From Zoom to Boom: Analyzing the Impact of Communication Tech on Employee Output in Canada’s Lockdown Landscape

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TRANSCRIPT

# Abstract

This research proposal aims to explore and analyze the relationship between communication technology usage and employee productivity during lockdowns in Canada. Though there were obvious health and crisis-lessening benefits that came from the lockdowns, there were also many negative side-effects, including professionally and psychologically, that were initially way lined for the greater good. By examining the factors that influenced the adoption and utilization of these communication tools, as well as their effects on individual productivity and overall organizational performance, this study intends to shed light on the role of technology in remote work contexts and its potential implications for workforce management.

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# Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 subsequently triggered the greatest disruption to life in recent history, leading to a global crisis within days. This crisis led governments worldwide, including Canada, to implement stringent measures to curb the spread of the virus and “flatten the curve”. These measures included government-mandated lockdowns, restricting social interactions and confining millions of employees to work remotely from their homes. In response to these exceptional circumstances, businesses rapidly adopted various communications technologies to sustain operations, enabling employees to remain connected to collaborate and continue working amidst the challenges of isolation and physical distancing. The widespread adoption of communication technology during the lockdown period has not only transformed the way organizations function but has also raised questions about its implications for employee productivity. While remote work offers benefits such as flexibility and reduced or eliminated commuting time, it also introduces new challenges related to employee productivity, work-life balance, and social interaction. Therefore, understanding the impact of communication technology on employee productivity during government mandated lockdowns is not only academically significant, but also practically relevant for businesses and policymakers seeking to optimize their strategies for future crises or remote work scenarios and for the continuance of remote work as we know it today.

# Significance

The increased reliance on communication technology during government-mandated lockdowns has led to a pressing need to assess its impact on employee productivity and its implications for work-life balance.

The pandemic-induced remote work shift has compelled employees to adapt quickly to virtual communication platforms, such as video conferencing, instant messaging, and collaboration software. While these technologies have facilitated a flexible communication environment and enabled teams to stay connected, their influence on employee productivity remains a topic of interest and concern. Understanding the extent to which these technologies influence productivity is crucial for organizations seeking to optimize remote work practices.

As the world adapts to a “new normal”, it is imperative to delve deeper into the interplay between communication technologies and employee productivity. This research proposal seeks to address a critical question and provide evidence-based recommendations that can shape remote work policies and practices, leading to enhanced productivity, improved employee satisfaction, and a healthier work-life integration for remote-work employees in Canada.

# Research Question

In the context of government-mandated lockdowns in Canada, how does the increased reliance on communication technology impact employee productivity, and what are the associated implications for work-life balance?

# Rationale

The research question serves as the focal point of this study, aiming to uncover the relationship between communication technology, employee productivity, and work-life balance during lockdowns. This question arises from the evolving landscape of work, where remote arrangements became imperative due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The extensive adoption of communication tools brought both opportunities and challenges, warranting a comprehensive investigation into their effects on employees’ productivity and personal well-being.

The first component of the research question focuses on the primary concern, the impact of communication technology on employee productivity. This stems from the urgency to understand the efficacy of remote work tools. With traditional workplace dynamics disrupted, organizations rapidly embraced digital communication platforms to ensure that their operations continued. However, whether these technologies did indeed enhance productivity requires an in-depth exploration.

The second component delves into the implications of increased technology usage for work-life balance. The integration of work into home environments, facilitated by communication technology, has raised valid concerns about the potential erosion of boundaries between an individual’s professional and personal lives, which would directly affect the productivity of employees working remotely. As employees found themselves navigating this new work at home normal, understanding the impact on their wellbeing and daily routines becomes pivotal.

This research aims to ascertain the multifaceted effects of technology-induced blurring of work-life borders, ultimately guiding the development of measures that sustain both productivity and employee wellbeing.

Overall, the research question encapsulates the central inquiries of this study, bridging the gap between the utilization of communication technology, its effects on employee productivity, and the ensuing repercussions on work-life balance. By addressing this question, the study endeavours to contribute valuable insights to the fields of remote work management, organizational behaviour, and employee wellbeing, while simultaneously offering actionable recommendations that can shape policies and practices in an increasingly technology-driven work environment.

# Literature Review

A literature review was conducted and revealed that past studies were few in number as they pertained to the problem as a whole. Relevant literature was primarily focused on researching and analyzing other topic-adjacent issues, such as the effectiveness of public health communication during lockdown (Lowe, et al., 2022) and the effects of social isolation and communication with family and friends during lockdown (Heshmat & Neustaedter, 2021). Unfortunately, there was limited directly related literature, with the closest literature found being the 2022 study published by Statistics Canada entitled “*Canadians’ use of the Internet and digital technologies before and during the COVID-19 pandemic*” (Wavrock, D., et al, 2022).

# Methodology

Given the nature of the problem and the individual aspects of the results, the study will employ a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. These together will form a comprehensive dataset from various employees across different industries and situations. The surveys will focus on communication technology usage, productivity metrics, and employees’ perceptions. The interviews will provide valuable insight into the challenges and benefits experienced by the participants and to compile a dataset from which productivity can be inferred.

# Ethical Considerations

This proposal acknowledges the significance of adhering to ethical standards throughout the study. First and foremost, participant consent will be a primary ethical consideration. All participants involved in surveys and interviews will be provided with clear and comprehensive information about the study’s purpose, procedures, and the intended use of their data. Informed consent will be obtained from each participant before their involvement in the study, ensuring their voluntary participation and understanding of what the data will be used for.

Confidentiality and data protection will also be strictly adhered to and upheld. Participant’s identities and any personally identifiable information will be kept strictly confidential and only used internally to reference the participant to a number. Any data collected will be anonymized during analysis and reporting to prevent the identification of individual respondents.

Moreover, the design of the research will ensure minimal risk to participants. Surveys and interviews will focus on participants’ experiences with communication technology, their productivity, and their work-life balance both before and during lockdowns. These topics are non-intrusive and will not require participants to disclose sensitive or personal information. Participants will also be given the option to withdraw from the study at any point without question, and all data collected from the individual as part of surveys and/or interviews that they participated in will be destroyed.

By upholding these ethical considerations, this study aims to ensure the wellbeing, privacy, and the rights of participants while contributing valuable insights to the understanding of the topic of this study.

# Artefacts

This research proposal outlines two main data collection points, surveys and interviews. Quantitative data from the surveys will be statistically analyzed to identify patterns and correlations between communication technology use, productivity, and work-life balance. Qualitative data from the interviews will be thematically analyzed to extract meaningful themes and insights. Together, these findings will present a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships under investigation in this study.

# Timeline

The proposed research on “*The impact of communication technology on employee productivity during lockdown in Canada*” will be conducted over a span of approximately six months. This will provide adequate time for additional literature review, data gathering, data analysis, and finally the compilation and presentation of said data.

## Month 1: Project Initiation and Preparation

The first month will consist of project initiation and preparation, including refining of the objectives and expected outcomes of the research project, further reviewing relevant literature and identifying gaps, and designing the survey and interview protocols.

## Month 2: Piloting and Ethical Clearance

The second month will include piloting of the survey and interview protocols, distribution of surveys and identification of possible interview participants, and conducting ethical reviews and obtaining approvals.

## Month 3: Data Collection and Preliminary Analysis

The third month will include the collection of survey responses, conducting interviews with identified participants, and initiating preliminary data coding and analysis.

## Month 4: In-Depth Analysis and Integration of Findings

This month will see the completion of data analysis from the surveys and interviews, taking the qualitative and quantitative data and integrating them to create a primary dataset, and drafting the preliminary analysis sections in the final report.

## Month 5: Interpretation and Synthesis

This month the key themes and patterns from the data will be synthesized and conclusions will be drawn, report sections will be developed for the implications of remote work and the use of communications technologies and the discussion surrounding those implications, and the review and refinement of the initial analysis will take place.

## Month 6: Reporting and Finalization

The final month will see the final research report document completed with relevant datasets and previously developed sections, the document will be reviewed and proofread, and the final research document will be submitted for peer review and release. Finally, a reflection on the lessons learned and future research on the topic will be published as a follow-up, less official, document.

# Summary

The proposed timeline provides a structured outline for the progression of the proposed research project. Flexibility will be maintained to accommodate any unforeseen or minor challenges, as well as any opportunities that might arise during the project. Additionally, this timeline ensures that ethical considerations are being placed at the forefront of this research. The result of this meticulously planned timeline will be a comprehensive and conclusive document that contributes to the understanding of communication technology impact on employees that were often forced to work from home under non-ideal circumstances, and the importance of understanding the implications of the lockdown directives as they apply to workforce productivity to Canada as a nation.

# References

* Heshmat, Y. & Neustaedter, C. (2021). Family and Friend Communication over Distance in Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Available at: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3461778.3462022> (accessed 04 August 2023)
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