

## Gendered Stereotypes on Working From Home (WFH) Before and After the Pandemic – A Literature Review

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*Abstract:* Working from home (WFH) has received a lot of attention due to the Covid-19-related lockdown phases. Questions about the impact of WFH on careers and possible effects on women have not yet been sufficiently investigated. The results of the systematic literature review show, that the career prospects of employees who work from home depend on stereotypes and related stigmas within the working environment, which particularly affect women. Based on the results, a phase model of structural and cultural change for organizations with implications for women's career prospects is developed.

*Keywords:* Career, gender gap, working from home, change, systematic literature review

### **Stéréotypes sexistes sur le travail à domicile avant et après la pandémie – une revue de la littérature**

*Résumé:* Working from home (WFH), le travail à domicile, a suscité une grande attention en raison des phases du confinement liées au Covid-19. Les questions relatives aux effets du travail à domicile sur l'évolution de la carrière des employé·es, ainsi que les effets possibles sur les femmes, n'ont pas été suffisamment étudiées jusqu'à présent. Les résultats de l'analyse systématique de la littérature montrent que les perspectives de carrière des employé·es qui travaillent à domicile dépendent des stéréotypes et des stigmates associés dans l'environnement de travail, qui affectent particulièrement les femmes. Sur la base de ces résultats, un modèle de changement structurel et culturel pour les organisations avec des implications pour les perspectives de carrière des femmes est développé.

*Mots-clés:* Carrière, écart entre les hommes et les femmes, travail à domicile, changement, analyse systématique de la littérature

### **Geschlechtsspezifische Stereotype zur Arbeit im Homeoffice vor und nach der Pandemie – ein Literaturüberblick**

*Zusammenfassung:* Working from home (WFH), das Arbeiten im Homeoffice, hat durch die Covid-19 bedingten Lockdown-Phasen hohe Aufmerksamkeit erhalten. Fragen nach den Auswirkungen von WFH auf die Karriere von Mitarbeitenden sowie nach möglichen Effekten für Frauen wurden bislang nicht ausreichend untersucht. Die Ergebnisse der systematischen Literatur-Analyse zeigen, dass bei WFH die Karriereperspektiven von unterschiedlichen Stereotypen und Stigmata innerhalb des Arbeitsumfelds abhängen, von denen insbesondere Frauen betroffen sind. Aufbauend auf den Ergebnissen wird ein Phasenmodell des strukturellen und kulturellen Wandels für Organisationen mit Implikationen für die Karriere von Frauen entwickelt.

*Schlüsselwörter:* Karriere, Gender Gap, Homeoffice, Wandel, systematische Literaturanalyse

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## 1 Introduction

Explanations for unjustified unequal treatment of women in the workforce comprise structural as well as ideological barriers. Structural barriers include for instance the unequal distribution of care work and related reconciliation issues, while ideological barriers refer to prejudices and stereotypes (Holst & Wiemer, 2010). The latter include, for example, the prejudice that women are less career-oriented than men (Kohaut & Möller, 2022).

Our question relates to the impact of working from home (WFH) on (women's) career prospects and/or barriers, including occupational prestige and financial attainment but also the ability to develop one's talents (Olson & Shultz, 2013). Thereby, we focus on WFH schemes that are part of flexible working arrangements in general and that involve a certain degree of time flexibility (Neidlinger et al., 2022). With regard to the degree of temporal freedom, we particularly refer to the discretion of employees to independently determine the start, timing, and end of working hours. This arrangement can apply to both full-time and part-time employment just as the scope of WFH can range from a few hours to the entire working day or week. Typically, WFH also involves the use of digital tools and technologies to communicate, collaborate, and complete work tasks (International Labour Organization, 2021).

The various effects of WFH have been studied for some time and have attracted even more attention with the expansion during the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, WFH in organizations is said to have increased significantly compared to pre-Covid-19 levels (Barrero et al., 2023). Although it is too early to conclude whether the pandemic has led to lasting changes, a systematic analysis of the literature can be used to track developments and show the initial impact of the pandemic on WFH in terms of women's careers. We include studies published before and since the pandemic in order to answer the following research questions:

- › What constructs can be found in the literature that help explain the relationship between WFH and career?
- › What implications of WFH on women's careers does the literature reveal?
- › What changes have resulted from the pandemic with regard to the assessment of WFH?

Our approach is as follows: We outline the methodology of the systematic literature review, followed by the presentation of our findings according to the developed categorization. In the subsequent discussion and implication, we reflect on our findings and develop a framework with practical implications for employers.

## 2 Methodology

In order to gain comprehensive, systematic, and relevant insights into the career prospects of women working from home, we conducted a systematic literature review between April and September 2022 (Moher et al., 2015; Torraco, 2016). In the first step, we deliberately did not include any explicit reference to women in our search string. Thus, we wanted to ensure we also covered articles that included effects on women as a minor topic without omitting relevant articles on WFH and career development. Based on our preliminary research on the topic, we decided on the following search string:

*(work from home OR teleworking OR flexible work OR remote working OR home office OR flex work) AND (career development)*

We chose Business Source Premier as our database, which initially produced 418 results. Then we applied the following two main filters in our research:

- › Peer-reviewed articles in academic journals: We filtered for peer-reviewed publications to ensure a high scientific standard.
- › Time window: 2010–2022. As the topic WFH has become more relevant due to the Covid-19 crisis, we aimed to include the most recent publications until and including 2022. At the same time, our research extended back to 2010 to take account of the digitization surge and working-from-home opportunities over the last decade.

This selection initially produced 83 results. We then screened the references according to their relevance by reading through all the abstracts, thus reducing the number of records to a total of 18. The selection criteria were research in the field of WFH, coupled with the subject of career and particular effects on women's careers. Afterwards, we checked the most relevant sections of each article to assess their relevance, leaving 14 articles in the final selection for this round.

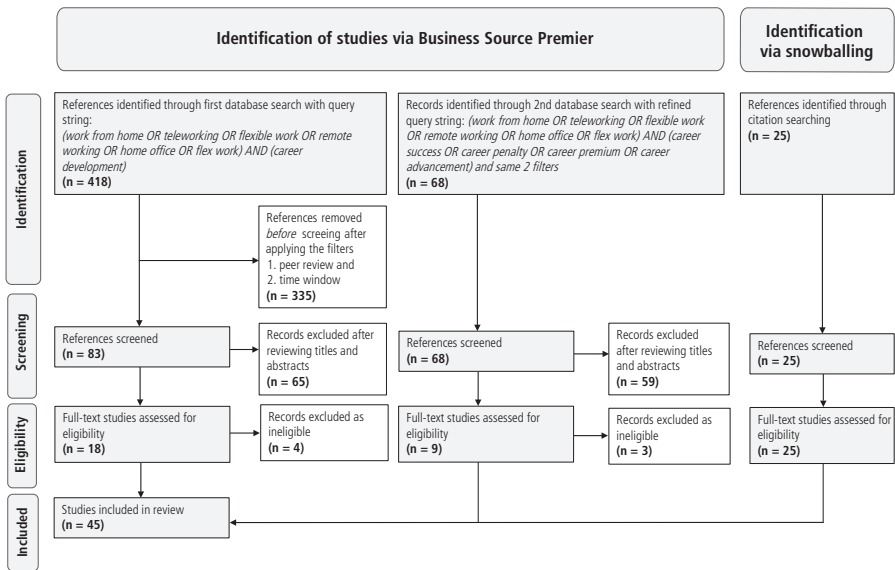
Based on the 14 relevant articles retrieved, a second step was taken, again using the Business Source Premier database, with a refined query string:

*(work from home OR teleworking OR flexible work OR remote working OR home office OR flex work) AND (career success OR career penalty OR career premium OR career advancement)*

On the basis of this approach and using the above-mentioned filters, we obtained 68 articles overall. In this round, 9 articles were selected based on their title and abstract. After checking if they met the aforementioned criteria, 6 articles were chosen for the final selection.

From the 20 selected articles, the topics on flexibility stigma, femininity stigma, and motherhood penalty in connection with flexible work and consequences for women stood out as being particularly relevant to the research questions. Therefore, in a third research step, we applied the snowball sampling method (Wohlin et al., 2022) to find suitable articles on the aforementioned topics listed in the references of previously evaluated relevant articles. Again, the titles were screened for eligibility, and then 25 selected articles were reviewed in more detail. A total of 45 articles (41 empirical studies and 4 literary works) were used for the subject of this research paper.

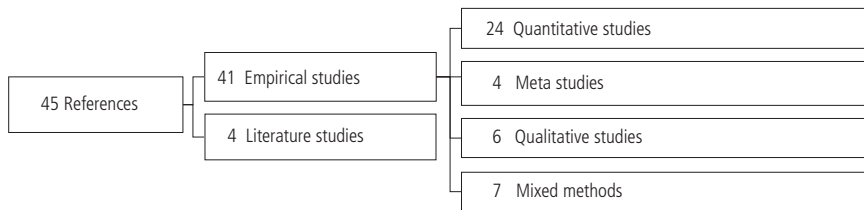
Figure 1 Systematic Review Protocol



The 41 empirical studies are composed of 24 quantitative studies, 6 qualitative studies, 4 meta studies, and 7 mixed-method studies.

The largest number of empirical studies, a total of 19 reports, relate to English-speaking countries (9 studies from the U.S., 5 studies from the U.K., and 5 studies from Australia, Canada, and Ireland), followed by other European countries and country comparisons amounting to 10 studies. The remaining empirical studies are from Israel (1), China (1), South Korea (1), and Indonesia (1), while further reports do not reference a specific country.

Figure 2 Composition of the Studies Included in the Review



To analyze the 45 studies, we used qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz (2014). First, we defined major categories based on the research questions and the material and refined them through pilot coding. In the subsequent coding phase, we coded the entire material and assigned each article to one or more categories. In addition, we deepened the coding within the main categories and finally established connections between the categories. Table 1 shows the main categories and the assignment of each article.

Table 1 Overview of Records With Main Categories

Authors, year	Title	Categories
Abendroth, Lott, Hipp, Müller et al., 2022	Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed gender- and parental-status-specific differences in working from home? Panel evidence from Germany	WFH effects during Covid-19
Arntz, Sarra, Berlingieri, 2019	Working from Home: Heterogeneous Effects on Hours Worked and Wages	Gender related effects of WFH
Barhate, Hirudayaraj, 2021	Emerging Career Realities during the Pandemic: What Does it Mean for Women’s Career Development?	WFH effects during Covid-19
Bontrager, Clinton, Tyner, 2021	Flexible Work Arrangements: A Human Resource Development Tool to Reduce Turnover	Flexibility paradox, WFH effects during Covid-19
Borgkvist, Moore, Crabb, Elliott, 2021	Critical considerations of workplace flexibility “for all” and gendered outcomes: Men being flexible about their flexibility	Motherhood penalty
Bornstein, 2013	The Legal and Policy Implications of the “Flexibility Stigma”	Flexibility paradox, Motherhood penalty
Brown, 2010	The relationship between motherhood and professional advancement	Flexibility paradox
Cabrera, 2009	Fixing the Leaky Pipeline: Five Ways to Retain Female Talent	Gender related effects of WFH

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Authors, year	Title	Categories
Cech, Blair-Loy, 2014	Consequences of Flexibility Stigma Among Academic Scientists and Engineers	Flexible work stigma
Chung, 2019	'Women's work penalty' in access to flexible working arrangements across Europe	Gender related effects of WFH
Chung, 2020	Gender, Flexibility Stigma and the Perceived Negative Consequences of Flexible Working in the UK	Femininity stigma
Chung, Birkett, Forbes, Seo, 2021	Covid-19, Flexible Working, and Implications for Gender Equality in the United Kingdom	Femininity stigma, WFH effects during Covid-19
Chung, van der Horst, 2018	Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexitime and teleworking	Gender related effects of WFH
Chung, van der Horst, 2020	Flexible Working and Unpaid Overtime in the UK: The Role of Gender, Parental and Occupational Status	Gender related effects of WFH
Chung, van der Lippe, 2020	Flexible Working, Work-Life Balance, and Gender Equality: Introduction	Gender related effects of WFH
Clark, McGrane, Boyle, Joksimovic et al., 2021	"You're a teacher you're a mother, you're a worker": Gender inequality during COVID-19 in Ireland	WFH effects during Covid-19
Crowley, Kolenikov, 2014	Flexible Work Options and Mothers' Perceptions of Career Harm	Gender related effects of WFH
Delany, 2021	What challenges will organisations face transitioning for the first time to the new normal of remote working?	WFH effects during Covid-19
Dijkers, van Engen, Vinkenburg, 2010	Flexible work: ambitious parents' recipe for career success in The Netherlands	Gender related effects of WFH
Fuller, Hirsh, 2019	"Family-Friendly" Jobs and Motherhood Pay Penalties: The Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements Across the Educational Spectrum	Motherhood penalty
Frize, Lhotska, Marcu, Stoeva et al., 2021	The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on gender-related work from home in STEM fields-Report of the WiMPBME Task Group	WFH effects during Covid-19
Gazit, Zaidman, van Dijk, 2021	Career self-management perceptions reflected in the psychological contract of virtual employees: a qualitative and quantitative analysis	Flexible work stigma
Golden, Eddleston, 2020	Is there a price telecommuters pay? Examining the relationship between telecommuting and objective career success	Flexibility paradox, Flexible work stigma
Gonsalves, 2020	From Face Time to Flex Time: The Role of Physical Space in Worker Temporal Flexibility	Flexibility paradox
Guillaume, Pochic, 2009	What Would You Sacrifice? Access to Top Management and the Work-life Balance	Flexible work stigma

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Authors, year	Title	Categories
Himawan, Helmi, Fanggidae, 2021	Negotiating Indonesian Married Women's Agency in a Career: Work From Home Arrangement as a Possible Solution	WFH effects during Covid-19
Ko, Kim, 2018	Intention to use flexible work arrangements	Flexibility paradox
Kurowska, 2020	Gendered Effects of Home-Based Work on Parents' Capability to Balance Work with Non-work: Two Countries with Different Models of Division of Labour Compared	Gender related effects of WFH
Langner, 2018	Flexible men and Successful Women: The Effects of Flexible Working Hours on German Couples' Wages	Motherhood penalty, WFH effects during Covid-19
Leslie, Manchester, Park, Mehng, 2012	Flexible Work Practices: A Source of Career Premiums or Penalties?	Flexible work stigma
Long, Kuang, Buzzanell, 2013	Legitimizing and Elevating Telework	Flexibility paradox
Lott, Abendroth, 2020	The non-use of telework in an ideal worker culture: why women perceive more cultural barriers	Flexibility paradox, Gender related effects of WFH, Motherhood penalty
Maruyama, Tietze, 2012	From anxiety to assurance: concerns and outcomes of telework	Motherhood penalty
McDonald, Hite, O'Connor, 2022	Developing sustainable careers for remote workers	WFH effects during Covid-19
Menezes de, Kelliher, 2011	Flexible Working and Performance: A Systematic Review of the Evidence for a Business Case	Gender related effects of WFH
Noback, Broersma, van Dijk, 2016	Climbing the Ladder: Gender-Specific Career Advancement in Financial Services and the Influence of Flexible Work-Time Arrangements	Femininity stigma
Oo, Lim, 2021	Changes in Job Situations for Women Workforce in Construction during the COVID-19 Pandemic	WFH effects during Covid-19
Park, Jeong, Chai, 2021	Remote e-Workers' Psychological Well-being and Career Development in the Era of COVID-19: Challenges, Success Factors, and the Roles of HRD Professionals	WFH effects during Covid-19
Peetz, Baird, Banerjee, Bartkiw et al., 2022	Sustained knowledge work and thinking time amongst academics: gender and working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic	WFH effects during Covid-19
Raišienė, Rapuano, Varkulevičiūtė, Stachová, 2020	Working from Home—Who Is Happy? A Survey of Lithuania's Employees during the COVID-19 Quarantine Period	Flexibility paradox
Rudman, Mescher, 2013	Penalizing Men Who Request a Family Leave: Is Flexibility Stigma a Femininity Stigma?	Femininity stigma

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Authors, year	Title	Categories
Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, Siddiqi, 2013	When Equal Isn't Really Equal: The Masculine Dilemma of Seeking Work Flexibility	Femininity stigma, Flexibility paradox
Williams, Blair-Loy, Berdahl, 2013	Cultural Schemas, Social Class, and the Flexibility Stigma	Femininity stigma, Flexible work stigma
Yarberry, Sims, 2021	The Impact of COVID-19-Prompted Virtual/Remote Work Environments on Employees' Career Development	WFH effects during Covid-19
Yucel, Chung, 2021	Working from home, work-family conflict, and the role of gender and gender role attitudes	Femininity stigma, Gender related effects of WFH

The categories “flexible work stigma”, “motherhood penalty”, “femininity stigma”, and “flexibility paradox” refer to interrelated analytical approaches. They serve to answer our first research question on the constructs that help to explain the relationship between WFH and career in the literature.

The category “Women-related effects of WFH”, includes codes that address specific influences of WFH on women’s careers and relates to our second research question on the impact of WFH on women’s careers.

The category “WFH effects during Covid-19”, in turn, comprises both codes related to the concrete effects of the pandemic on women’s careers (e.g. greater involvement of fathers in caregiving) and codes related to the implications for the underlying concepts (e.g. the flexibility stigma), and relates to our third research question on pandemic-related changes in WFH assessment.

### 3 Findings

We present our findings according to the categorization and the corresponding research questions outlined above.

#### 3.1 Analytical Approaches to the Relationship Between WFH and Career

A large part of the corpus of literature deals with fundamental patterns of stigmatization. Here, reference can first be made to the general concept of the *flexibility stigma*. The flexibility stigma derives from an *ideal-worker stereotype*, i. e., the idea of an employee who is ready to work at any time, who does not shy away from overtime, and who is present in the office or at various other locations as needed (Acker, 1990; Kelly et al., 2010; Lott & Abendroth, 2020). This kind of constant availability serves as an alleged indicator of high-quality work, utmost commitment, and inner devotion to the job (Guillaume & Pochic, 2009). Hence, WFH is seen as a break with



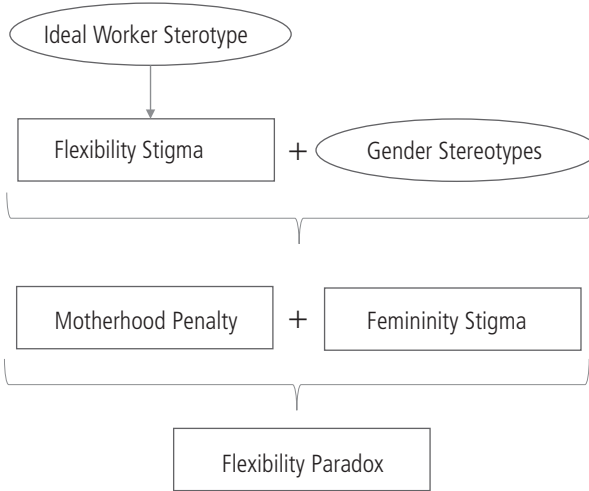
the ideal and a deviation from the supposed optimum. In this context, articles point out that the idea of an ideal worker is a cultural schema (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014) or moral norm, e.g., “moral convictions, not rational organizational concerns about merit and performance, define the social context” (Williams et al., 2013, p. 228). Measurable consequences of the flexibility stigma are, for example, a reduced bond between employees and managers (Gazit et al., 2021) and lower salary increases or promotions for people in WFH arrangements (e.g., Golden & Eddleston, 2020). The extent to which such negative consequences occur depends not least on the actual or even assumed reason for WFH. The decisive factor here is the “perceived commitment” (Leslie et al., 2012), depending on whether professional or private reasons are cited or assumed. For example, employees who prefer WFH for family reasons are assumed to have a lower commitment.

The flexibility stigma is, thus, inextricably linked to the so-called *motherhood penalty*: “the flexibility stigma stems primarily from maternal wall bias – that is, the negative workplace commitment and competence assumptions that are triggered by motherhood when ideals of a good worker and a good mother clash” (Bornstein, 2013, p. 399). Negative consequences of stigmatization do not only affect mothers; rather, the assumption that flexible forms of work are due to lower commitment and are associated with poorer performance also affect women in general. This includes both the aspect that access to WFH tends to be made more difficult for women (e.g., Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Lott & Abendroth, 2020) and the fact that the salary and career development of women working from home is worse than that of their male counterparts (e.g., Langner, 2018; Maruyama & Tietze, 2012). In a similar vein, Borgkvist et al. (2021) conclude that, while companies communicate WFH and time flexibility as generally acceptable, managers often regard it as being “for women” and appropriate for lower-level, routinized roles. In contrast, they regard men to be “flexible about their flexibility”, i. e., able to suspend other commitments (such as caregiving) in order to maintain their status as an ideal worker.

Men, in turn, may be affected by what is known as the *femininity stigma* (Rudman & Mescher, 2013). This means that men may face stronger prejudice when using WFH and flexible schedule arrangements for care reasons, as they then deviate from the masculine breadwinner image (Chung, 2020; Chung et al., 2021; Vandello et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2013; Yucel & Chung 2021).

Actual repression as well as the fear of potential stigmatization lead to the so-called *flexibility paradox*, i. e., despite the potential of flexible work policies to increase both work-life balance and productivity, employees are often reluctant to use them for fear of career penalties (Bontrager et al., 2021; Ko & Kim, 2018; Lott & Abendroth, 2020; Raišienė et al., 2020; Vandello et al., 2013). Moreover, they understand or even accept negative career implications associated with the use of WFH or also part-time work as a logical and indispensable consequence of not fulfilling the ideal-worker stereotype (Bornstein, 2013; Brown, 2010). In this context, there are legitimization strategies that are used to avert or mitigate a (perceived) flexibility

Figure 3 Stereotypes and Their Effects



stigma such as deliberately seeking face-to-face-contact with the supervisor (Golden & Eddleston, 2020) or engaging in legitimation-elevation dialectics (Long et al., 2013). In this context, a study by Gonsalves (2020) on the crucial role of designing physical spaces when attempting to break the flexibility paradox is instructive. An office redesign from assigned cubicles to an unassigned mix of workspaces (originally intended to reduce costs) turned out to change taken-for-granted greeting practices, noticing practices, and evaluation beliefs, reducing fears of career penalties and leading to greater control over the timing and location of work.

Overall, this category provides us with a deep insight into the underlying stereotypes that result in career penalties for both men and women when working from home. Figure 3 shows the various stereotypes and their effects.

### 3.2 Women-Related Effects of WFH on Women’s Careers

Empirical studies from the pre-pandemic phase deal with the impact of WFH on women’s careers. First, we can draw on literature that identifies career prospects, particularly for mothers, that result from reducing commuting time and thus making it easier to combine work and care responsibilities. The focus of attention here is on increased opportunities for mothers to stay in employment as well as on mothers reducing the gender gap in working hours and monthly earnings (Arntz et al., 2019; Chung & van der Horst, 2018; Dikkers et al., 2010).

However, pre-pandemic literature also refers to various conditions that relativize or even question the positive effects on women's careers. For instance, Chung and van der Horst (2020) refer to the risk of unpaid overtime for mothers working part-time from home. In addition, several articles point out various aspects that affect the career development of women. For example, having time sovereignty when working from home is said to be both a success factor for career development and to be more available to men than to women (Cabrerá, 2009; Chung, 2019; Crowley & Kolenikov, 2014). In this context, differences in attributed commitment and perceived productivity are recognized. Accordingly, men working from home are considered by their employers to show a higher level of commitment and productivity than women (Chung & van der Horst, 2018; Lott & Abendroth, 2020).

Above all, tensions relating to domestic work and domestic norms lead to a differentiated and even pessimistic view on women's career advancement in WFH settings within pre-pandemic literature (Arntz et al., 2019; Chung, 2019; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Influenced by traditional role allocation, women are attributed to more likely combine WFH with domestic responsibilities, while men are more likely (and/or expected) to expand their work sphere when working from home (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). The extent, however, is context-specific and varies depending on a more traditional versus egalitarian national culture or individual role attitudes (Kurowska, 2020; Yucel & Chung, 2021) and also regarding the size and culture of the company or organization (Menezes & Kelliher, 2011).

Altogether, this category provides us with insights into the ambiguous effects of WFH on career prospects and aspects influencing whether and to which extent there is a positive or rather negative connection. These aspects can be divided into structural aspects of the work environment (e.g., national or cultural context), which influence general role expectations, and individual aspects at the employee level (e.g., work scope, time sovereignty), which in turn are influenced by these general role expectations.

### 3.3 WFH Effects During Covid-19

Articles in the context of Covid-19 refer to a gradual erosion of the flexibility stigma (Abendroth et al., 2022; Delany, 2021; Oo & Lim, 2021). Although the gender gap in domestic labor is still prevalent and undermines career advancements for working mothers (Clark et al., 2021), the "new normal" of WFH during the pandemic has created a window of opportunity. Hence, a study by Abendroth et al. (2022) states that the flexibility stigma, as a reason for the non-use of WFH, was reported less often than before the pandemic, and independent of sex and parental status. Himawan et al. (2021) state, for the Indonesian context, that home-based work made available during Covid-19 was an opportunity for women to participate in the labor market at all. Further articles of the sample touch upon positive physi-

cal and psychological effects of WFH (Delany, 2021; Oo & Lim, 2021; Park et al., 2021), which also affect performance and career development. However, there is also a broad consensus that ensuring and fostering career progression requires further deconstruction of the ideal-worker stereotype and a change in domestic norms (Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021; Delany, 2021; McDonald et al., 2022; Peetz et al., 2022). Besides, further changes in corporate culture and leadership are considered necessary for a sustainable effect (Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021; Bontrager et al., 2021; Delany, 2021; Yarberry & Sims, 2021).

In addition to the generally increased acceptance of WFH, a second discussion thread deals with an increased acceptance of role diversity as well as an overlapping of roles during the pandemic. For instance, Frize et al. (2021) refer to the increased involvement of men in caring tasks during the pandemic going hand-in-hand with a shift in traditional roles that is changing the masculine image and expectations. Likewise, Chung et al. (2021) as well as Barhate and Hirudayaraj (2021) identify an increased spillover from home into work and vice versa during the pandemic and, with it, more role flexibility, particularly when men were working from home. However, the aforementioned authors emphasize that further steps are needed such as a reflection of the existing work culture and gender norms as well as actually closing the gender care gap.

#### 4 Discussion

Our literature review shows that both the ideal worker stereotype and prevailing gender stereotypes have been challenged during the pandemic. The experience of the crisis, with its heightened awareness of health and fundamental values, has created the conditions for questioning the all-encompassing focus on work in terms of the ideal worker stereotype. Moreover, the overlap between work and private life during the lockdown as well as increased role flexibility may serve as a starting point for changing gender stereotypes. Both would be an important prerequisite for WFH to have a more positive impact on women's careers in the future, as they may benefit from both changing expectations of the ideal worker and from greater role diversity, particularly with regard to their careers.

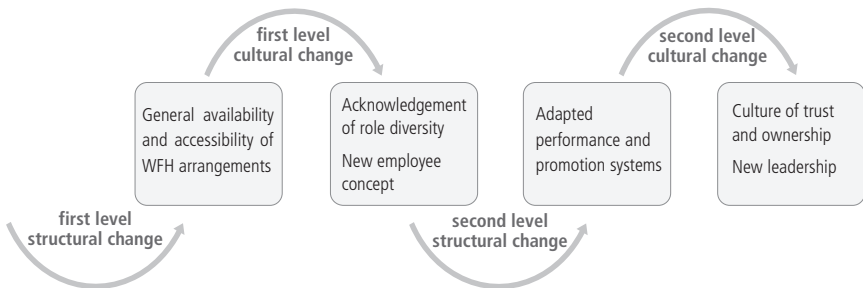
In our sample, the Covid-19 pandemic is seen as an accelerator for digitalization and the emergence of new forms of work; the availability and acceptability of flexible working arrangements increased for both women and men (e.g., Chung et al., 2021; Delany, 2021). However, the literature review also reveals that technical change with regards to working methods implies further changes in organizations with regard to leadership and cooperation, i.e., autonomy, distribution of power, centralization, control etc. (e.g., Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021; Bontrager et al., 2021). In settings where there is a gap between the technologically feasible and the culturally accepted reality, the ideal-worker stereotype is still deeply embedded in

minds and organizational structures (e. g., Brown, 2010; Lott & Abendroth, 2020). Our following implications, therefore, focus on potential steps to align the technological and the cultural dimensions of change.

## 5 Implications

We have identified a gap between the technical change with regards to digital tools and the basic availability of WFH models and a more fundamental cultural change within organizations regarding mindset and leadership support. Based upon this we have developed an ideal-typical change process (Figure 4) that systematizes the relationship between the outlined dichotomy as well as the related asynchrony. Moreover, we can use this process to develop practical implications for employers.

Figure 4 Flow of Structural Change and Cultural Change With Implications For Women's Careers



### *First Level Structural Change: Technical Facilitation of Working From Home*

At the first level of structural change, WFH is anchored within formal organizational practices and the technical hurdles of accessibility have been overcome. At this level, traditional role expectations as well as an enduring ideal-worker stereotype may still occur (e. g., Lott & Abendroth, 2020; Peetz et al., 2022; Raišienė et al., 2020 from our sample). Therefore, change is restricted to technical accessibility and associated regulations regarding WFH within legislation and at the level of the individual employer.

### *First Level Cultural Change: Dissolving the Ideal-Worker Stereotype*

The first level cultural change is about dissolving the ideal-worker stereotype, which comes along with the acknowledgement of role diversity. This means that for working women and men, equal options for professional, family, and other private roles are

being acknowledged. Particularly, the overlapping of the private and work sphere during Covid-19 has raised awareness and visibility regarding the role diversity of employees (e.g., Chung et al., 2021; Frize et al., 2021 from our sample). With the first level cultural change, a new and comprehensive employee concept may develop that values the role diversity in the workforce. The traditional image of the “ideal worker”, who is completely devoted to work at the cost of family and personal needs is replaced. The fact that employees themselves are actively calling for a new employee concept is demonstrated not least by the current debate around the 4-day-workweek (Jahal et al., 2024) or post-pandemic labor shortages that are often connected to WFH arrangements (Liu, 2023; Ng & Stanton, 2023).

*Second Level Structural Change: Developing New Parameters to Measure Success and a New Approach to Face-Time*

General availability of WFH arrangements (first level structural change) and a changed perception of the ideal worker (first level cultural change) prepare the way for a second level structural change. With this second level structural change, new parameters to measure success and a new approach to office presence time can be developed. Being physically present in the office certainly remains of value. Informal and social exchange is a key component of professional interaction. However, it is important that the evaluation of work results is explicitly distinguished from the informal process of “showing face” and integrated into a structured process (e.g., Cabrera, 2009; Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Gonsalves, 2020 from our sample).

But even within the post-pandemic development, face-time is still considered as an indicator of engagement and performance (Moller et al., 2024) and there are still strategies for WFH employees that are in place to mimic face-time behavior (Afota et al., 2023). Likewise, recent studies on engagement and performance in hybrid settings (e.g., Allen et al., 2024; Naqshbandi et al., 2024) indicate that a potential engagement deficit is still assumed. However, there is a paucity of studies that specifically address performance evaluation in hybrid work contexts, although individual target agreements have long played a role in the HR literature (Wadhera et al. 2023).

The second level structural change is therefore about establishing structured ways for employees to present their results, regardless of whether they work from home or in the office, and transparent systems for managers to evaluate these results and decide on career development and promotion. In addition, the adaptation of the performance and promotion systems may also affect the selection and promotion criteria. For example, skills that were developed outside the paid job could systematically be recognized. In this sense, a recent study by Gartzia (2024) argues that the idea of family-work enrichment should be made fruitful for leadership research and identifies parenting as a major, previously unaddressed antecedent of leadership effectiveness.

*Second Level Cultural Change: Preparing Managers and Employees to Succeed Within the Second Level Structure of WFH*

Finally, the second level structural change of working from home provides the basis for but also requires further cultural change, namely the confident handling of the work situation that has been reached with the second level of structural change by all players involved. In this context, leadership on the part of managers and self-management skills on the part of employees play an essential role. Managers are required to ensure the alignment with the goals of the company, while their employees are more self-directed in their work. While studies in our sample call for a new management culture (e.g., Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021; Chung, 2020), there is an ongoing debate in leadership literature on how this new culture could look like. Therein, the concept of trust is crucial (e.g., da Silva et al., 2022; Newman & Ford, 2021), just as different alternatives to hierarchical leadership, such as post-heroic leadership (e.g., Škerlavaj, 2022) or servant leadership (e.g., Zada et al., 2022), are being discussed. Employees, in turn, are faced with the great challenge of moving within this new freedom. Employee health and wellbeing has been a topic within our sample, e.g., with regard to psychological challenges (Park et al. 2021) or the double burden of parents and especially mothers (e.g., Clark et al., 2021; Frize et al., 2021). With regard to the continuation of WFH, a second level cultural change leads to employees taking more responsibility for their work organization, work methods, and also their work results, while at the same time developing their strategies to safeguard their mental and physical health by balancing the different areas of their lives. Organizations may support their employees in this regard by providing the necessary framework including appropriate training and coaching.

## 6 Conclusion

Based on a systematic literature review, this paper has examined existing literature on the relationship between WFH and career prospects, paying particular attention to effects for women on the one hand and recent changes due to Covid-19 on the other.

Our results show that the effect of WFH on careers is ambivalent. Answering our first research question “What constructs can be found in the literature that help explain the relationship between WFH and career?”, we can see a clearly negative relationship, which is explained by various stigmas. The flexibility stigma leads to negative perceptions of employees who work from home and refers in principle to women and men, while the motherhood penalty describes the negative consequences for women regardless of whether they actually provide care. This stigmatization affects women in the workplace in general but is particularly disadvantageous for women WFH. Finally, the femininity stigma describes the stigmatization of men who use flexible work arrangements such as WFH and who explicitly provide care.

Regarding to our second research question “What implications of WFH on women’s careers does the literature reveal?”, we can state that career implications depend on the organizational culture. In principle, many activities can be performed effectively and efficiently while working from home. In addition, the possibility of WFH holds great potential for reconciling different areas of life. However, this becomes problematic if the latter aspect is equated with a lack of commitment. If the stereotype of the omnipresent ideal worker persists, WFH is devalued, affecting primarily women.

This finding is also relevant to answering the third research question “What changes have resulted from the pandemic with regard to the assessment of WFH?”. We were able to show that the availability and acceptability of WFH increased during the pandemic, leading to an erosion of traditional stigmas. However, there are still gaps between what is technically possible and what is considered appropriate. To illustrate the sequence and interplay between the different dimensions of change and to provide practical implications for employers, we developed an ideal-typical change process.

Our literature review acknowledges several limitations with regard to the comprehensiveness and generalizability of the findings. Our sample includes publications until 2022 – this can only grasp the first impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Both the actual effects of the pandemic and research on the topic are still ongoing. Moreover, our choice of database may introduce bias by excluding valuable studies published in journals not included in the database. In addition, language restrictions limited the inclusion of non-English studies that could have enriched the review. The studies reviewed used a variety of research methods and were sometimes limited to specific populations or settings, which may make it difficult to synthesize findings and apply them to different contexts.

Based upon the limitations and research gaps outlined before, further research should include, for example, follow-up literature reviews as well as longitudinal studies to be able to map actual changes in structure and culture. Moreover, the comparison of first and late movers in the area of WFH and women’s career developments also seems promising. Finally, it will be important to examine the effects of possible new structures of performance measurement in terms of their impact on employee satisfaction and employee health, so that a shift away from the old stereotype of the ideal worker is not replaced by a new but equally restrictive stereotype.

## 7 References

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