, employees who faced a stressor event at work experienced burnout and exhaustion more rapidly, regardless of organizational resources (Leiter, 1990). In this study, we focus on strategies as family coping resources imperative for dealing with collective work-from-home, and we seek to investigate the strategies families deployed to manage their collective work-from-home.

Work-From-Home Research Concerning Parents and Families

The work-from-home literature that has considered families (with or without children) suggests that telecommuting is likely to benefit parents with children at home more than it benefits those with no children (Glass & Noonan, 2016; Mokhtarian, Bagley, & Salomon, 1998). Work-from-home appears to impact the quantity and quality of participation in housework and childcare. Both men and women were found to spend more time on housework while working from home and to share tasks such as cooking, cleaning, ironing, and childcare with their non-teleworker partners (Giovanis, 2017). Research has reported that teleworker mothers reallocate time saved from not having to commute to caregiving, housework, or work (Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson, & Andrey, 2008), and teleworker fathers appreciate the opportunity to spend time with their children and be present for significant events in their children's lives (Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson, & Andrey, 2013). Some preliminary studies have shown that during the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals and families experienced increased levels of stress (Chung, Lanier, & Wong, 2020), and time devoted to domestic work changed in households compared to before the pandemic (Collins, Landivar, Ruppanner, & Scarborough; Feng & Savani, 2020). Since dual-earner families with school-age children face the constant challenge of managing multiple work and family demands, including childcare and children's learning needs (Christensen, Schneider, & Butler, 2011), in this study, we examine the work-from-home experience of this understudied group of families.

METHODOLOGY

We adopt a qualitative interpretive methodology, informed by a constructivist philosophical approach (Crotty, 1998). The interpretive approach enables understanding of "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they

attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). Research through the social constructivist lens facilitates analysis of social phenomena in relation to the contexts in which they are embedded (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004).

Participants

Twenty-eight dual-earner households with school-age children residing in China, Iran, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, or the United States participated in our study. Families were recruited through personal and professional contacts according to the following purposeful sampling criteria (Patton, 2002): (1) dual-earner couple household, (2) both partners working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown period, (3) at least one school-age child learning from home during the lockdown period. In each household, we interviewed parents and asked for a drawing from at least one of their school-age children illustrating their work-from-home experience. The interviewees had a wide range of jobs, including teacher, university professor, manager, psychologist, engineer, accountant, lawyer, and support personnel. The average age of interviewees was 42, ranging from 34–54. Fifty percent of the interviewees had a bachelor's degree, 42% had postgraduate degrees, and the rest had a high school diploma as well as a professional certificate. Five households had one, 19 had two, and four had more than two school-age children between 6 and 14 years old. We started data collection in the UK, Malaysia and the US when the lockdown had been in place for at least eight weeks; in the US, our data collection was limited to households that resided in the states that had a lockdown. At the time of our study, China and Iran had lifted some of their national COVID-19-related restrictions. Although the majority of our Chinese and Iranian interviewees were working from home while supporting their children's home learning at the time of the interviews, we had a few households

in which one partner had returned to work in the office; therefore, we asked our interviewees to focus on their lockdown experience when responding to our questions.

Data Collection

Our dataset includes 56 in-depth interviews with parents, as well as drawings and with their description (written or voice-recorded) from at least one school-age child in each of the 28 households. The partners were interviewed separately. Children were asked to draw a picture that illustrates their family's work-from-home experience, and then describe what their drawing meant. We received input from 31 children in total. Our team did not directly contact the children; instead, we asked their parents to see if their child was willing to participate in the study. Once receiving consent, parents conveyed our instructions to their children, who then prepared the drawing; then parents helped children record their narration of the drawing, and shared the drawing and narration with us. In our consent form, we highlighted that in cases where the children or their parents were not willing to share their voice, the parents could debrief us on what their child had described. Other than one household that shared only their child's drawing with the parents' description attached to it, the remaining 27 households shared with us both the drawing and their children's narrations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each partner separately for 60–90 minutes via a safe online video-conferencing application (in observance of social distancing). We asked the participants to describe their experiences relevant to working from home during the lockdown. We gave each household a gift card once the interviews were completed. Each author conducted interviews with households in their country of residence (except for one author who spoke three languages and conducted interviews in Malaysia and China); the lead author

listened to all the interviews as they were conducted to monitor their consistency and suggest additional questions in case new topics were raised in the first set of interviews.

Data Analysis

All interviews and children's descriptions of their drawings[4] were transcribed verbatim, yielding 1,214 pages of text (font size 12; single-spaced). Informed by the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), our data analysis unfolded in three stages. At the first stage, each author open-coded data from two households independently (10 families in total), which involved reading the transcriptions and assigning labels to specific units of text to capture their meaning, all the while remaining flexible to new codes that might appear in subsequent data (Charmaz, 2014). All the authors had been engaged with conducting the interviews and writing memos, which provided them an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. In a reflective group discussion concerning the open-codes and interview memos, we realized that all the 10 families had discussed resources and demands that working from home created for them. Having this initial observation in mind, we turned to the literature and learned that our observation could be supported by resource-based work-home interface models (Greenhaus & ten Brummelhuis, 2013; Voydanoff, 2005). At this point, two of the authors took the lead on data analysis and immersed themselves in the data by listening to all the interviews and examining all the children's drawings. Interviews conducted in local languages were translated into English by credible services. At least one of the authors who coded the data was proficient in the original interview language to check the meaning conveyed in translations if needed. Then, one author open-coded the whole dataset, using "in vivo" codes (p. 55)—text labels that came verbatim from interviewees—as often as possible, while mindful of resources

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[4]. The drawings were meant to trigger children to reflect on and narrate their perspectives and lived experiences. We analyzed children's descriptions rather than the drawings themselves.

and demands as theoretical anchors. As soon as a family's data was coded, the lead author on analysis double-checked all the codes; the two authors discussed points of disagreement and calibrated their interpretation of codes. As more data was coded, the two authors merged codes into categories and subcategories while constantly comparing the newly analyzed data with previously coded data (Charmaz, 2014).

Once all the data was coded, our research team met once again to discuss the categories that emerged from the data. We were able to finalize a set of seven subcategories that could be categorized as work-from-home demands (e.g., additional house chores) and resources (e.g., collective family spirit). Open-coding of all the data also revealed another prevailing pattern in the data: that shared lived experience across 56 families included adopting strategies to cope collectively with work-from-home. We referred to the work-from-home literature to identify relevant theoretical anchors, but we realized that the existing research primarily focused on individual-level experiences, which could not explain findings at the collective level. We then turned to family studies and identified McCubbin and Patterson's (1983) model of family stress, which helped make sense of our findings regarding family strategies used to adjust to work-from-home. Since we had not begun the analysis with this theoretical lens, two authors re-analyzed the whole dataset again, making sure they coded the data for all the possible strategies, and that the categories were represented at the collective (family) level. Our analysis yielded five categories (e.g., collaborative) and 13 subcategories (e.g., facilitating demands of family members). This extra step enabled us to confirm the theoretical saturation[5] of our categories, "indicating that no new properties of the category emerge during data collection" (Charmaz,

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[5] . We collected and analyzed data simultaneously; therefore, we realized that categories reached saturation after analyzing the 25th household. We collected and analyzed data from an additional eight families to ensure no new categories emerged.

2006, p. 12). Throughout the analysis process, three authors kept a shared journal in which they iteratively and collaboratively explored the relationships between the emergent categories and (re)organized the findings into a model (see Figure 1 for final categories, subcategories, and the model).

FINDINGS

The 28 households who participated in our study had experienced a shock after learning about the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. As dual-earner families with school-age children, it had taken them a while (from a few days to a couple of weeks) to get back on track and develop a routine for combining family life with work and home learning. Our open-coding and multiple readings of the data led us to examine the changes brought by this experience through resource-based work-home interface and family stress models. This enabled us to examine family as a collective and to outline the demands created and the resources gained due to the involuntary work-from-home situation caused by the lockdown. It also allowed us to explain how the examined households addressed their emergent demands with the resources available to them and to identify the strategies they adopted to manage their unmet demands. Following, we present our findings, supported by representative quotations from the interviews conducted with spouses in the households and by the insights we gained from the children's narration of their drawings.

Figure 1 about here

Collective Work Home Integration: A Resource-Demand Lens

Demand Generation

Working from home as a collective generated demands for all the households who took part in our study. These demands were mainly associated with (a) loss of resources (i.e., space,

tools, technology, social relations) due to being away from work or school; (b) work or school synchronicity requirements (i.e., privacy and focus); (c) dependent member contingencies (i.e., care, monitoring, learning); and (d) additional house chores (i.e., cooking, cleaning, shopping) that would not exist had the households not transitioned collectively to work-from-home mode. Households living in large houses that had enough space for all the members, and enough devices and bandwidth to support the parents' work and children's home learning, found it easier to transition and adjust to work-from-home. Also, households with couples whose work required frequent synchronized engagement, and children whose school provided synchronized lessons, needed the most privacy and focus. Whereas families in which one or two of the spouses had flexible work that did not have to be done at a fixed time, and children whose school's lessons were asynchronous, found it easier to work in the same space, even if their house was not very spacious.

Having children in all the households meant that, in addition to attending to their work and supervising their children's home learning, parents had to engage their children and remain committed to their care responsibilities all day long. In households with one parent having synchronous work obligations, the other parent, or another adult, had to be available to attend the child(ren), or they were left unattended. We had only one extreme case of an occasion in which both parents were unable to attend to a child who needed support and was left unattended. Children in Malaysian, Chinese, or Iranian households typically had synchronous school sessions, while children in British or American households received daily homework that required their parents support and encouragement to complete.

Work-from-home as a collective also meant that the household members had to have all meals at home—requiring more cooking and grocery shopping than usual. Spending more time

at home also produced additional chores, such as washing, cleaning, or tidying, compared to pre-lockdown life. For households that were used to having external help for household chores—such as weekly cleaners or maids—the lockdown was less tolerable because they lost the help they typically received at the same time that they had more chores to do. This was mainly evident in Malaysia, where having maids at home is common practice.

Resource Generation

The forced work-from-home had also generated various resources for the households, primarily from the elimination of work commutes and preparation, and from being close to family members; these resources included retrieved time, money, energy, and emotional support. The time typically spent on the morning rush and dressing up for work, commuting to work and school, and being stuck in traffic was now available to the households. Also, spouses shared with us that working from home had turned their work breaks into time available for family. Other than temporal resources, work-from-home saved financial resources for the interviewees, such as gas or transportation money, and the money spent on snacks, make up, or hair products. Our participants—especially those with long commutes—highlighted that not having to commute to work made them less tired during the workdays and saved them energy. Participants with demanding or stressful jobs regarded the availability of their family to provide emotional support as a resource they could not readily access while at work. Quotations below showcase our participants' accounts of the resources generated due to their work-from-home experience.

My workplace is around 52km from home, back and forth is like 104km daily. The first thing is during MCO [the Movement Control Order[6]] I'm saving the journey … I can get

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[6]. The term that the government used for 'lockdown' in Malaysia.

a lot of saving daily commute, my wife's commute is about 200km … back and forth. (Family$_{12}$, Male)

You don't have to go to school in the morning; you just go downstairs and it is actually quite fun (Family$_{22}$, Girl)

It's so much easier. Like right now I don't have any hair product. You know, it's so much easier to just shower, get in sweatpants and a T-shirt. You know, for me, it's working 20 feet away basically downstairs. So that's been enjoyable, absolutely. Walking. The kitchen is not far, so I'm getting lunch. (Family$_{24}$, Male)

Although some of the demands and resources we discussed above have been mentioned in previous studies, our findings are unique in that our participants managed them as a collective rather than individually. In other words, resources generated for a family member could cross over to be used to address the demands of another member, or demands generated for one member could be handled by resources available to other family members.

Collective Work-From-Home Management Strategies

Our findings suggested five strategies, namely *collaborative*, *attentive*, *relational*, *delegative*, and *negligent*, adopted by the households to address their demands through resources available to them and to manage their work-from-home experience. The frequency of adopting the strategies depended on the sum of resources available to each family and on their aggregated demands. Although the households who participated in our study were homogeneous in terms of being dual-earner families with school-age children, in which the partners had professional jobs, each household had unique resources and demands. For example, one household had a child with special needs who required specialized education that was not available during the lockdown, and another family with five school-age children needed extensive home learning organization.

Following, we describe each strategy, together with its varying manifestations, the demands it addressed, and the resources it deployed. Each strategy was used by at least 19 households, mentioned by at least one member. Due to space limitations, we provide only one or two representative quotations for each strategy.

Resource-Demand Management

Collaborative. The collaborative strategy was adopted by all the households participating in our study. This strategy was implemented when one or more members of the family made adjustments or went an extra mile to help other members. *Facilitating demands of family members*, *adjusting work, home, or learning*, and *taking advantage of sharing space* were the three ways in which this strategy was demonstrated. The main demands motivating this strategy were childcare and home learning, as well as synchronicity requirements of one or more members' work or school. For these demands to be met, resources such as the flexible nature of other members' work or school, and the family's collective spirit were needed the most.

When *facilitating demands of family members*, spouses shared supporting their children's home learning or household chores. A few spouses divided their children among themselves so that each parent was responsible for one or more children; some took responsibility for helping their children with the subjects they knew well, and a few took care of the bulk of house chores and grocery shopping, leaving the other partner responsible for the children's learning. In a few cases, older siblings supported younger siblings' learning, or children helped with house chores. Implementing this strategy enabled many family members to attend their synchronous meetings or school classes, because the other members supported their privacy, accommodated their spatial or technological needs, and took care of essential tasks (e.g., childcare, cooking, tidying).

Adjusting work, home, or learning occurred when spouses adjusted their working time or working space to divide childcare between themselves or to accommodate their children's home learning. For example, one spouse could work while the other spent time with children, and then they swapped so that each could get their work done. Another example was when one members' job was mainly synchronous, so the quiet corner, or office space, was devoted solely to that member, and the others shared the remaining space for work and learning. Such adjustments were possible when one or both parents' work or the children's classes were flexible (not time sensitive) and when the family had enough space to maintain privacy for online meetings. Households in which more than one member had to simultaneously attend synchronous sessions were more mindful about sharing space, and were required to make more adjustments. Also, having frequent synchronous meetings in a household required its members to eat separately or to adjust mealtimes if they preferred to eat as a family.

Taking advantage of sharing space was adopted when at least one parent's work was flexible enough to allow for sharing their workspace with their child(ren). Parents could monitor their children and were available to support their learning when they had questions or synchronous classes. We had a few cases of households in which all members worked around the same table, but in most cases, only one parent stayed with the children. In families with children of different ages, typically the younger children played or did their home learning activities in a shared space.

In Family$_{22}$, who were UK residents, the mother was a child psychologist and the father was a science teacher, both in their early 40s; they had two children who were 8 and 11. The mother saved 150 minutes of daily commute time, and worked in a room upstairs due to having

synchronous meetings. The house chores and responsibility for the children's home learning were shared between them.

> There hasn't really been a time where both me and [my partner] have been shut away somewhere else, working … one of us has either been working with them or one of us has been not working at the same time … they've always had an adult available with them at any time … I'll often sit at the table with them … and I'm able to work then at the same time … that's been fine for doing things like … writing reports [for] school or replying to e-mails, where you can kind of dip in and out and do bits and bobs. (Family$_{22}$, Male)

Attentive. The attentive strategy was adopted by all the households who used their existing resources to invest in activities that elevated their well-being. This strategy was demonstrated in the form of *setting off shared well-being or engagement activities* or *upgrading quality of family life*. Our participants typically took on an attentive strategy to make up for their lost resources, such as social time with colleagues or friends, and to make sure they were taking care of the collective's well-being. Implementing such strategies mainly depended on the household members' taking advantage of the flexible nature of their work or their children's school, and of the time and energy they saved by eliminating commute and preparation time.

When *setting off shared well-being or engagement activities*, families came up with activities that engaged two or more members of the collective and lifted their spirits. Examples of such activities include playing games, exercising or going for family walks, cooking or baking together, having movie nights or home picnics, and conducting collective religious practices. Although our households resided in five different countries, they came up with very similar activities when trying to engage the children or to initiate entertaining activities as a family.

Upgrading quality of family life, such as improving family meals, taking care of the garden, or doing projects to improve their living space, was also common among households that took attentive strategy onboard. Working at home made it possible to cook meals that took longer to prepare, and being around the house all day made family members more aware of the things that needed to be done at home. Most of these activities were initiated by one family member and then other members joined in to help.

In Family$_{17}$, who resided in Malaysia, the mother was a university administrative staffer and the father was a sales person in the information and communications technology industry; they were both in their early 40s, and had 3 children aged 6, 9, and 11. The parents' jobs required synchronous meetings and instant responses to emails; the children attended online classes. However, the household members embarked on fun activities together, such as cooking, playing, and exercising when they had free time.

> Sometimes I paint together with my children, during the MCO, there was once I was playing Jenga with the children, the one I bought is … plain color, [made of] wood … I told … should I paint this and turn it to be a puzzle as well? … so I painted a rooster. It was very therapeutic for myself, at the same time, they found it interesting, after that they got to play with it as a puzzle (Family$_{17}$, Female)

> When I have time, in between work … I will squeeze in some time to get them to do the Malay exercises (Family$_{17}$, Male)

Relational. Relational strategy, or using the opportunity of sharing working, learning, and living space to interact with family members was brought up in our interviews with all the households. The context of our study, the lockdown experience due to the COVID-19 pandemic, meant that family members were inevitably more accessible to each other and saw more of each

other's daily activities. On the one hand, such interactions partially made up for the social connections at work (for the parents) or at school (for the children). On the other hand, the dual-earner families in our study, who had experienced very rushed mornings and afternoons prior to the lockdown, cherished having more time with each other free from commutes or traffic, although many of the children still missed school and playtime with their friends.

Spending more time with family was regarded as an opportunity valued by our participants. Although assuming responsibility for their children's home learning could be frustrating at times for some of the parents, in general, they were happy that they could invest the time and energy they saved while working from home in strengthening relationships and bonding with their family members. Chatting with family during work breaks, having frequent conversations as a couple or family, and having more frequent family meals appeared in many interviews as a strategy to cope with and make the best of their unprecedented situation.

Investing in relationships was manifested by some families who addressed household members' lack of connectivity or social life by initiating virtual interactions with extended family and friends. Creating or joining WhatsApp groups, having virtual meetings with extended family and friends, and playing online multiplayer games were examples of how our participants invested in relationships outside their immediate family.

Family9 showcases the relational strategy. This family resided in Iran; the wife was an IT specialist, the husband an academic, and they had an 8-year old daughter. They cherished the time they could spend with each other as a family during the lockdown, and felt they were closer to one another.

> We are always outside, all three of us… it was rare for us to be together like this, and all
> three of us are so happy to be together… [Previously] … I had to make breakfast for my

daughter, and get out at 6 am, then his father would take [her to school] and I would not see my child until five in the afternoon ... I really didn't have time to spend with my child ... [before] she always complained that "Mom! I don't get to see you" ... and this issue was resolved for my child. This was the greatest blessing for me. (Family9, Female)

When I refer to my personal experience, it is interesting that during lockdown, without saying a word and making a will, the [communication] problems we had did not occur at all. This interests me ... I'd like to know why. (Family9, Male)

[My husband and I] did not have time to talk to each other at all; there was no time for us to have fun. But during this period ... it is as if, say, we have returned to the peak of our relationship. (Family9, Female)

Unmet Demands Management

Delegative. The delegative strategy, adopted by 19 households, was taken on when existing demands could not be fulfilled by the resources available to the collective's members. Demands such as children's contingencies, work or school synchronicity requirements, social time or childcare resources lost due to working from home, and additional chores could not be addressed by the households all the time. Therefore, they either empowered their children to become more independent, or sought external support.

Empowerment of the dependent member (mainly children in this study) was practiced by households with parents who had to engage with synchronous work tasks during the day and could not accompany their children in their online classes or provide their children with extensive support for their home learning. In these cases, parents encouraged their children to become independent learners and to assume responsibility for organizing their days, attending

their online classes, or doing their share of house chores. Some parents saw this situation as an opportunity for their children's growth and independence.

    Outsourcing was a solution for some households who did not have sufficient resources to deal with demands such as childcare, child learning, or cooking. External helpers included grandparents, who provided childcare support by coming to the household, agreeing to having young children dropped at their house in the morning and picked up in the afternoon, or engaging in online conversations with their grandchildren.

    Families who needed support with home learning enrolled their children in online courses in addition to what was offered by the schools; such online classes were common among the Chinese and Malaysian households. When managing household chores, especially cooking, was an issue for the families, they had food delivered to their houses or were supported by parents who were willing to cook meals for them.

    $Family_2$ characterizes the delegative strategy in many ways. This family resided in China; the mother was a public sector employee, and the father was a senior engineer in a multinational company. The mother was in her late 30s and the father was in his early 40s, and their two children were ages 7 and 3. During the quarantine period, they sent their 3-year-old to her grandparent's house as a way for them to fulfill their job and home learning responsibilities. Their son attended online supplementary classes in addition to his school lessons.

> I don't have much time on the day time to take care of my son … so I set … some of the goals [and told him] … "you need to arrange your time by yourself and you need to know what class you need to take during the day … we helped him arrange … the online courses, and [told them] you will need to arrange the time every day for sports, for rest, for taking supplements … after several weeks, actually he got used to this kind of life …

after 3-4 times, he started to engage very much with the schedule making before the start

of the week … last month he made the schedule by himself totally. (Family$_2$, Male)

I attend my online classes, arrange my own timetable … I feel I've made the best of my

time during this stay-at-home period (Family$_2$, Boy)

Having [parents] who work during the pandemic … trains the children to be more

independent … He was able to adapt fast. He sometimes cooks noodles for his lunch … I

guess he observes and he learns, he has seen us cook before (Family$_2$, Female)

Negligent. Negligence of the demands of one or more domains happened when

household members did not have sufficient resources to address some of their immediate

demands and were unable to outsource them. We do not argue that families willingly ignored

some of their needs; however, our analysis showed that 29 of the households had experiences of

being forced to ignore some of their immediate demands in order to fulfill their job requirements

or to navigate some days. Such demands included, childcare, home learning support, work

synchronicity requirements, and additional house chores. Negligence was manifested in four

different types, as we describe below.

Compromising selected tasks or responsibilities happened when families could not

provide childcare or learning support to their children due to their daytime work requirements.

These families did not manage to pay attention to or spend time with their children as they liked,

allowed their children extensive screen time, or could not attend to their children's learning

requirements on time. They felt guilty about compromising their children's needs, but there were

certain hours of the day or the week when they could not make themselves available to their

children as they wished.

Overburdening a family member, typically evidenced by having the mother of the family carry a heavier load than other members, was mentioned in our interviews with five households. Childcare and home learning requirements and additional chores, when combined with living with a spouse whose work had extensive synchronicity requirements, resulted in putting a very heavy burden on the other spouse. The burdened member of the collective sacrificed their sleeping or resting hours to be able to have it all, which could be both exhausting and frustrating for them.

Tension among family members was an indicator of households being frustrated by their inability to deal with their demands. For example, parents found it hard to play the role of teachers and did not get along with their children when they tried to teach them, or spouses had conflict over assuming responsibility for childcare or housework. Although 11 households mentioned having experienced tension in their households during the lockdown, such tensions were not constant and had been experienced occasionally.

Postponing selected tasks was shown in the form of delaying non-urgent work requirements or household chores by parents who preferred to focus on urgent tasks and making themselves more available to their children. We observed that our participants who worked as academics or had flexible jobs with minimum synchronous requirements were more likely to afford postponing selected jobs tasks.

In family$_{28}$, who were residents of the US, the mother worked for a utility company and the father was a finance instructor. They had three children, aged 6 years, 2 years, and 6 months old. Although a grandparent came to their house every weekday to help with childcare, sometimes they still needed to allow their children to have more screen time than is ideal.

My two younger ones, usually stay downstairs watching TV, or we'll give them a phone –

well, we'll give the two-year-old the phone to kind of get distracted for a little bit.

Especially when I'm in a meeting and I really can't get bothered ... Having the phone

helps her just like focus on the phone, watching her YouTube videos which is unfortunate

… but it's the only way to distract her so usually we give her the phones when we have

meetings or my husband has a class going on (Family$_{28}$, Female)

Perceptions of adjustment among families were highly dependent on the extent of the

demands they needed to address and the extent of resources available to them, as well as their

ability to implement the strategies effectively. Therefore, the level of adjustment among families

varied, ranging from mal-adjustment to full adjustment.

DISCUSSION

Our findings demonstrate that the unanticipated challenge of working at home caused by

the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced how employees experience and adjust to work-from-

home. We illustrate that it might not be viable to depend solely on theories that have informed

this scholarship thus far, unless we expand those theories or integrate them with other theories

that enable us to understand the pandemic driven work-from-home experience. In our study,

which examined dual-earner households with school-age children, we borrowed from extant

work-home literature as well as family studies to explain how our participants managed their

experience. We argue that future researchers studying the dynamics of work-from-home, and the

work-home interface in general, might need to borrow from other disciplines to describe and

understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on working at home.

Despite focusing on homogenous middle-class households, which resided in different

countries but shared more commonalities (i.e., being white-collar, dual-earner households with

children) than differences, we found that the demands introduced by the forced work-from-home experience outweighed the resources generated by it. Twenty out of 28 households neglected portions of their personal or professional responsibilities, and 19 households delegated some of their tasks. Although adopting such strategies enabled those households to adjust, such adjustments might not be sustainable if working from home becomes the new normal, or even if it becomes more frequent, as suggested by relevant research (Abulibdeh, 2020). We acknowledge that our study took place at the peak of the pandemic, which might have imposed maximum demands on households (e.g., supporting children's learning), and that some demands have since been removed for some families (e.g., schools in the UK reopened in September 2020); however, every change can introduce new demands that require new adjustments (e.g., week-day school drop off and pick up). We encourage future researchers to expand the pool of resources and demands, as well as strategies, identified in our findings to more fully conceptualize the emerging dynamics of work-from-home. Also, quantitative researchers can examine the associations between the multiple variables involved in adjusting to collective work-from-home.

The strategies that emerged in our findings emphasize the role of families' agency in determining their experience and their adjustment, which is consistent with research suggesting that families develop strategic skills when they face challenges (Denov, Fennig, Rabiau, & Shevell, 2019; Heiman, 2002; Walsh, 1996, 2002). The notion that work can be actively managed has received a great deal of attention recently, in part due to changes in employment psychological contracts and the shift in jobs from being long-term and secure to short-term and less secure (De Vos, Dewettinck, & Buyens, 2009; Raabe, Frese, & Beehr, 2007). In this study, we demonstrate the applicability of such ideas to the family context and adjustment to remote

work. In doing so, our work complements previous studies that have investigated strategies for adjusting to flexible work arrangements. Makarius and Larson (2017) emphasized individual cognitive abilities (e.g., managing distractions), Litrico and Lee (2008) focused on individual learning ability (e.g., time-tracking), and Raghuram et al. (2003) examined structuring behaviors (e.g., planning and organizing work). We extend these management strategies to the family level by incorporating multiple actors and collective efforts to handle resources and demands. Future research may consider the strategies in our study on a continuum (collaborative, attentive, and relational at one end and delegative and neglected at the other end) and examine the differential impact of these strategies on the outcomes of work-from-home.

All the strategies we identified implied a crossover of resources and demands among family members. Within the work-home interface and stress literature, crossover effects refer to a process whereby stresses and strains experienced by one individual affect the stresses and strains experienced by a partner in that individual's social system (Tammy D. Allen & Martin, 2017; Westman, 2001). We demonstrated the application of crossover processes to the work-from-home context. Specifically, we found that when working from home as a collective, the crossover can be manifested in two different ways. First, direct transmission of resources occurred when demands experienced by one family member motivated other family members to share their resources. Another direct way crossover took place was when a family member's demands were added to the demands of other members. Indirect crossover involved the shared space as an exchange facilitator. The demands of multiple family members activated a need to utilize the home space and allowed resources and demands to overlap in time and space. Our findings extend the work-from-home literature by highlighting crossover effects, which may

apply to the study of teleworkers and their relationships with their colleagues and supervisors, as well as their partners and children.

This study reflects the experiences of dual-earner, middle-class, and financially-secure families regarding collective work-from-home. Certain elements of our model may have emerged because our participants were white-collar professionals whose basic needs had already been fulfilled. We acknowledge that a disproportionate number of telecommuters are found in professional, scientific, and management-related sectors and in industries involving information, finance, insurance, and services (Delsiver, 2020), and that managerial and professional workers are more likely than others to engage in the types of tasks that can be performed remotely (Noonan & Glass, 2012). However, this pattern might change now that the range of jobs that could be performed from home has widened. Family studies suggest that a family's definition of the stressor or change event is an important determinant of its severity and of the family's adaptation (R. Hill, 1949). This means our participants saw the collective work-from-home and the COVID-19 lockdown as something they could handle; other families with different arrangements, who find these events beyond their capacity to handle, might adopt different strategies and might struggle with adjusting to them. Finally, our study took place when the families where adjusting to collective work-from-home by trial-and-error and learn-by-doing. As families gain more experience, and as organizations align their family-friendly policies with their employees' current needs, the dynamics of employees' work-from-home experiences might change, hopefully for the better.

We suggest that it might be time for employers to move beyond providing limited, one-size-fits-all, family-friendly initiatives, especially now that more employees might be motivated, or expected to work-from-home. For example, our findings indicated that addressing work-from-

home demands depends heavily on family members' mutual understanding of their professional responsibilities and contingencies. Organizations might develop training programs that target their employees' families to help them better understand the specific requirements of the employee's job. For example, one of our interviewees, who was a child psychologist, had to have a conversation with her children to help them understand the privacy requirements of her job. Organizations might step in to facilitate family members' adjustment to work-from-home by delivering such training to inform their employees' families and ease the burden for their employees.

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Figure 1. Collective Work-from-Home: A Resource-Demand Perspective

Collective Work-from-Home as Dual-Earner Housholds with School-Age Children							

Work/School-related Resource Loss	**Work/School Synchronicity Requirements**	**Dependent Member(s) Contingencies**	**Additional House Chores**	Resources		
				Commute and Preparation Elimination	**Collective Family Spirit**	**Work/School Flexibility**
Space	Privacy	Care	Cooking	Time saving	Emotional Support	Availability
Tools	Focus	Engagement	Shopping	Money saving	Respect	Adjustability
Technology		Learning	Cleaning	Energy saving	Technical support	
Social						

Resource-demand fit management	Unmet demands management

Strategies

Collaborative
- Facilitating demands of family members
- Adjusting work, home, or learning
- Taking advantage of sharing space

Attentive
- Setting off shared well-being/engagement activities
- Upgrading family's quality of life

Relational
- Spending more time with family
- Investing in relationships

Strategies

Delegative
- Empowerment of the dependent member
- Outsourcing

Negligent
- Compromising selected tasks or responsibilities
- Overburdening a family member
- Tension among family members
- Postponing selected tasks

Outcome Adjustment