IIRSM TECHNICAL PAPER

The Impact of New Working Methods – A Psychosocial Risk Perspective

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1. Introduction

Over the last 20 years, organisations have introduced a more diverse range of working methods both in an attempt to improve operational efficiency and profitability and as a consequence of the potential offered by information and communication technologies (ICT). Traditionally, employees travelled to a specific workplace where they would have the tools and materials necessary to carry out their designated tasks. They would also have the opportunity to interact with colleagues in the workplace and discuss issues related to their work on a face-to-face basis. Similarly, in an office environment, employees would have their own desk or even their own office and more structured interaction took place in formal meetings.

Now, this pattern of work has been replaced for many employees by new methods of work such as teleworking, hot-desking, home working, temporary or part-time working, outsourcing, internships etc. These new approaches have obvious advantages for employers who no longer have to provide the same level of accommodation to their employees (for instance with hot-desking, employers can obtain benefit by maximising the number of employees who use the same work stations; at the same time, office size can be reduced by up to 30%). Similarly, these methods have also been promoted as having benefits for some employees who no longer have the same level of commuting and may have a better work-life balance. For example, parents may find it advantageous in terms of providing child care. Also, for those who are still based in a more traditional workplace, we have seen changes of expectations such as excess working hours becoming the norm.

However, sometimes these new methods give rise to disadvantages; for example, some employees find working from home makes it difficult to maintain a work/life balance. Furthermore, several studies have shown that employees find new working methods such as teleworking more stressful as they have to be working at 100% capacity at all times in order to provide better service to the customers.

Recent research by Gonzales, et al., (2010) has shown that these changes have also increased risks such as stress related illness or reduced security. Previously, similar issues were highlighted by Becker, et al (1994) who, in his study, discussed both the drivers and barriers of new working methods (particularly with flexible work locations). These drivers and barriers can be summarised as follows:

Drivers of flexible work locations

- More flexibility and control provided to the employees;
- Freedom from the pressure associated with commuting;
- Employees to work in the area that best suits the task at hand;
- Reduced space costs.

Barriers resulting from flexible work locations

- Decreased communication between employees;
- Decreased ability to work as a team;
• Dissatisfaction with having to give up office space;
• Insurance questions for non-office work locations;
• Workspace sometimes not suitable (Becker, et al., 1994).

These new working methods have introduced many physical and psychosocial risks which create pressure and may lead to workplace stress and mental health problems for workers. Physical risk factors such as force, posture and repetition can be harmful to the body and can lead to people developing musculoskeletal disorders. However, several researchers have emphasised the increased interest in psychosocial risks since new working methods have been introduced. According to HSE (2014), psychosocial risk factors are things that may affect workers' psychological response to their work and workplace conditions (including working relationships with supervisors and colleagues). Some examples include high workloads, tight deadlines, and lack of control of the work and working methods.

Over the last few years, the topic of psychosocial risk has gained greater attention. It has been recently selected by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) as the focus of their ‘healthy workplaces campaign’ of 2014-2015 for which the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM) is a Campaign Partner. As a partner with EU-OSHA, the IIRSM is playing its part by conducting some novel research in this topic. From this perspective, IIRSM (in collaboration with Cardinus Risk Management Ltd) has carried out an initial pilot survey from its members to identify the key psychosocial risks associated with the introduction of new working methods which are likely to affect employees’ health and wellbeing. This includes identifying the commonly used working methods in large as well as small and medium size enterprises (SMEs). Similarly, for this survey, we have considered a list of different factors that we believe could contribute towards workplace stress; the data are gathered using these factors. Through this survey, we have obtained some interesting findings which show that there is a substantial need to carry out further research into the specific areas identified from the survey.

This paper should be viewed as IIRSM’s initial study to identify the impact of new working methods (involving stress and psychosocial risks) on employees’ health, safety and wellbeing. Firstly, we describe those new working methods and associated benefits and problems that have been identified. Then, we discuss the reasons why organisations have shifted their focus from traditional working methods to several new working methods which are now used as a part of day to day work. Some key psychosocial risk factors are also discussed which we believe contribute towards workplace stress. Then, the research methodology section and some initial survey results are presented, showing some interesting outcomes. Lastly, we present the results obtained through the initial survey, some conclusions and discussions about why there is a need to conduct further research in this area. This last section also covers our future plans and some discussions about our partners involved in this study.

2. The New Working Methods

The use of technology in the work environment, along with the globalisation of business generally, has resulted in the need and ability for employees to work from multiple locations. For instance, by using email, Skype and other communication channels, it is now possible for workers to stay in touch
with each other from any part of the world. This allows businesses to reduce costs in some areas. In addition, changes in working methods, such as the need to provide flexible working arrangements make it a requirement for businesses to offer options to employees. In this section, we present several new working methods which have been introduced in organisations over the past 20 years. For each method, we have covered its advantages and disadvantages for both workers and the employers.

2.1 Teleworking

Teleworking, also known as “telecommuting” refers to ‘work carried out in a location where, remote from central offices or production facilities, the worker has no personal contact with co-workers but is able to communicate with them using new communication technologies’ (Ki, Martino and Wirth, 1990, p.50; as cited in Mann and Holdsworth, 2003). Some of these new communication technologies established to perform work duties from a remote location include phone, email, fax, internet-based teleconferencing, Skype or Instant Messaging (IM). Teleworking is viewed as different from home working as it allows employees to work from different remote locations (e.g. a coffee shop or local telework centre).

There exist several advantages of teleworking for both employers and employees; some of these are as follows:

Advantages

- It can reduce costs by providing savings on office space and other facilities;
- It can improve productivity as people are not interrupted by the day to day distractions of office life and politics;
- Employees have more freedom over where they live, how they organise their work and when they carry it out;
- Employers who help people with disabilities or caring responsibilities to work at home can benefit from the additional skills and expertise of workers who may not otherwise be available to attend the workplace;
- Teleworking also reduces or eliminates time spent on travelling and lowers absence and staff turnover rates.

However, it also comes with several disadvantages; some of these include:

Disadvantages

- Little or even no supervision is available for employees;
- Remote working is not suitable for all types of job;
- Sometimes providing latest IT equipment can be expensive;
- Teleworking requires self-motivation and self-discipline which is sometimes difficult for employees;
- Both managers and remote workers sometimes find it hard to communicate with each other (Riley, 2012).
2.2 Hot-Desking

Hot-desking is another new approach that has become popular within the work environment. It is a method which involves employees sharing the office equipment amongst each other. Hot-desking was first seen in call centres where customer service agents and sales personnel share fully equipped desks only as required. Later on, it became popular and nowadays, it is used by a high proportion of organisations that are benefiting from this working approach. Hot-desking often occurs where an organisation’s databases and other services can be easily accessed via wireless or telephone links (Business Dictionary, 2014). Some of its advantages and disadvantages are discussed as follows:

**Advantages**

- By maximising the number of employees who use the same work stations, offices can sometimes reduce their size by up to 30%;
- Some employees work more efficiently and with more confidence if they have the flexibility to work where and when they need to;
- Employees can be productive in many locations as opposed to just one.

**Disadvantages**

- Employees may feel disturbed as the space/desk that they worked at one time, may be taken the next;
- Employees may feel isolated as they find it more difficult to develop relationships with colleagues;
- Sometimes equipment is very expensive; this will take a big cut from the organisation’s budget;
- IT disruptions (i.e. time lost if required items are not to hand) (eoffice, 2014).

2.3 Home Working

Home working is when a person works from home for one or more organisations and lives and works from the same place. Home workers will usually fit into one of the following four categories:

- **An employee of an organisation:** An employee working for an organisation whose job role requires or allows him/her to work from home. For instance, the employee may work for an organisation which is based in another country.
- **Self-employed:** Most people working from home fall into this category. They either provide a product or service from home such as a web designer, a consultant etc; or use their home as a base such as a plasterer, a musician etc.
- **Free-lance:** Means that the person is self-employed but has an existing skill (e.g. physiotherapist, proof reader) which is made available to a range of organisations.
- **Outworkers:** Are skilled piece-workers or contract packers who are paid to carry out work at home (CivvyStreet, 2014).

The advantages and disadvantages of home working are:
Advantages

- By working at home, people can save on many costs associated with going to work such as costs of commuting, car wear and tear, fuel, road taxes, parking, etc.;
- Employees are more flexible in terms of working hours;
- Some people claim that working from home can cause less stress; however, there is no significant evidence available to support this;
- Employees may be more productive due to less interruption from colleagues.

Disadvantages

- Interruptions from family, friends, and neighbours may be very disruptive and special efforts must be made to make it known that you are actually working and unavailable which may prove difficult for less assertive people;
- Workers sometimes feel that the work doesn’t end as there are no fixed working hours;
- Difficulty in separating home from work (Bayt, 2014).

2.4 Temporary/Part-Time Working

Temporary working refers to a situation where an employee is expected to leave the employer within a certain period of time. Temporary employees are sometimes called contractual, seasonal, interim, casual staff, freelance; or the word may be shortened to temps. In some cases, temporary professional employees (particularly in the white-collar worker fields, such as law, engineering, and accounting) even refer to themselves as ‘consultants’. This is not to be confused with consultants (as in management consulting or medical) (Wikipedia, 2014a). In addition to these contracts, there has been an increase in the use of zero hours contracts. With this type of contract, an employee is not guaranteed any specified number of hours and will only be paid if they are working. These employees, together with part-time workers, may obtain a range of advantages. For example, workers (such as students, parents, older workers etc.) not only earn some extra money but at the same time, develop skills and the gain experience of the work environment.

Advantages

- Temporary/part-time workers are easy to hire through different agencies;
- It provides an opportunity for the employee to gain experience;
- Flexible working hours are available in most of the cases.

Disadvantages

- Lack of understanding of the organisational issues;
- Less control over the way a job or task is carried out;
- Less or no health or pension benefits from the organisation;
- Temporary staff finds it easy to switch between different jobs meaning loyalty is reduced, which is not beneficial for the organisations.
2.5 Outsourcing

Outsourcing is an act of one organisation contracting with another to provide services that might otherwise be performed by in-house employees. Often the tasks that are outsourced could be performed by the organisation itself but in many cases there are financial advantages to outsourcing. Nowadays, many large organisations outsource jobs such as call centre services, e-mail marketing services, payroll, etc. These jobs are handled by separate organisations that specialise in each service, and in some cases are located overseas (WiseGeek, 2014).

Advantages

- It reduces organisations’ costs as services are provided at considerably lower cost than recruiting permanent employees;
- It saves organisations’ time and they can focus on core activities;
- Mostly SMEs choose this option as they tend to have fewer employees.

Disadvantages

- It does not always meet the requirements of the organisation and can be difficult to monitor performance and value for money;
- It eliminates direct communication between an organisation and its customers;
- Organisation may not always be able to control some aspects of their business.

2.6 Internships

An internship is a fixed limited period of time spent within an organisation. Mostly, students do an internship as a compulsory part of their university degree. Internship also provides an ideal opportunity for fresh graduates to gain experience in their chosen career or industry. The time period of internship with each organisation differs; it can last from one week to a year and can be part time or full time. Similarly, the payment that is offered depends on each organisation; some organisations offer minimum wage, others cover interns’ costs, and in other cases, interns receive nothing at all. Generally, certain jobs are set aside for interns to do, for instance, helping with a company’s project. It gives an ideal opportunity for interns to explore an industry and build relationships for a future career. There are several industries such as advertising, fine arts, etc., where an internship or unpaid work experience is the only way in for most people to obtain permanent full time employment (Prospects, 2009).

Advantages

- An internship is an excellent opportunity to gain hands-on experience in an industry of interest;
- It bridges the gap between education and the professional world;
- It also gives a valuable addition to an individual’s CV.
Disadvantages

- Often, interns move from one department to another within an organisation and are regarded as an ‘assistant’ rather than an apprentice;
- Internship is only an option for young people who have access to resources which will allow them to work and live without pay;
- Some organisations take advantage of interns and make them do the most menial and tedious tasks that will barely enhance their skills (FindEmployment, 2014).

2.7 Older Workers (Workers Over Normal Retirement Age)

There is no exact and commonly recognised age at which someone is considered an older worker. Some studies have focused on people older than 55 while others mentioned those of 60 years or older. In the UK, there is no mandatory retirement age; although, individual employers can set a compulsory age if it can be justified. The retirement age in the UK is not necessarily the same as the age at which state pension can be claimed. This ranges between 61 and 68 depending on date of birth and gender. Many studies have explained that older workers are regarded as dedicated workers; they produce higher quality work which can result in a significant cost savings for the organisation.

According to Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Health and Safety Executive (HSE), research and employer case studies shows that the majority of older workers:

- Are just as productive as their younger counterparts (at least up to age 70);
- Are just as successful in training;
- Take less short-term sickness absence; and
- Tend to offset any loss of speed with better judgement based on years of experience (DWP, 2013; DWP, 2006; HSE, 2011).

Advantages

- Older employees have invaluable work experience, including diverse thoughts and approaches;
- They are usually able (and willing) to mentor younger and less-experienced employees;
- They are more reliable, loyal, and have a serious commitment to work (WTA Inc., 2014).

Disadvantages

- Some employers may be reluctant to hire older employees as they perceive that these workers have higher salary expectations because of their previous work experience;
- Older employees sometimes find it difficult to work under a younger and less experienced supervisor;
- Some employers are reluctant to hire older workers because they expect providing health benefits to older workers to be more costly;
- Unfounded perception that younger workers provide longer service (Brandon, 2012).
2.8 Overseas Workers

An overseas worker is a person who works in a country other than the one of which he/she is a citizen. In some cases, overseas workers temporarily reside in the country in which they work, and will often send most of their wages earned, back to their country of origin (Wikipedia, 2014b).

Advantages

- Access to highly qualified workers (e.g. PhD level) that are in short supply within a country;
- Offers opportunities to expand business which require an employee with multilingual skills, or particular knowledge of and contacts in foreign markets;
- Facilitates corporate mergers or acquisitions which require an organisation to inherit a key employee who is a foreign worker (MS&K, 2007).

Disadvantages

- Foreign workers may be perceived as creating a lack of employment opportunities among locals;
- Some employers cannot afford to arrange work permit for an employee;
- In some cases, jobs which are attractive and well paid in some countries such as construction becomes very lowly paid if they employ mostly foreign workers.

3 Reasons for organisations moving towards new working methods – Change in working environment

We believe that technology has played a key role as it has made it possible for organisations to start thinking globally using several new working methods. In this section, we have summarised the main reasons for this change.

3.1 Capitalism

As reported by Mumford (2006), George Soros, an international financier, believes that capitalism is becoming unstable and it is changing rapidly. Because of this, organisations have adopted the latest technologies and are more focused on profit whilst ignoring their focus on social and political factors. The social objectives such as providing employment, take second place while the organisations’ major focus is on its consolidations, short-term targets, and increasing profits. It has been seen that in order to save costs and increase profits, organisations have accommodated different groups of employees by introducing new working methods. For instance, using working methods such as home working and teleworking, organisations have given choice to their employees to work from any location as long as they are meeting their targets in given timeframe. This has benefited those employees who prefer working from home due to their family commitments. Whereas, engaging employees to work from different locations means that organisations are also saving cost in terms of providing office space and equipment. These new working methods have also benefited small and medium size enterprises as these are often run with limited resources. For instance, using an outsourcing approach, it is now possible for SMEs to provide the level of service
that may not be possible by in-house employees. This approach has also significantly reduced the cost.

3.2 Globalisation

Technological advancement has helped many organisations to expand their business worldwide without altering their physical presence. For instance, Amazon is seen as a classic example with their successful e-business model. Technology has now made it possible for any organisation, even SMEs, to expand their business globally and sell their products in any part of the world.

Similarly, with the help of latest technology, most of the banks and other financial institutions have realised the potential to target new customers in different countries. With the help of new working methods such as hot-desking, teleworking etc., most of the banks nowadays have opened their call centres in other countries to offer 24/7 service to their customers. This has helped them not only in terms of saving employment costs but also with customer acquisition due to providing round-the-clock services. For instance, employment costs in Middle East and Southeast Asia are comparatively cheaper than most of the western countries. At the same time, customer service agents working in these different locations can easily attract new customers because of their familiarity with the local culture and most of the customers find it easy to communicate with the local agents as they prefer speaking in their native language. The important factor which always needs to be considered is to maintain the same level of standard across all branches.

3.3 Market Competition

Recent economic change and advancement in technology has increased market competition and put pressure on several organisations that have been around for many years running their businesses without major problems. For instance, local financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies are under pressure as international financial companies have increased the market competition. This has also given more choice to the customers who have now become more demanding and expectant and are aware of their value to businesses. As a result, the local financial institutions have realised that they have to compete in order to survive and to sustain their position in the marketplace. This has created a need to improve business performance and reduce costs, often resulting in the introduction of different working methods to engage experienced employees who they believe would bring more value. This was not possible before the technological advancement.

4 What comes with the change in work nature?

In this new economy, several new changes are seen in the work environment. Some of these are presented in the following sections.

4.1 IT Oriented Job Roles

We believe that the technological change in the work environment has provided employment to many but on the other hand, it also results in unemployment for those with insufficient IT skills (i.e.
employees who are not up-to-date in terms of technology). It has been observed that the new job roles involve at least basic IT competency to perform day-to-day job related activities. For instance, most work these days is performed using a computer which requires employees to enter the data electronically using several tools e.g. a word processor. Similarly, email is used as a main communication channel whereas skype and several other VOIP (voice over internet protocol) tools have become popular for video conferencing for business meetings. Therefore, it has become essential that employees should have at least minimum knowledge of these IT tools.

4.2 Job for Life Concept has Disappeared

The change in the workplace environment has never been greater; economic volatility, technological advances, and the continued search for productivity are all imposing immense pressure on employers and employees alike. At the same time, many employees are now entering into various forms of self-employment roles such as consultants and freelancers. All of these factors are changing the way that employees view their careers, their need for new and upgraded skills, and how they cope with change.

The pace of technological change means that employees can no longer rely upon expectations of lifetime employment. It is also very clear that many employees have realised that they will need to switch careers at some stage in their life. Therefore, not only has the job for life concept disappeared, but the career for life concept is not far behind (Kelly Services, 2010). As many of the new workers have become (or are becoming) self-employed, these individuals will now have to become skilled at selling themselves and protecting their knowledge. They understand the importance of continuous learning, and have embraced the need for training. Many are even prepared to spend their own money in order to enhance their skills. Hence, through this new concept, people are not looking for jobs; rather they are looking for customers. Because people are working as individuals (rather than as members of teams having little job stability), it is believed that systems of social support and protection will need to be created.

4.3 Performance Monitoring and Accuracy

It has been observed that there is an increase in target oriented job roles which requires more concentration and accuracy. For instance, with call centre job roles, employees handle customers’ phone calls and at the same time enter customers’ data using computers. Employees’ performance is constantly monitored as the calls are recorded by the line managers. Similarly, with data entry jobs, employees have to be accurate as their speed and accuracy is constantly monitored by their line managers.

5 Commonly seen problems with the change in working environment

It is quite obvious that these new working methods have introduced a range of risks (e.g. sitting in front of a PC for long hours may cause employees health issues). We believe that stress and psychosocial risks are directly linked with the type of work employees perform. Some work types cause more stress than others; it also depends on how employees perceive their workload. These risks, if not well managed, would result in affecting employees’ physical and mental health. Here are
few examples of employees’ health and safety and social problems which are associated with the change in working environment and introduction of new working methods.

5.1 Health and Safety Problems

- To those with pre-existing eyesight problems, exposure for long hours in front of the computer screen can exacerbate any pre-existing defects;
- Physical injuries such as various RSIs (repetitive strain injury);
- Although unproven, it is suspected that constant use of the telephone may affect the operator’s hearing, leading to deafness;
- Stress due to performance monitoring and high job demand;
- Some employees may feel anxious because of working at different locations.

5.2 Social Problems

- Less time with family because of different working hours;
- Difficulty in creating a balance between work and social life (especially with self-employed and home working methods).

Therefore, the implementation of technology (in order to use the new working methods) requires proper planning so that ergonomics risks can be avoided or at least minimised.

6 Introducing the key factors which may contribute towards workplace stress and psychosocial risks

Following is a list of key factors we believe may stimulate pressure which ultimately leads towards stress-related conditions.
### KEY FACTORS | DESCRIPTION
--- | ---
**Demands of Job** | - Realistic job demands;  
- Achievable within the agreed working hours;  
- Matched with the skills and abilities of employees;  
- Designed tasks to be within existing capabilities of the employees;  
- Addressing employees’ concerns about the workplace environment.

**Degree of Control Over the Task** | - Control over the pace of work;  
- Encouraging employees to use their own initiative;  
- Encouragement to develop new skills;  
- Employees consulted over work patterns;  
- Employees consulted over rest breaks.

**Level of Support (e.g. from Managers)** | - Managers providing support to the staff;  
- Managers encourage employees to support colleagues;  
- Employees to be aware that support is available and how to access it;  
- Managers providing regular constructive feedback to the staff;  
- Counselling is made available for the staff.

**Relationships (e.g. with Colleagues)** | - Positive behaviours to ensure fairness and avoid conflict;  
- Employees sharing information relevant to their work;  
- Implementing policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;  
- Systems to be in place to help managers deal with unacceptable behaviour;  
- Systems to be in place and understood through which employees can report unacceptable behaviour;  
- Implementing other ways of socialising.

**Understanding of the Role** | - Ensuring that conflicting requirements are not placed on employees;  
- Employees to be provided with all necessary information to understand their roles;  
- Requirements placed on employees are clear and unambiguous;  
- Employees to be able to raise concerns about any ambiguities in their role.

**Uncertainty (e.g. Lack of Job Security)** | - Employees unsure of their job roles within the organisation;  
- Employees unsure of what would happen in future;  
- Uncertainty in terms of organisation failing to achieve its future goals/targets;  
- Uncertainty can be caused by the market/competitors pressure.

**Organisational Change** | - Providing timely information to employees about the reasons and benefits of change;  
- Providing opportunities to employees for them to influence decisions;  
- Employees are made aware at an early stage of any possible impact on their jobs due to the change;  
- Employees are made aware of the timetable for change;  
- Providing appropriate support to employees during the period of change.

**Bullying and Harassment** | - Employees to be aware of these issues as these may lead towards psychological health problems such as depression, anxiety or low self-esteem;  
- These may also result in employees’ physical health problems such as stomach problems, or sleep difficulties;  
- Employees’ overall work performance may also be affected due to this;  
- Organisation’s policy document on bullying & harassment to be clearly visible;  
- Employees to be aware about how to react when it occurs.

Table 1: Key Factors Contributing towards Workplace Stress and Psychosocial Risks
7 Research Methodology and Data Collection Approach

As discussed in the previous sections, the main purpose of this study was to identify the impact of new working methods within different organisations and the key issues which are likely to have an effect on employees’ workplace performance and their domestic/social life. Amongst the choice of two traditional research approaches (i.e. quantitative and qualitative), a quantitative approach is recommended in order to gather and then analyse a large amount of statistical data (i.e. a sample from different organisations about employees’ views on the topic which can be then presented in a structured form using tables/graphs etc.).

7.1 Survey Approach and the Number of Participants

A quantitative survey approach is considered as the main source of data collection as we believe that the approach would allow a large amount of data from a sizeable population to be presented in a highly economical and structured way. According to Straub et al., (2004) and Emory (1980), in the survey method, the researcher seeks verbal or written responses to the questions or statements. Surveys can be very effective in gathering data about individual preferences, expectations, past events, and private behaviours. The versatility of this method is its greatest strength. It is the only practical way to learn many types of information and the most economical way in many other situations.

We believed that an on-line survey was the ideal choice for this type of project as the approach is particularly attractive to those projects where the researcher wishes to gather large number of respondents whilst keeping the identity of the respondents as highly confidential. Using this approach, we have conducted a short on-line survey (using SurveyMonkey) of IIRSM members and Cardinus clients working at various levels in different organisations to get their views on the topic questions. The survey was open for around two weeks and had a total of 250 respondents from various small, medium and large size organisations.

8 Ethical Issues

Before introducing the survey questions, participants were provided with the background to the research topic and the objective of the research. The information gathered through this survey was treated as highly confidential and to be solely used for the research purpose. Confidentiality can cause ethical concerns during survey research and we therefore made sure that any information that could not result in employees’ personal identification being divulged. The aim was to share the key findings of this research in the form of academic/technical papers or presentations to interested parties.

9 Research Limitations

There are of course limitations to this research study. As with any online survey, the biggest challenge is finding participants from the target population. It is not always possible to ensure that
answers are from individuals across a range of job roles, business units/sectors, age groups, etc. Sometimes, more responses from one particular group of participants will affect the overall findings.

As this survey was intended as an introductory exercise; the sample was not scientifically selected and within the group there would inevitably be some ‘self-selection’ by individuals wishing to make their particular viewpoint known. However, given a knowledge of this limitation, we felt that the results were worthy of reporting but also that a more rigorous survey should be carried out in the future.

10 Survey Results

In this section, we present the results gathered from the online survey conducted from IIRSM members and Cardinus’ clients. Each of the following sections contains results with graphical representation followed by some discussions to explain the survey outcomes.

10.1 Size of Organisations

In terms of the organisation size, we have designed and gathered the responses using five categories to cover the number of employees working at small, medium and large size organisations. We believe that providing different options in terms of employee numbers would encourage and make it easy for more participants to answer this question. As we can see in the following figure 1, most of the respondents who participated in this online survey are working in large organisations (combining options 4 and 5 with 15.45% in option 4 and 58.13% in options 5 of the total sample). Similarly, the medium size organisations (combining options 2 and 3) came second with 8.13% and 6.91% respectively. Finally, employees working in small organisations of up to 25 employees represented 11.38% of the total sample (seen in option 1).

![Figure 1: Size of Organisation](image-url)
10.2  Respondents’ Job Roles

To gather proper responses for this question, we have introduced several job titles which are commonly used in the majority of organisations. In terms of survey response, the middle level managers formed the largest group with 43.40%. The second and third highest respondents were individual employees with 20.43% and team leaders with 11.06%. Whereas, respondents who work voluntarily and as interns were seen in very few numbers with 0.43% each as shown in the following figure 2. Once more, this bias could be expected as a result of the sampling methodology which focussed on health and safety professionals.

![Respondents’ Job Roles](image)

Figure 2: Respondents’ Job Roles

10.3  New Working Methods

As seen in the figure 3, several new working methods were covered while preparing this survey question to gather more responses. The most frequently adopted methods seen from the total responses were home working with 54.46%, hot-desking with 48.02% and temporary/part-time
working with 44.55%. However, internships and overseas workers, with 14.36% and 20.79% respectively were employed by fewer organisations but the number was still significant.

Figure 3: New Working Methods

10.4 Excess Working Hours

The responses gathered for this question (as seen in figure 4) indicate that the majority of employees rely on working in excess of their actual contractual working hours (i.e. the survey results show that 70.56% of the total respondents work additional hours to cover their day to day work). This situation is of serious concern and we strongly suggest that this needs to be addressed as it is becoming common among employees to spend extra hours to complete their normal activities. We believe that this issue, if not addressed well, could lead to increased workplace stress for employees, compromising their social/domestic life and causing psychological problems.

From the perspective of the organisation, the reliance on excessive working hours is short sighted as most workers have need of time which can be used to deal with sudden peaks in workload. If they are working excessive hours there is no spare capacity which they can use.
10.5 **Key Factors Contributing towards Workplace Stress and Psychosocial Risks**

To cover this section of the online survey, we addressed several factors which may contribute towards psychosocial risks and workplace stress. These factors were also discussed in detail in section 6. As seen in figure 5, the demands of the job are seen as a major risk factor with around 65% responses which is slightly higher than other options that gathered more or less similar views from the respondents. However, bullying and harassment is seen as below average with around 42% which of course cannot be ignored.
which affect employees’ workplace performance as well as their physical and mental well-being. For example, the excess working hours topic requires more working methods where we discussed how these methods have provided business opportunities to various organisations (i.e. the possibility of organisations expanding their business globally using these working methods). Then, some commonly seen problems associated with these new methods which affect employees’ workplace performance as well as their physical and mental well-being were discussed. Several factors which we believe could contribute towards workplace stress and psychosocial risk are presented followed by some survey results. The survey was designed considering likely risk factors and was conducted from IIRSM members and Cardinus’ clients.

The survey results obtained have shown that most of these new working methods have introduced several stress related problems. As a result, a thorough investigation is required to identify these problems within the work environment. For example, the excess working hours topic requires more detailed investigation as the survey results for this topic have shown that around 70% of employees from various organisations are relying more on working in excess to their contractual working hours as their jobs are too demanding (i.e. they cannot finish their tasks within the time given). This could be as a result of an overall organisational culture or may be the type of work they perform. Hence,

11 Conclusions, Discussions and Further Research

The paper addressed some key psychosocial risk areas associated with the use of several new working practices. We believe that these risks, if not managed well, could likely affect employees’ health, safety and wellbeing. The first part of the paper mainly focused on introducing different new working methods where we discussed how these methods have provided business opportunities to various organisations (i.e. the possibility of organisations expanding their business globally using these working methods). Then, some commonly seen problems associated with these new methods which affect employees’ workplace performance as well as their physical and mental well-being were discussed. Several factors which we believe could contribute towards workplace stress and psychosocial risk are presented followed by some survey results. The survey was designed considering likely risk factors and was conducted from IIRSM members and Cardinus’ clients.

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this cannot be ignored and needs to be properly investigated as ignoring this issue could result in employees experiencing serious psychological problems.

Based on the outcomes of this survey, our plan is to conduct more detailed research with an online survey approach (using stratified random sampling) within selected organisations to identify key stress and psychosocial risk related factors from personnel at various levels and to assess the way employees’ perception of these issues differ at different levels of hierarchy. To avoid self-selection of industries, we are planning to carry out the survey within a single organisation using a more rigorous form of sample selection. Similar surveys would be carried out in other organisations. Similarly, to avoid self-selection of respondents, we would propose using a stratified random sample across the organisational structure. For instance, based on payroll numbers etc., we would clearly need to liaise with the HR department in this type of selection.

The topics for this detailed survey would cover the following broad categories:

- Organisational culture about workplace stress and psychosocial risks (perception of these terms at various levels);
- Workplace stress and psychosocial risks related to excess working hours and other new working practices (e.g. teleworking, mobile working, hot-desking, home working, temporary working, part-time working, outsourcing, internships etc.)
- Organisational change;
- Work-life balance; and
- Coping measures

For data analysis, we will be looking at a comparative case study approach which seems a useful approach to analyse the data by comparing the overall views from personnel in various organisations. We are hoping to achieve promising results through this study. The major outcomes of this study would further help us to design interventions in the form of briefing sessions/workshops for senior management and different training courses for line managers.

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However, any responsibility for inaccuracies must remain with the authors of the paper.
13 References


