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## *Original Paper*

# Purpose Built Offices Replaced by Work from Home (WFH) in a Time of Business Disruption: Hybrid Office Model (HOM)

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### **Abstract**

*With the pandemic of COVID-19 came a time of significant business disruption, particularly in relation to social distancing rules that effectively shut down organisations physical office spaces, and moved employees to Work From Home (WFH) in a very short space of time. This research looks at the current office space that employees use and compares it to the WFH space. The results showed that employees valued their physical office space, but that open plan or shared offices were often noisy and lacked privacy. Most described their office space as personal, comfortable, and conducive to productivity. In relation to the ability to work collaboratively, most respondents stated this happened in their current office space (87%), and with the move to WFH, 76% stated that they were still able to work collaboratively. Employees will no longer need to commute to work, can spend more time perusing personal plans and feel more productive when WFH. For employers, they now have access to a wider pool of talent, can enjoy cost savings and decrease their carbon footprint. The office of the future will be a hybrid model, a combination of WFH, working in the office and both, known as the Hybrid Office Model (HOM).*

### **Keywords**

*Work From Home (WFH), Business Disruption, COVID-19, Hybrid Office Model (HOM)*

## **1. Introduction to the Study**

The World Health Organisation (2020) determined that the COVID-19 virus was as a pandemic, and on 30 January 2020 declared it to be a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern”. In response to this, the Australian Government has implemented that “Public gatherings significantly increase the risk of COVID-19 spreading, on 29 March the National Cabinet agreed to further limit most indoor and outdoor non-essential gathering to 2 people” (Australian Department of Health, 2020). This has had a

profound effect on the ability of people to work in their usual place of business. This research examines the effect of this on staff at Avondale University College, a higher education institution located in regional NSW, Australia who has been operating since 1892.

Since the March 31, 2020 introduction of the Public Health COVID 19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement Order (2020) by the NSW Government, working from home (WFH) is becoming the norm for staff who have the ability to do so. According to Safework NSW (2020), this includes the following:

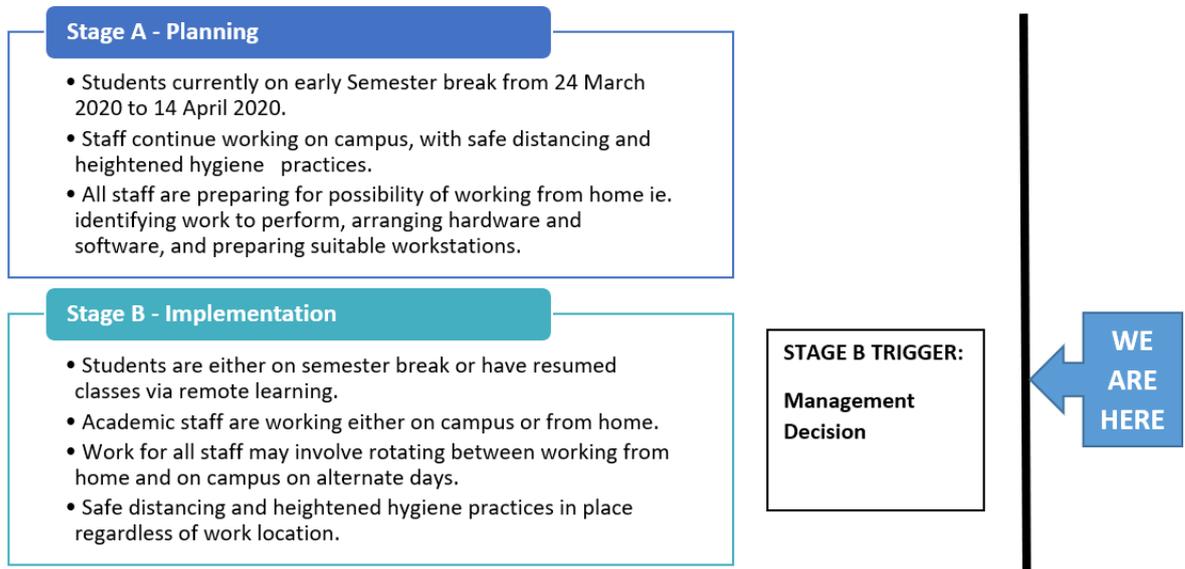
- “ceasing non-essential work activities that involve close personal contact (less than 1.5m)
- implementing controls to reduce direct contact with workers and customers, including:
  - social distancing of at least 1.5metres (1 person per 4sqm indoors)
  - barriers to create space at counters, between workstations, seated areas, etc.
  - modifying shifts and rosters to reduce peak periods
  - actively supporting flexible work arrangements, including *working from home (WFH)* (emphasis added).

In response to this government- imposed limitation on gatherings, the Avondale University College President sent to all staff on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March (2020) the following: “The decision has been made that;

- all those who are able to work from home and who have completed the paperwork/checks required by line-managers, should transition to working from home from this afternoon onwards. For staff yet to confirm their capability to work from home and/or to confirm the tasks they will be completing from home, we aim to transition you to working from home by Wednesday (April 1);
- from this afternoon onwards, all those needing to be on-campus should stay within their immediate work area and not visit other areas of campus that are not directly associated with their employment”. (President Avondale University College, via email 29/3/20)

This comment derives from the Avondale Crisis Management Teams’ staged responses to COVID 19, of which it was determined Avondale was at Stage B at the time (see Figure 1). Based on this information, all employees were encouraged to work from home, and if not to work only in their offices within their specific work areas, known as “moat” working. It is the aim of this research to understand what challenges and opportunities individual staff had when working from home, and what challenges and opportunities it meant for staff as a collective, when working remotely.

## COVID-19: CORONAVIRUS AND AVONDALE



**Figure 1. Avondale University College COVID 19 Stages**

Telecommuting or teleworking (Bloom, Liang, Roberts, & Ying, 2013) is described as “a facility or space which offers workers an alternative to either working in their normal place of work or working from home (WFH)” (NSW Government Trade & Investment, 2013, p. 5). Employers benefit from “increased productivity, security in retention, strengthened organisational commitment and improved performance”; Employees benefit from “reduced stress, better health and better work-life balance”; and the wider community benefit from “reduced congestion on roads and the corresponding environmental benefits” (Fitzgerald, Malik, & Rosenberger III, 2017, p. 4).

From a work/life balance perspective, this balance has become more challenging, especially with increasing workloads and advances in technology, which have resulted in the boundaries between work and home life becoming more blurred (Major & Germano, 2006). Advances in communication technologies, such as mobile phones, laptops, email and wireless internet connections, have created a virtual workforce (remote working), where employees can be contacted anywhere and anytime (O’Driscoll, Brough, & Kalliath, 2006; Beaugard & Henry, 2009). Being able to work from any location, especially from home, has an impact on a person’s work-life balance.

On the one hand, remote working enables the reduction in commute time, allowing for more time to interact with family and other non-work commitments, such as exercise and hobbies (Hall et al., 2013). Research has shown that employees who are Working From Home (WFH), are experiencing greater intrusion into their family life, due to the difficulty experienced in “leaving work at work” (Hyman et al., 2003).

Work-Life Balance (WLB) is the time an individual uses to work, in comparison with their time spent with individual engagement and relations (Abioro, Oladejo, & Ashogbon, 2018). In this century, WLB is an important concept, in which the equilibrium must be maintained and managed constantly. A finding shows that employees with a well-balanced life are valuable for the company, and the quality of their personal life impacts their work quality (Garg & Yajurvedi, 2016).

Studies done by Barnes, Long and Williams (2019 and 2020) into the advantages of workers using a remote smart hub indicated two themes of 1/work satisfaction and 2/personal satisfaction from using a smart hub closer to home. They also identified factors that contributed to these themes, either as an opportunity or a challenge of reduced commute, flexibility, productivity, control, interactions (internal and external), wellbeing, facilities & environment, work life balance, cost & time. At times these were favorable outcomes, and at times these proved challenging.

Due to the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, this research surveyed current employees at Avondale University College to see what challenges and opportunities arose when changing from working in an office space provided by the institution and its facilities, compared to the impromptu move to Working From Home (WFH). Staff were surveyed after they had been working from home for at least a month, to allow them to settle in and get used to the new ways of working.

The aims of this project were to identify the current challenges and opportunities to employees of Avondale University College who have had to change their workspace to Working From Home (WFH) as individuals and as a collective.

Based on the literature review and research aims, the Research Questions (RQs) for this study are:

*RQ1: What are the individual challenges for employees working from home?*

*RQ2: What are the individual opportunities for employees working from home?*

*RQ3: What are the challenges of working collaboratively from home?*

*RQ4: What are the opportunities of working collaboratively from home?*

The research questions are identified in Table 1, and linked to the survey questions to elicit answers:

**Table 1. Research Questions Linked to Survey Questions**

| Research Questions  | Survey Questions  | Survey Questions  |
|---|---|---|
|   | Individual Current Avondale Space   | Individual Work From Home (WFH) Space                           |
| <i>RQ1: What are the individual challenges for employees working from home?</i> | <b>Part A: Current Avondale Office Space</b>  | <b>Part B: Remote/Home Office Space</b>                         |
|   | 1) How long have you worked in your current Avondale space/office? <1, 1-5, 5-10>10 | 1) How would you describe your remote/home office space? (Open) |
| <i>RQ1: What are the</i>  | 2) How would you describe your  | 2) What is in your current office                               |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <i>individual challenges for employees working from home?</i>                | <p>current office space at Avondale? (Open)</p> <p>3) What and who shares your current office space? (Open)</p> <p>4) Is there anything you <u>don't like</u> about your office space? (Open)</p> <p>5) Is there anything you particularly <u>like</u> about your office space? (Open)</p> <p>6) How important is the physical space you work in? (Not/Very)</p> <p>7) How private is your current office space? (Not/Very)</p> <p>8) Have you been able to personalise your office space? (Yes/No)</p> <p>9) Do you think your office allows for collaboration with others? (Yes/No)</p> <p>10) Any other comments you would like to make about your Avondale office space?</p> | <p>space? (Open)</p> <p>3) Who do you share your current office space with? (Open-children/partners/animals)</p> <p>4) Is there anything you <u>don't like</u> about your office space? (Open)</p> <p>5) Is there anything you particular you <u>like</u> about your office space? (Open)</p> <p>6) How important is the physical space you work in? (Not/Very)</p> <p>7) How private is your current office space? (Not/Very)</p> <p>8) Do you think your office allows for collaboration with others? (Yes/No)</p> |
| <i>RQ3: What are the challenges of working collaboratively from home?</i>    |  | 9) What have been the biggest challenges working with colleagues who are also working from home?   |
| <i>RQ4: What are the opportunities of working collaboratively from home?</i> |  | 10) What have been the biggest opportunities working with colleagues who are also working from home?   |
| Demographic Questions  | <p>1/ How many years have you worked at Avondale? Scale 0-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20&gt;20 years</p> <p>2/ Please indicate if you are professional/administration/academic staff member.</p>  |  |

## 2. Methodology

According to Yin (2003), qualitative methodology is ideal for generating descriptive answers, involving richness and intensity, to access and understand personal experiences and opinions. Qualitative research is undertaken when the researcher “aims to explore a problem, honour the voices of participants, map the complexity of the situation, and convey multiple perspectives of participants” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 7). Quantitative methods will also be utilised to determine associations between key concepts in the research questions. This understanding arises through the depth of exploration of the participant’s perspectives.

Quantitative research methods typically use numeric data to measure variables (Sarantakos, 2005) and describe trends or explain relationships between variables (Creswell, J., & Creswell, D., 2018). It typically (but not exclusively) uses surveys, documentary methods, observations and experiments (Sarantakos, 2005). Creswell notes this method typically uses questions which are “specific and narrow” in order to “obtain measurable and observable data on variables”, using “mathematical procedures, called statistics” (2008, pp. 54-56). In order to get both qualitative and quantitative data collection, individual surveys will be sent to participants, with questions consisting of both quantitative (open questions) and qualitative (e.g., Likert scale) data collection.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Formal Office Space

A survey was administered to all staff at Avondale University College using survey Monkey, in July 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic business shutdown. Total staff at Avondale University College according to the Human Resources Department numbered 157, with 83 responses received, giving an overall response rate of 53%. Of the 83 responses, 74 (or 89%) indicated that they are now Working From Home (WFH), with 9 (or 11%) still working at the Avondale premises, (note those that answered “No” to working remotely did not proceed with the survey). Of the 74 respondents who indicated they worked from home, not all of them proceeded to answer the rest of the survey, with responses varying in number between 66 to 68.

Respondents stated the amount of time they have worked at Avondale with less than 5 years=26 respondents, 5 and 10 years also 26 respondents, between 10 to 15 years=8 responses, 3 between 15 and 20 years and 3 respondents indicating services of 20 years or longer. Of the respondents who indicated that they had to work remotely, 38 (57%) were academics and 29 (43%) were from professional or general staff members. The respondents included employees who have been working at Avondale from being a new employee (less than a year) to an employee who has served more than ten years in the current space they worked in as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Length of Time in Current Space**

| Length of Service | Number | Percentage |
|-------------------|--------|------------|
| <1 Year           | 13     | 19%        |
| 1-5 years         | 25     | 37%        |
| 6-10 years        | 18     | 26%        |
| >10 years         | 12     | 18%        |
| Total             | 68     | 100%       |

Survey data was administered to understand the current office space and compare it to the space used at home during the COVID-19 changes to social isolation. Current descriptions of office spaces at Avondale are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Description of Current Office Space**

| Description of Current                             | Example of Quote   |
|--|--|
| <b>Avondale Office</b>                             |  |
| Good/Great/Excellent (23 out of 68 responses, 34%) | “Very satisfactory” (#16), “quite adequate” (#17) “Excellent” (#6),<br>“Very pleasant” (#10)   |
| Spacious/large (21 out of 68 responses, 31%)       | “Spacious” (#4)<br>“Large enough to conduct the various aspects of my job” (#25)<br>“Large office for one person” (#58)                                |
| Comfortable (13 responses, 19%)                    | “Comfortable” (#26)<br>“Pleasant and comfortable with plenty of light” (#54)   |
| Tight/small (11 responses, 16%)                    | “Small internal office with one occupant” (#11)<br>“Cramped” (#33), “Confined” (#34), “Small office” (#38)   |
| Efficient/Functional (10 responses, 15%)           | “It allows me to work efficiently” (#1)<br>“Practical” (#18)<br>“Allows for me to complete my work in an efficient manner” (#19)                       |
| Work with Colleagues (7 responses)                 | “Open plan and adequate for the task of collaborating with team members” (#12)<br>“It’s located in and amongst the staff that I work with daily” (#50) |
| Window View (5 responses)                          | “Great view” (#2)<br>“View out window” (#8)  |

The question of if office space was shared with others resulted in 68 responses, with 29 or (43%) stating they shared office space, with 39 (57%) stating they had their own office.

**Table 4. Individual Space v Shared Space**

| Current Space                  | Total     | Sample Quotes  |
|--------------------------------|-----------|--|
| <b>Shared Office Space</b>     | 29 or 43% | “It is difficult to block out telephone and other conversations of my colleagues in as part of their work” (#34) “No partitions and can be noisy and distracting at times “(#56) |
| <b>Individual Office Space</b> | 39 or 57% | “I have my own office in the building with other offices close by” (#20) “No one else, just me, just the way I like it” (#32)  |

When asked if there was anything they didn’t like about their office space, 28 or 41% stated that there was nothing they didn’t like about their space. 40 participants (59%) stated some improvements were needed including increasing privacy (e.g., partitions, less people in one space) and reducing noise in shared spaces. Other issues included old, noisy and shared air conditioning, lack of glass panels and windows, cold offices in Winter, cramped spaces, open plan offices and loneliness from being too far away from other colleagues.

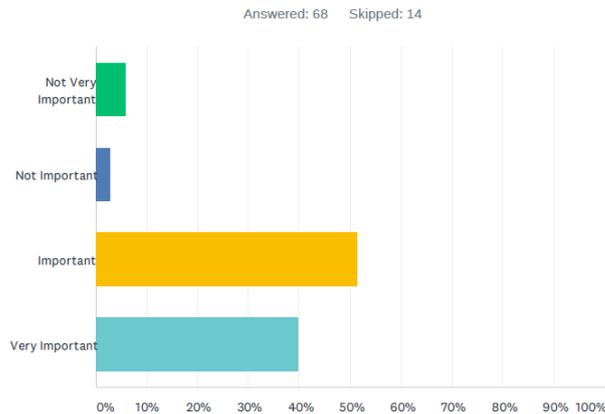
When asked what participants liked about their offices the following were stated:

- The view and natural light (25 participants, 37%)
- Size of space occupied (18 participants, 27%)
- Privacy (16 participants, 24%)
- Collegiality (7 participants)

Other reasons for liking the workspace included accessibility for students, lovely buildings to work in, having two screens to work on and air conditioning.

When asked how important the physical space you work in was, only 6 participants (9%) indicated that it was not very important or not important. 62 participants (91%) indicated physical space was important or very important to them as shown in Figure 2.

Q7 How important is the physical space you work in?



| ANSWER CHOICES     | RESPONSES |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Not Very Important | 5.88% 4   |
| Not Important      | 2.94% 2   |
| Important          | 51.47% 35 |
| Very Important     | 39.71% 27 |
| TOTAL              | 68        |

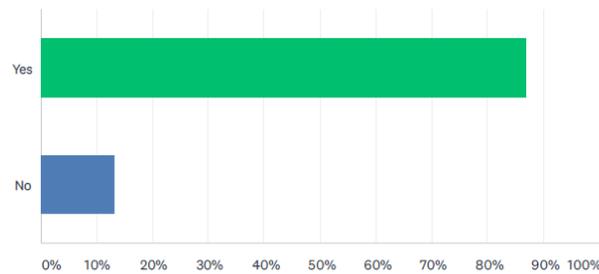
**Figure 2. Importance of Physical Space**

Participants were then asked how private their current workspace was, with 30.88% or 21 indicating it was not private. 42.65% or 29 participants stated it was sometimes private, and 26.47% or 18 stated it was very private. This aligns with the results above where space and privacy were indicated as positive factors for office space, and lack of privacy was shown in the open plan or shared spaces, particularly in relation to the level of noise.

In relation to the ability to personalise space, 87% of respondents (59) indicated they had the ability to personalise, with 13% (9) indicating they did not have this ability. In relation to collaboration with others, 87% (59) stated their office space was conducive to collaboration, and 13% (9) stated that they didn't have the ability to collaborate with their current office space, as shown in Figure 3.

### Q10 Do you think your office allows for collaboration with others?

Answered: 68 Skipped: 14



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |    |
|----------------|-----------|----|
| Yes            | 86.76%    | 59 |
| No             | 13.24%    | 9  |
| TOTAL          |           | 68 |

**Figure 3. Collaboration with Others in Current Office Space**

#### 3.2 Working from Home (WFH) Space (COVID-19)

Participants were then asked to describe their remote office space, that they had moved to since the government implemented COVID-19 restrictions that effectively closed the Avondale campus down to both students and staff. Most described their home/remote working spaces as functional (17 responses, 25%) and comfortable (15 responses, 22%). Some described their individual spaces in detail for example “Stand up desk on the chest of drawers in my bedroom or sitting at the living room table or breakfast bench” (#24). Some described how easy it was to set up their office at home or remotely for example “Really who needs a “space” when all you need is a computer and phone. I can work anywhere as long as I have a power point” (#40). Some also lamented that they felt their home/remote office was “heaven” (#60) and that “it is going to be pretty hard to go back to my 7.4 sqm office space!” (#34).

Of the 68 participants that described their home or remote office, 61 (90%) indicated they had a dedicated desk, and dedicated chair (54, or 80%), some borrowed the chairs from their work office, others used dining chairs. 42 participants (62%) indicated they were able to use their computer/laptop from work at home, and others indicated that in their home office they also had access to a second bigger monitor (20, 43%), and a printer (19, 28%). Interesting were the other office equipment listed such as a “jogging trampoline” (#12) and a “fish tank” (#40). Others also described the difference between their home office and office workspace for example:

“Desk (choice of sitting or standing which I do not have at work), much bigger screen (personal home computer), mini kitchen (sink, kettle), controllable heating/cooling (windows and sliding door open for fresh air, not possible at work), laser printer/scanner, bookshelf, controllable lighting (not possible in work space)” (#7).

When participants were asked who they share their remote/home office space with, 41 (60%) indicated that they shared it with children, partners or housemates. 22 participants indicated that they did not share their remote office space with anyone (32%) and a further 30% (21 participants) indicated they also shared the space with various animals. Some also indicated they shared the space with both family and animals, for example the following:

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 58 | The husband wanders in occasionally. The German Shepherd frequently shares the space, and my children do too two days a week. |
| 59 | During COVID - 2 kids, one partner, one dog   |

Participants were then asked if there was anything they didn't like about working from home/remotely. 27 or 40% of respondents indicated there was nothing they didn't like about their remote office. Of the other participants, issues included lack of space (12), lack of privacy, distractions, lack of adequate equipment (e.g., printer/scanner), lack of colleagues and too much easy access to both the pantry and the fridge! The following quote from participant #6, sums up some of the issues raised by this question:

“There is nothing I don't like about my home office space. There are things I don't like about working from home. Being within ‘earshot’ of anything that arises at home. Being too close to everything (not enough exercise). Being more ‘available’ for work (i.e., putting in more hours than I am contracted to do because it is convenient to do so). Not being able to printout things that I need—when connected to Avondale my home printer isn't accessible but of course Avondale printer is also not accessible. No personal interactions with work colleagues. Correspondence via email rather than talking to someone face to face can sometimes cause a misunderstanding that could have been easily resolved in a face to face conversation” (#2).

When asking the question what do you like about working in your home/remote space, only one participant indicated they did not like working remotely. All other 67 participants indicated that they liked working from home for reasons such as the following:

- The View and natural lighting (22, 32%)
- Comfortable (15, 22%)
- Productive
- Private
- No more Commute
- Quiet
- Space
- Others included, Multi-tasking, convenient and flexible.

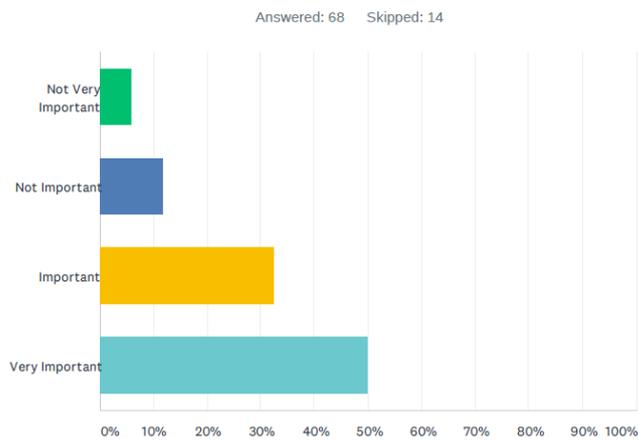
One quote from participant #6, sums up some of the issues raised:

“Being able to do a home chore (like removing the washing from the line if it is about to rain) but being able to ensure that my work obligation is fulfilled. No travel so later start to the day (or time to do home chores before start time). With the shorter days—being at

home and warm during the work day and when the day is finished not having to travel in the dark and cold. Having access to whatever I feel like eating for lunch not what I managed to ‘throw together’ as I ran out the door in the morning” (#18).

Respondents were then asked how important it was during COVID-19 to have your own office space. 82% stated that it was important or very important (22+34=56), and 18% indicated that it was not very important, or not important (4+8=12) to have their own office space as shown in Figure 4.

Q17 How important is it to have your own office space at this time?



| ANSWER CHOICES     | RESPONSES |    |
|--------------------|-----------|----|
| Not Very Important | 5.88%     | 4  |
| Not Important      | 11.76%    | 8  |
| Important          | 32.35%    | 22 |
| Very Important     | 50.00%    | 34 |
| TOTAL              |           | 68 |

**Figure 4. Importance of Own Office Space during COVID-19**

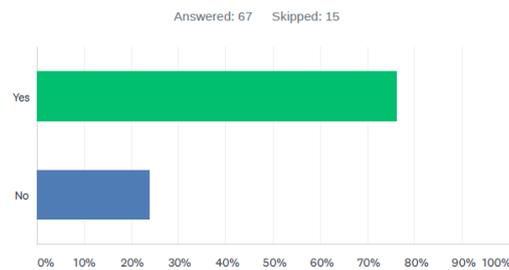
When asked about how private their remote/home office was, participants answered that 10 felt it was not private, 21 stated somewhat private and 37 said private. This can be compared to the results for the Avondale office space as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. Privacy of Spaces Avondale v Remote/Home Office**

| Office versus remote/Home space | Avondale Space | Remote/Home office Space | Variance                               |
|---------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--|
| Not private                     | 21 (31%)       | 10 (15%)                 | 11 found more privacy at home          |
| Somewhat private                | 29 (43%)       | 21 (31%)                 | 8 found home less private than office  |
| Very Private                    | 18 (26%)       | 37 (54%)                 | 19 found home more private than office |
| Total                           | 68 (100%)      | 68 (100%)                |  |

In terms of collaboration with others whilst working remotely Figure 5 shows the results:

Q19 Do you think your home/office space allows for collaboration with others?

**Figure 5. Collaboration Home/Office Space**

Challenges identified included seven main factors that created challenges in working from home or remotely. These Challenges included Collegiality, Communication, Workload, Equipment/Connectivity, Community, Mental Health & Work Life Balance. Table 6 lists these with supporting quotes.

**Table 6. Challenges of Working Remotely/Home Office**

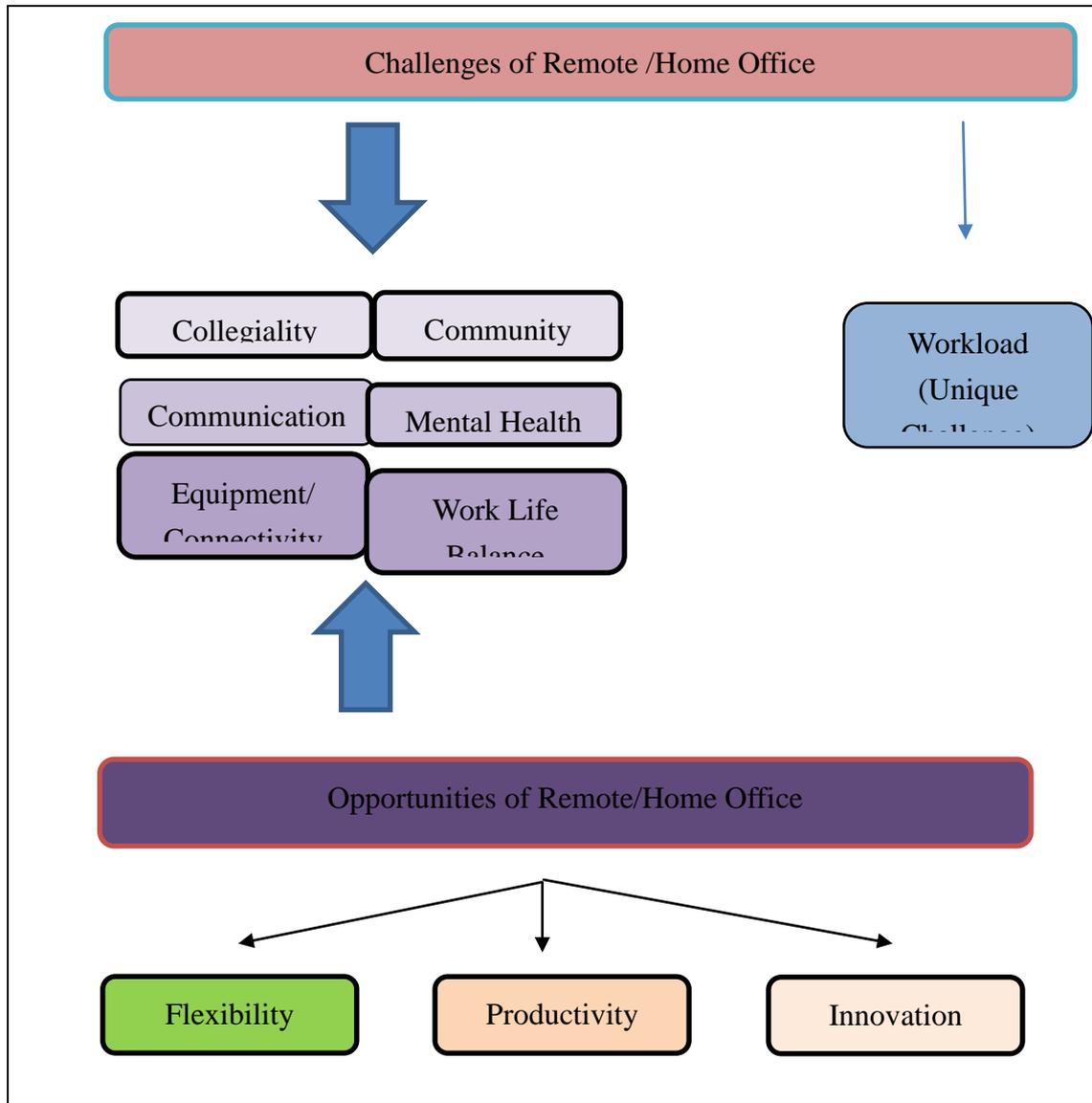
| Challenges                  | Quotes from Respondents   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Collegiality                | <p>“I miss the face to face contact” (#14)</p> <p>“Physical presence” (#17)</p> <p>“I miss the collegiality” (#18)</p> <p>“Zoom connection provided space for connecting with others” (#7)</p>  |
| Communication               | <p>“Not being able to talk and collaborate face-to-face” (#19)</p> <p>“Not being privy to body language when communicating/giving direction” (#4). “I struggle to insert myself into conversation in the same way I would in person” (#46)</p>  |
| Workload                    | <p>“The blow-out in workload” (#37)</p> <p>“The sheer number of hours spent in Zoom meetings has been exhausting some days” (#29)</p> <p>“I tend to work more at home than in the office” (#35)</p> <p>“Availability has been difficult for some of them who are home schooling” (#36)</p>  |
| Equipment/<br>Connectivity  | <p>“We are a paper-based department and at first that proved to be a challenge, but we have since figures out solutions that seem to work” (#27). “Can’t print your documents out so everything has to be saved on the F Drive” (#53)</p> <p>“Making sure I have brought everything I need from work home” (#54)</p> <p>“Learning to use technology such as zoom” (#55)</p> <p>“Internet performance and connectivity with College Network” (#34)</p> <p>“Zoom is tiring” (#2) “Zoom fatigue” (#25)</p> |
| Socialisation/<br>Community | <p><i>Missing the</i> “social gatherings where we share personal stories” (#65)</p> <p>“Maintaining a sense of community” (#67)</p> <p>“Motivating of staff who are extroverts and thrive on people being around” (#15)</p>   |
| Mental Health               | <p>“Monotony and anxiety” (#21)</p> <p>“I see some work friends struggling” (#65)</p>   |
| Work Life<br>Balance        | <p>“Not knowing when I’m at work or home” (#45)</p>   |

Opportunities included six of the seven challenges listed in Table 6, including Collegiality, Communication, Equipment/Connectivity, Community, Mental Health and Work Life Balance. Only workload was not discussed as an opportunity. Three other opportunities were also identified including Flexibility, Productivity and Innovation, as shown in Table 7 with supporting quotes from respondents.

**Table 7. Opportunities of Working Remotely/Home Office**

| Opportunity                 | Quotes from Respondents  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Collegiality                | “Sharing challenges and solutions to working online/delivering education online” (#10). “Closer collaboration with Sydney Campus” (#19)<br>“Staff worship via zoom when we get to see and know staff from other areas of the College” (#6)   |
| Communication               | “I have been able to communicate with them more often” (#1)<br>“More open, honest conversations that often extend beyond work related matters” (#2). “We can all work from home and still communicate via zoom or email to achieve what we would normally achieve at work” (#42)   |
| Equipment/<br>Connectivity  | “Zoom has provided a wonderful opportunity to stay connected with colleagues” (#3). “Zoom meetings has actually brought about more collaboration” (#15). “The ability to interact through Zoom/Skype digital media” (#34). “Connecting globally” (#7).<br>“Learning new ways of collaborating remotely” (#46)  |
| Community                   | “We have grown closer and kept in touch more often than we did in the office” (#8). “Team collaboration between both physical campuses” (#26)  |
| Mental Health               | “Team meetings designed with the main focus on well-being and how you’re going” (#58)  |
| Work Life<br>Balance        | “Proof of concept that work can continue fairly much as normal” (#19)<br>“Not having to travel” (#52)<br>“Once COVID restrictions are lifted ... the experience has showed us that we can get work done when we are isolated... we may be able to choose to work from home on some days” (#34)   |
| Flexibility                 | “More flexible ways of meeting” (#11)<br>“Autonomy” (#24) “Availability of people” (#66)<br>“Flexible working areas from home” (#39)<br>“Attendance at meetings has been more regular by all members” (#13)  |
| Efficiency/<br>Productivity | “I get more done at home!” (#14)<br>“Improving processes and work more efficiently” (#27)<br>“Meetings I found are more intentional and kept to topic” (#54)<br>“Not having staff trooping into my office ... has allowed consistent concentration on tasks... more focussed interaction with colleagues” (#29)<br>“Time to do research” (#62)<br>“Watched a lot of podcasts to get professional development hours” (#63)<br>“Setting boundaries—no casual visitors that suck up time” (#65) |
| Innovation                  | “Stretching our norms and developing new ways of working” (#22)<br>“More innovative. Think outside the box, refine our processes and be more open to change” (#36)<br>“Working with existing colleagues to integrate new technology” (#32)<br>“Learn new technology skills” (#51)  |

A summary of these findings is shown in Figure 6, where there are six factors that appear as both challenges and opportunities, with a unique factor of “workload” as a challenge, and three additional issues as opportunities including “Flexibility”, “Productivity” and “Innovation”.



**Figure 6. Challenges and Opportunities for Remote/Home Office**

#### 4. Discussion

COVID-19 has given organisations an opportunity to demonstrate their trust in their staff through working from home, and that although challenges have been presented, that these challenges can also turn into opportunities, and bring with it, additional prospects of flexibility for staff, increase in productivity and use of innovation. What does the office of the future look like? According to a survey conducted by PwC (June 2020), the office of the future will change, with 3 out of 4 executives declaring Working From Home (WFH) a success, with a caveat that employees need to set clear

work-life boundaries, and employers need to be more flexible (PwC, 2020). 55% of executive respondents would like to utilise WFH at least 1 day a week, with most agreeing that the office of the future whilst not obsolete, will change with 30% believing they will need less office space in the future (PwC, 2020). This is indicative of potential changes to the way people will work in the future. It seems a hybrid model will suit most employees with a combination of WFH options with office space as needed, particularly to encourage collaboration and provide social support for the model to work. Figure 7 shows this hybrid model, with the options of WFH, working in the office and Hybrid (HOM) of doing both.

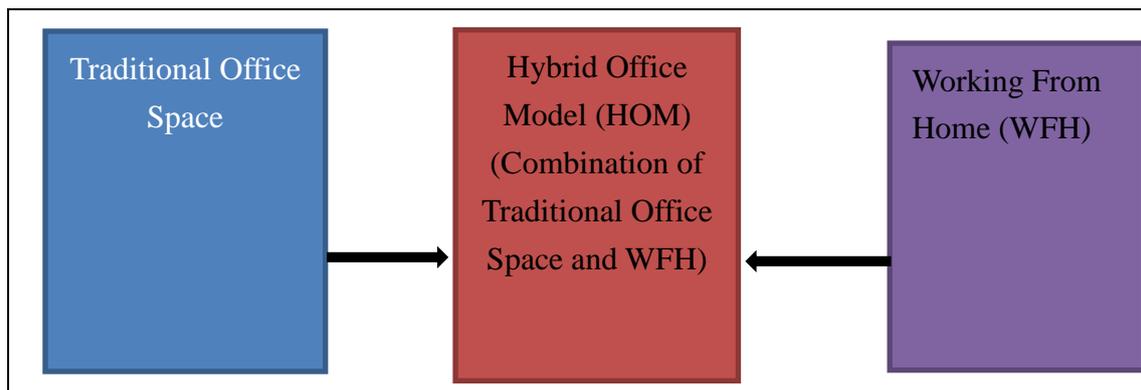


Figure 7. Hybrid Office Model (HOM)

This study has shown that employees of Avondale are generally happy with their office spaces on campus, but identified some challenges in shared office spaces, such as noise and privacy, and that the physical space they work in is important, as is collaboration with colleagues. Upon moving to WFH during COVID-19, most agreed that their home office was comfortable and functional, and that it was important to have their own space for privacy and productivity. 76% of people WFM also identified that it was important to collaborate with colleagues and that this was possible to do remotely.

It appears that going forward the “office” will change for many organisations. If employees are happy to work from home, and have the space, privacy and equipment they need to do their job efficiently and effectively from home, then employers need to provide that flexibility. The upside for employees is no commute time, more time with family/partners/friends, and the ability to work for an organisation that may not be in your geographical area. For employers it means a decrease in the carbon footprint for the environment, a decrease in costs, e.g., electricity, heating, cooling, & rent and a wider talent pool to recruit from. ***The office of the future then, will be a hybrid model of WFH, working in the office, and a combination of both, known as the hybrid office model (HOM).***

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