



# Cultural and Gender Perspectives on Working from Home

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**Abstract:** In March 2020, New Zealand went into a level 4 lockdown to contain the spread of Covid-19. Overnight, workplace operations shifted into the home, requiring employees to rapidly upskill and use online collaboration platforms to maintain ‘business-as-usual’. However, the home was not an empty space, rather it reflected specific cultural and gender activities and norms.

A phenomenological research study conducted in 2020 examined the working from home experiences of 21 women from different cultural backgrounds employed by a South Auckland organisation. The research focused on two groupings of HRM themes; one the HR practices of productivity, performance, leadership, health and safety, and technology and equipment; the other, the impact of these practices on the domestic cultural norms and gender roles of the women employees.

The paper identifies an unresolved tension between the organisation and the women and asserts the need for revised performance expectations in a working from home context. The paper argues that a potential resolution is available if the organisation adapts Trompenaars’s model of intercultural reconciliation.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the New Zealand Government declared an all-nation Level 4 lockdown in its Covid-19 response, advising all non-essential workers to begin working from home (WFH) for the foreseeable future to prevent the virus's community transmission (Kronast & Sadler, 2020; Wade, 2020). This sudden exit from offices required an abrupt transition for business managers and staff to adapt to operating workstations hastily constructed within their households. Within a short space of time, employees were required to perform

tasks on digital platforms with no guidelines, procedures or protocols to assist them (Green et al., 2020). Stats NZ (2020) stated that 42% of employed New Zealanders were WFH during this initial lockdown period. Aside from maintaining business activity, short-term benefits for the employer included reducing the running costs, while for employees, benefits included removing commuting and offering autonomy over their working hours.

The practice of WFH has been growing over the last 50 years. The concept was first introduced by Jack Nilles, a former NASA engineer, who suggested WFH in 1976 as a remedy for the acute workday traffic congestion in the US (Gan, 2015; Nilles et al., 1976). Throughout the 21st century WFH has been steadily gaining in popularity, both overseas and in New Zealand. However, the Covid-19 pandemic saw a rapid expansion of this mode of working (Green et al., 2020).

International research into WFH has focussed on managerial/employee perspectives such as productivity, trust, leadership, networking and innovation. Equally there have been studies looking at human resource management issues such as staff wellbeing, work-life balance and health and safety (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Many studies are a combination of both these fields of inquiry. An increasing focus has been the impact of WFH on women, examining the competing pressures of work versus childcare and domestic duties (Ibarra et al., 2020; Zamarro & Prados, 2021).

However, to view the impact of WFH in relation to managerial functions and employee behaviours is only one half of the story. When employees were relocated to WFH during lockdown, the home was not an empty space waiting to be filled by work; it was a space configured around the needs and practices of employees' lives. With the implementation of Level 4 lockdown, employees were plunged into a dual world of work and home responsibilities, regardless of their personal circumstances, cultural environment or prescribed domestic roles (Song & Gao, 2018).

While research addresses women's experiences, the design of major studies is mostly framed through the lens of western, individualistic cultural perspectives. What has been under studied is the cultural perspectives of female participants who belong to collectivist societal traditions.

This research, albeit a preliminary study with a small sample, builds on the New Zealand work-family WFH literature. It was conducted in a large, multicultural organisation based in South Auckland. The majority of staff reside in this urban area, made up of half a million residents with a high percentage of Māori, Pacific Island and migrant communities (Huakau, 2014). Three quarters of staff are women, half in management roles. The study examines the implications on WFH and how it affected 21 women, viewed through five human resource management core functions: productivity, performance, leadership, health and safety, and technology - vital ingredients in an organisation's overall functions, team relationships and staff well-being. To protect all parties involved in the research, details of the organisation and participants are unidentified.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

New Zealand is a diverse nation with the Human Rights Act 1993 requiring multicultural workplaces to uphold diverse cultural norms, ethics and values. The Act states values include languages, practises, beliefs, roles, individualism. Ely and Thomas (2001) assert these multicultural norms and values are often implicit within an organisational setting.

How cultural values and norms are arrived at and manifest themselves are not discussed in this research, nor are details of global cultural cluster analysis by theorists such as the Hofstede, Meyer, Trompenaars and Hampton-Smith. Notwithstanding, Browaeys and Price (2019, p.84) state that despite the multi-ethnic and multicultural make-up of Australia and New Zealand, the business culture is Anglo-Saxon in nature. While some research in New Zealand analysing the diverse workplace has been undertaken, (Chen, 2016; Ministry for Pacific Peoples (MFPP), 2021), studies have not encompassed the impact of WFH on minority groups. It is suggested this is not intentional; rather participants in research are largely drawn from Eurocentric cultural samples because they most readily engage in open research invitations.

In Auckland and other major New Zealand cities, Māori, diaspora from the Pacific Islands and minority cultures make up an increasing important component of the workforce (MFPP, 2021; Chen, 2016). It is the custom, either through financial necessity or preferred living arrangements, that many families live inter-generationally. Honouring family responsibilities are more important than accumulating material wealth, and with Pacific peoples, large families are preferred, and religion is part of daily life (Ruano-Borbalan, 2002, as cited in Browaeys & Price, 2019). Powell et al. (2009) state that in collectivist cultures, specific family members are allocated special roles and responsibilities within the family structure, and this is not the norm in individualistic cultures.

Leadership and performance management is essential to enhance employees' productivity and is utilised to motivate employees either with rewards or punishment, engagement and promotion. Leadership styles need to be compatible with the organisation's goals and working environment (Aguinis, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2015). Likewise, health and safety obligations such as workplace hazards and behavioural training are adopted to reduce workplace stress, protect employees' wellbeing and safety, and motivate organisations to create a safe and productive environment (Managing Health and Safety, n.d.). Additional obligations, imposed by the Employment Relations Act 2000, requires employers (and employees) to act in good faith, a legal obligation to be proactive when communicating with each other and respond to issues facing the employee (Green et al., 2020).

According to Stats NZ (2020), during the 2020 Level 4 lockdown, 40% of employed New Zealanders were WFH, with 48% stating that this was a new experience. Professionals in higher-paid income brackets made up 58%. A University of Otago research project on WFH conducted during this time drew 2560 respondents; 80% were women, 79% were New Zealand European and 92% from the public sector. Findings stated that although productivity levels were high, employees struggled; 65% of participants identified challenges, such as childcare distractions, with 35% stating they were unable to switch off from work. A lack of collaboration with colleagues affected 30% of participants and while 65% provided their own hardware, a lack of proper equipment and designated workspaces affected their performance and health and safety (O'Kane et al., 2020).

A large international workforce survey by Van der Lippe and Lippényi (2020) identified that individual and team performances were lower when WFH. Also, employees relied on direct collaboration with colleagues to spark innovation and this proved more time consuming on digital platforms. Sardeshmukht et al. (2012) stated that telework (WFH) altered time and space compared to office work, changing how work was experienced

away from colleagues' interaction, resulting in increased social isolation. Parker et al. (2020) observed that leadership and performance management perceptions altered when WFH disruptions impacted on an employee's ability to meet office-based productivity outputs. This could lead to micromanagement or a hostile relationship. Some managers were subjective in their style of leadership, based on their individual attitude to providing support, communication, and trust. There was an expectation that employees needed to be available at all times, and this close monitoring interfered with home demands, especially childcare, leading to anxiety. Also, online outputs drove work expectations instead of the visual recognition of an individual's work (Dahlstrom, 2013; Maurer, 2020; Parker et al., 2020).

Studies have found that employees worked longer hours WFH, resulting in negative connotations towards work. Issues included conflict created by bringing work into private lives, increased work demands, lack of established boundaries, reduced breaks, and burnout. This resulted in employees being less productive and motivated (Gao & Song, 2018; Maurer, 2020; Hayes et al., 2020). An organisation's lack of support produced high levels of work-related stress and these were higher amongst women.

During lockdowns, parents with children at home had to undertake childcare responsibilities, schoolwork tasks, and family cultural commitments. As childcare arrangements were not feasible outside household bubbles, research showed that 33% of working mothers carried heavier childcare loads compared to 11% of men. WFH also created a gender gap for women as their productivity and working hours were impacted by childcare, housework responsibilities, and working in a shared family space (Agovino, 2020; Del Boca et al., 2020; Feng & Savani, 2020; Zamarro & Prados, 2021). This resulted in psychological stress, with 49% of women with school-aged children experiencing mild psychological distress and reduced job satisfaction. Also impacting on the gender gap of women was the perceived lack of confidence and accomplishment when adapting to video conferencing. Women's indirect communication styles, lack of authority and unequal talking time, significantly impeded their leadership or success in the workplace (Wang & Roubidoux, 2020).

Without doubt, the home environment was dislodged by WFH as work practices superimposed demands over domestic functions (Major et al., 2002). In an Australian study on the role of the home as a personal space, Woodlands (2015) stated that women's long relationship with the home crosses multiple cultures. The home offers an individual respite and space to be oneself, to express personal behaviour, domestic rituals and practices. Historically, women have occupied the prime role of caregivers in the home and managed their domestic setting. Woodlands' research shares many cultural similarities with New Zealand.

### **3.0 METHODS**

This research used a phenomenological approach and a qualitative data collection method to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings (Sandelowski, 2000). The focus of the research method was to gather subjective descriptive data through in-depth perspectives and opinions (Gelo et al., 2008). The phenomenological paradigm and its emphasis on quality and depth of data is often referred to as being rich, since it captures detail and nuance of the phenomena being studied (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

The design was to provide a deeper understanding of the investigation areas, using semi-structured, open-ended questions for participants regarding particular topics or themes. The sample size consisted of 21 employees WFH during the Covid-19 lockdown. The sample group was a diverse range of women of different cultural backgrounds chosen through subject selection (Sargeant, 2012). The design facilitated minority women's narratives, often missing from larger scale surveys.

The research involved a random sampling method from a large organisation with significant cultural diversity. Female employees from different non-European cultures were approached and asked if they would be willing to participate in interviews and questionnaires, and 21 responded. This sample population was from different teams in the organisation, and this contributed to the avoidance of selection bias. Oversampling provided for more in-depth analysis.

### ***3.1 Primary – In-depth Interviews***

Two distinct groupings of HRM themes were explored in the research. One focus was HRM practices of productivity, performance, leadership, health and safety, and technology. The second focus was domestic cultural norms and gender roles. The interviews and questionnaire were designed to give an opportunity to critique the organisation, rather than steering participants towards a balanced perspective. It is to be noted that a number of the participants have a cultural preference for inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, n.d.) and the interviews and questionnaire were designed on this basis.

Five female participants were drawn from the initial sample of 21 women to take part in detailed research focusing on the above themes relevant to WFH. Browaeys and Price (2019, p.176) state that a “deeper understanding of cultural drivers, artefacts and attitudes” can be obtained by using non-numerical research tools. It was left to the participants to discuss their cultural and gender practices within their homes. In-depth interviews are useful when detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviours are sought to explore new issues in depth.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the exploration of topics or themes to expand with the participants' responses and offered flexibility to adjust the pace, style of interviewing and order of questions for each participant. This created a safe space given the topic's sensitive nature of participants' personal experiences (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Remenyi, 2012; Sargeant, 2012). All participants came from collectivist cultural backgrounds.

The interviews were 20-40 minutes long, conducted in the organisation's building in a private break-out room to create a safe and comfortable environment. The participants were given the questions prior to the interviews which were recorded via a smartphone. Throughout the process they were guided by probing, improvised questions to gain more detailed responses. Silence as an interview technique was used, recognising that some cultures are more talkative and open than others, with pauses allowing time to think or reflect. Care was taken to ensure cultural safety for all interview subjects, recognising they were from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Vaioteletti, 2013; Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interviews were transcribed, and the responses analysed to understand the phenomenon explored, adopting an interpretive analysis of data findings (Sargeant, 2012).

### ***3.2 Primary - Employee Questionnaire***

A structured questionnaire was developed with a set of 30 closed-ended questions, formulated so all participants would respond in the same order (Remenyi, 2011). It was self-administered with questions developed by the researcher based on the methods outlined in 3.1 above, and delivered using the Survey-Monkey tool. A link was sent to the sample of 16 women via their internal work email addresses and excluded the 5 in-depth interviewees. Closed-ended questions were constructed to mitigate any bias resulting from the in-depth interviews findings, and to reveal any discrepancies in the outcomes.

### ***3.3 Secondary Research***

Due to privacy protocols the organisation's database was not accessed. Secondary research was gathered from academic texts and peer-reviewed journal articles. The most significant source was the organisational culture theorists, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2007; Estienne, 1997; Ramsey, 2018, who offer a mechanism to resolve the culture dilemmas identified and discussed in the 4.0 and 5.0 Findings.

### ***3.4 Ethical Considerations***

In order to protect the identity of the participants, details of their specific cultures and ethnicities were not divulged. This allowed for frank discussions. Full and informed consent was obtained from each participant who were given a written summary of the proposal to sign. The identity, privacy and research findings relating to participants was protected throughout the process and a discussion was held with the participants to ascertain the best way to source relevant information that ensured their cultural safety and sensitivity (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2018).

## **4.0 FINDINGS: PRIMARY RESEARCH**

The findings from the in-depth interviews and the survey have been divided into two research themes: first the cultural responses, then the gender responses. These have been further separated under the following headings: productivity and performance management, leadership - line managers; leadership - organisation; health and safety and workplace stress; technology, equipment and working environment.

### ***4.1 Productivity***

#### ***4.1.1 Productivity - Culture***

All five women taking part in the in-depth interviews found the combination of completing work and household tasks stressful. They stated that looking after family was a cultural expectation, as was cooking, cleaning, maintaining the house, taking part in family and religious activities. One interviewee, a full-time caregiver for her mother, said that during the day she was expected to prioritise her mother's needs over work. As a result, she worked throughout the evening to meet targets. All women worked longer hours negotiating network issues, lack of appropriate equipment and family household expectations. This led to demotivation, physical and mental exhaustion and frustration.

One interviewee stated in addition to being responsible for all domestic duties, she was expected to look after her partner's children, monitoring their schoolwork. The time-consuming nature of household chores disrupted concentration and left the women with



no time to themselves and unable to achieve a high standard of work or meet work targets. Another interviewee said that attending to her daughter's schoolwork adversely affected her ability to work to a high standard. One interviewee, a solo mother, said she was used to running her household, but during lockdown her family took her children so she could concentrate on work. However, this alienated her from her family, made her lonely, and significantly affected her well-being and motivation; she also missed collaboration with colleagues.

#### 4.1.2 Productivity - Gender

One interviewee stated there should have been some understanding of the roles and duties required of women within their households. She was frustrated her manager questioned her regarding time management and the longer hours it took her to complete work tasks than a male colleague. Three interviewees stated performance expectations did not incorporate how looking after the elderly and childcare impacted on work targets, and these responsibilities were not factored into achievable work outputs.

### **4.2 Performance Expectations**

#### 4.2.1 Performance Expectations - Culture

This erosion of productivity created a disjunct between performance expectations from the organisation and the reality of WFH. While all interviewees felt the organisation recognised the differing cultural expectations such as large family responsibilities, meeting daily work targets remained unchanged. The organisation did not understand that in predominantly Pacific Island households, family comes first over work requirements. One interviewee stated the organisation should have provided more support for those families that have children or grandchildren in their homes, and needed to be more understanding. Another interviewee felt it was "business as usual" and the organisation had a tick box approach towards cultural norms. Pressures included the invasion of work within the small, shared family space with no designated place for work, and job requirements involving privacy and confidentiality impacted negatively on crowded households. There were varying opinions as to whether interviewees would be penalised for not meeting targets, and all encountered stress, working long hours to catch up.

#### 4.2.2 Performance Expectations - Gender

Interviewees stated the organisation should have understood the duties women have to perform and their role outside of the organisation when WFH. It did not factor childcare into performance measures, adopting a male standard regarding women's ability to efficiently complete daily targets. One interviewee said her performance was questioned regarding her time management given the long time she took to complete daily work tasks. Management did not hold discussions regarding women's role in parenting, caregiving of children or the elderly.

### **4.3 Leadership: Line Managers**

#### 4.3.1 Leadership: Line Managers - Culture

There were varied responses to how line managers understood and supported women's cultural roles within the home. One interviewee stated her manager, who was from a multicultural background, recognised the importance of family and held daily discussions

about her home environment and the need to keep her family safe, rather than just focussing on work topics. Another manager acknowledged difficulties in prioritising work in a shared space solely dedicated to family. One interviewee did not have a Wi-Fi connection at home because culturally technology was not a priority. To accommodate this, she was given a project to complete.

Another said her line manager was very supportive and recognised the cultural value of respecting elders, encouraging her to do her best while caring for her mother. However, she was expected to maintain open and honest discussion regarding difficulties meeting performance expectations.

One interviewee stated she only received support when providing evidence that she could not meet performance expectations; another stated her manager did not understand the cultural impact of being alone without her family.

#### 4.3.2 Leadership: Line Managers - Gender

Regarding gender implications, one interviewee stated her line manager was empathetic to her childcare responsibilities as he had children himself. Nevertheless, she was expected to complete her daily work targets. Two line managers did not acknowledge family dynamics influenced the expectations of a woman's role within the home; one enforced identical performance expectations for both men and women, irrespective of the emotional toll. Another stated he understood childcare demands but held onto performance expectations, suggesting she work while the children were sleeping.

### **4.4. Leadership: Organisation**

#### 4.4.1 Leadership Organisation - Culture

Overall, while some individual managers showed understanding, the organisation's email correspondence encouraged business as usual. Interviewees stated it could have provided more support for Pacific Island extended family living arrangements. The lockdown necessitated a physical workspace to be shared amongst family members, resulting in limited access to resources and a disadvantaged work environment compared to other colleagues.

Interviewees expected a South Auckland organisation to be more understanding of their cultural commitments by allowing flexibility towards employees' work hours. One interviewee said family cultural life centred around the church, and daily family prayers in her home disrupted her work in a shared space. Another said the organisation failed to provide emotional support for her well-being as she balanced full-time caregiving with work expectations.

#### 4.4.2 Leadership Organisation - Gender

Interviewees stated the organisation lacked respect towards women by not considering their difficulties meeting performance expectations. One said most of the senior leadership positions were held by men who did not comprehend the large number of duties women were expected to carry out at home and were likely to hold the same expectations in their own families. This created considerable stress, given the organisation's lack of acknowledgement that shared living spaces, childcare and caregiving for the elderly would impact on performance expectations.



## ***4.5 Health and Safety Workplace Stress***

### **4.5.1 Health and Safety Workplace Stress - Culture**

All interviewees found work-related stress significantly impacted on their home environments. Managing other household members' time, while meeting work deadlines was time-consuming and highly stressful. One woman began working at 4 am, significantly eroding her sleep time. Another, separated from her family during the lockdown, felt very isolated, missed social interaction, and support she received from office colleagues, and this impacted on her well-being. Another interviewee said she had to prioritise her work over her family, and this strained relationships as she had to work in their shared space. She was worried her family could see the confidential nature of her work, so constantly monitored her laptop.

### **4.5.2 Health and Safety Workplace Stress - Gender**

Interviewees said there was little support or networks to assist women coping with work-related stress. One said women were less likely to address the issue, as they felt emotions differently, and were less vocal about taking on more household responsibilities. All worked different hours to fit in household duties, unacknowledged by the organisation. There was no support for mothers WFH, who suggested a compensation scheme for women with families. Another stated there was considerable stress incurred in multi-tasking so they could complete work targets.

## ***4.6 Technology and Working Environment***

### **4.6.1 Technology, Equipment and Working Environment - Culture**

Two interviewees said they did not have suitable technology for WFH, stating the organisation should have provided this. One had to install a modem to access her work, spending money she could not afford as it was designated to support her family. Another said many Pacific Island families did not have technology in their households, as money was invested into their community with cultural celebrations such as weddings and funerals. Nevertheless, the organisation had strong expectations that all employees access their work through a secure internet connection. One interviewee, the prime caregiver for her mother, stated she did not have time to set up a designated workspace or equipment within her home as she had to constantly monitor her mother. She worked from a chair that did not support her adequately and only had a small monitor. These impediments impacted negatively on her posture and eye-sight, thus affecting her work performance.

**Table 1: Participant questionnaire responses**

<b>General</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Sample</b>
Was workplace productivity decreased WFH in your home environment?	81.25%	18.75%	0	16
Did you have difficulty meeting performance expectations WFH?	81.25%	12.50%	6.25%	16
Were you highly engaged in your work? Why/why not	37.50%	62.50%	0	16
Did the organisation support you with providing the correct technology and equipment when from WFH?	18.75%;	75.00%	6.25%	16
Was your line manager authoritative in monitoring your performance WFH?	87.50%	12.50%	0	16
Did work-related stress impact your home environment WFH?	75.00%	25.00%	0	16
<b>Cultural Norms</b>				
Did cultural norms impact on your individual performance WFH?	56.25%	43.75%	0	16
Did your cultural norms affect your workplace productivity WFH?	56.25%	43.75%	0	16
Did the organisation adjust its performance expectations to be aligned with your cultural norms WFH?	12.50%	87.50%	0	16
Did management incorporate your cultural norms into their performance expectations WFH?	6.25%	93.75%	0	16
Did the organisation take cultural considerations in your home environment into account regarding work equipment WFH?	6.25%	93.75%	0	16
Was your line manager approachable and understanding of cultural norms impacting on the WFH environment?	62.50%	37.50%	0	16
Was the organisation approachable and understanding of the impact of cultural norms on the WFH environment?	18.75%	75.00%	6.25%	16
Did the organisation incorporate any health and safety cultural considerations into your home environment WFH?	6.25%	93.75%	0	16
Did your cultural norms within the household lead to more burnout WFH?	56.25%	43.75%	0	16
Were you working longer hours from home due to cultural commitments within the home?	62.50%	31.25%	6.25%	16
<b>Gender Role and Duties</b>				
Did your gender role and duties impact on your individual work performance WFH?	80.00%	20.00%	0	15
Did your gender role and duties affect your workplace productivity WFH?	73.33%	26.67%	0	15
Did the organisation adjust their performance expectations to be aligned with your gender role in your home environment WFH?	6.67%	93.33%	0	15
Did management take into account your family dynamic in your home environment in their performance expectations WFH?	14.29%	85.71%	0	14
Did the organisation take your gender role and duties in your home environment into account regarding technology and equipment WFH?	6.67%	93.33%	0	15
Was your line manager approachable and understanding of your gender role and duties impacting on the WFH environment?	40.00%	53.33%	6.67%	15
Was the organisation approachable and understanding of your gender roles and duties impacting on the WFH environment?	6.67%	93.33%	0	15
Did the organisation incorporate any health and safety gender considerations into your home environment WFH?	6.67%	93.33%	0	15

**Note:** Six questions from the original questionnaire have been removed from this table in the interests of participant's confidentiality.

## 5.0 FINDINGS: SECONDARY RESEARCH

### 5.1 Model of Reconciliation

The tensions between the organisation and participants triggered by Covid-19 can be seen as a classic instance of culture clash, requiring a reconciliation. Organisational theorists and management consultants, Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner developed a model to benefit both the organisation and its employees. The seven dimensions of culture, published in their book *Riding the Waves of Culture* (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997), followed by their dilemma theory (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2007 as cited in Browaeys & Price, 2019), aim to reconcile opposing values that are in conflict with each other.

Trompenaars states that reconciliation has three essential elements: awareness, respect and reconciling cultural difference. Without awareness of these cultural differences, relationships can be unintentionally damaged. “Reconciliation permits both parties to maintain what is important to them, yet recognise the needs of the other” (Trompenaars, 2000, pp.29-33 as cited in Browaeys & Price, 2019).

Marion Estienne also asserts that a method of reconciliation is appropriate for dealing with cultural differences. She developed a five-step model of cross-cultural reconciliation that can be applied in a conflict situation. This involved reaffirming commitment to an on-going relationship and its benefit to both parties; recognising where and how there are differences; searching for similarities, synthesising solutions, or creating outcomes and reviewing the learning process, ensuring that it is available for the future (Estienne, 1997 as cited in Browaeys & Price, 2019).

Ramsey (2018) argues that Trompenaars’ and Hampden-Turner’s Dilemma Theory helps find ways to remove obstacles and understand differences. He states that while it focuses on resolving cultural differences, it can be used to interpret dynamics related to other kinds of differences. To capitalise on diversity, the Dilemma Theory can motivate people to look for solutions to reconcile different values that lead to conflict. Rather than championing one value over another, the theory states that both values are important and needed. “Rather than encouraging one or other of the values to be expressed, it encourages the flow of movement between the values so either or both can be expressed, depending on what the situation demands” (Ramsey, 2018, para.28).

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

Findings in this study suggest that the organisation’s employees with their different ethnicities held unique cultural norms and that cultural and gender diversity was acknowledged in day-to-day workplace operations, prior to the arrival of the pandemic. However, when the Covid-19 lockdown moved the organisation’s operations to the home, the situation became more complex. With no model to embrace the unique challenges of WFH, the organisation sought to conduct business as usual, ill-prepared for the impact on participants of cultural and gender norms explicitly practiced within the home.

The extra burden women carried in their domestic duties, child and elderly care, the financial costs, technology issues and productivity pressures were unforeseen, and to an extent, ignored by management, given the unique challenges created by the lockdown.

With the passage of time and increasing workplace recognition and acceptance of hybrid work arrangements, it is useful to extrapolate the findings in this research into a recalibrated organisational model that incorporates the worldviews of managers and employees. This is unlikely to be achieved via performance appraisals or equivalent modes. What is needed is a revision of performance expectations, with appropriate and fair adjustments reflecting WFH dynamics.

As Ramsey (2018) asserts, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's model of reconciliation, developed to resolve dilemmas within intercultural negotiations between international businesses, can be readily adapted when a clash of intercultural and gender values impede the flow of work practices within the WFH model. Estienne (1997) gives the stepping stones for this process. All four theorists identify a model whereby divergent worldviews can be negotiated in an organisational setting to reset the WFH relationship within an HRM framework.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Creating solutions that guarantee the integrity of work performance and the domestic responsibilities of home life, is the challenge presented by WFH. It is suggested that a solution lies in an adaption of Trompenaars' and Hampden-Turner's model. This involves recognition of differences in values, understanding the motive behind actions, respecting cultural and gender differences, and taking steps to resolve these differences.

Further, utilising Estienne's reconciliation process, organisations can reaffirm their commitment to the importance of women and cultural diversity within the organisation, while recognising the different responsibilities within the home.

Therefore, it is suggested that the organisation, and organisations with similar profiles recognise differing cultural, gender responsibilities and values within the home, and that Eurocentric, male norms dominant in New Zealand workplaces should not be transposed into the home environment. With increasingly multicultural workplaces, strategies include adjustments to performance management criteria and the development of a flexible working arrangements policy that realistically recognises the home environment. These strategies should be formulated by a consultation process that includes representatives from a culturally and gender diverse make-up. Also included would be guidelines for maintaining a work-life balance, and financial remuneration for extra expenditure incurred when WFH that meet New Zealand health and safety standards.

## **8.0 CONCLUSIONS**

This was a very small sample and further research is needed to provide more evidence to confirm the findings of this study. While the recommendations of this research cannot be necessarily extrapolated to other large organisations, they do confirm earlier studies that have well-documented gender findings. Issues relating to culture, a key element of this research, are an early contribution to a field of inquiry that has received limited attention in the literature.

There is an urgent need to expand the scope of management, organisational behaviour and human resources research to capture what is really happening in the multicultural New Zealand workplace.

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