

Changing Nature of Work: What Can We Learn From Time Use Diaries

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Motivation and Contribution

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- WfH = big change in the nature of work:
 - Here to stay – (Nick Bloom’s work)
 - With implications – albeit theoretically ambiguous - for worker wellbeing; productivity; operation of labour markets
- Emerging literature on incidence and implications:
 - Some clear findings on
 - Changing incidence of WfH in UK (spike, then some decline but remains much higher than pre-pandemic)
 - Importance of distinction between WfH, hybrid and workplace-only
 - Worker willingness to pay for WfH (e.g. Nagler et al 2024)
 - But uncertainty about WfH association with worker wellbeing and worker productivity
 - Xu (mimeo): positively associated with work-related wellbeing (job satisfaction in particular)
 - Wielgoszewska et al (2025): hybrid work exacerbates gender gap in worker wellbeing
 - Bloom et al 2015 for pre-COVID field experiment then Bloom et al 2024 for hybrid work experiment in 2021/22 showing improved job satisfaction and positive or NS effects on worker performance
 - Difficulties isolating WfH from other COVID-related episodes (illness, lockdown, key worker status)
- Contributions of this paper:
 - Detailed decomposition of the time allocation of WfH workers v others (‘revealed preferences’)
 - Wellbeing for each event
 - Pre- and Post-Pandemic data with long post-COVID follow-up to see how things unfold with time since COVID

Thoughts

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- Theoretical ambiguities
 - Selection into WfH: conditional on technological constraints, who chooses? Employer, worker, both? Some role for bargaining power
 - Heterogeneity in the amenity attached to WfH across worker types – value may vary according to circumstances only some of which are observed (household composition; housing quality; distance from work)
 - In frictionless markets workers will ‘pay’ for an amenity such that the overall ‘value’ of the job (with/wout WfH) remains constant
- Descriptive findings are very interesting:
 - Compared to those working on employer premises, those WfH commute less, have shorter working hours per day, do more multi-tasking, have more leisure, more sleep yet are no more satisfied.
 - But why? Those WfH are spending less time in work and commuting. So are those WfH constrained in using the additional leeway they have to vire towards more enjoyable tasks? If so, is this true for some (e.g. mothers) or all? Or does WfH degrade the wellbeing returns to non-work activities? Not that clear from Table 3. Check out [Knabe et al 2010](#) along similar lines
- Words of caution:
 - WfH (0,1) indicator: potential value unpacking hybrid working across the week since shown to be different for wellbeing compared to WfH all the time
 - Not really ‘reallocation’ of time because not panel data and not randomized
 - Relies on a counterfactual. Perhaps refine with matching of WfH and not-WfH on some key traits? Why? Because many not-WfH are not good counterfactuals
 - Not clear how incorporation of person FEs due to episode level data helps with non-random selection into WfH (no over-time switching)
 - Preferences v constraints in WfH: the role of occupation and employer policy not considered though regressions include 2-digit occupation
 - Recalling ‘instantaneous’ or ‘experienced’ enjoyment in the moment - Just one component of wellbeing (eudaemonic, hedonic etc can be important)
 - Self-assessed productivity:
 - Difficulties interpreting WfH v not-WfH differences if driven by unobservables linked to WfH propensity
 - Tell the reader a little more about the provenance of such a question and empirical experiences using such metrics