The Impact of Work-From-Home (WFH) of Male Full-time Workers under COVID-19 on Their Work-Life-Balance (WLB) Attitude

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Abstract

The spread of COVID-19 has led many Japanese companies to introduce work-from-home. In pre-COVID-19 Japan, work from home was considered a "special" work arrangement for a certain group of workers (e.g., female workers, workers in specific industries, etc.). However, after COVID-19, this way of work has been introduced equally to workers who have never experienced working from home before, and in a sense, it is becoming the standard. As mentioned above, full-time male workers in Japan have not been a group of workers who actively chose this work style, so there must be various challenges in getting used to this new work style. Especially for male workers, experiencing this work style must have had a significant influence on their attitude/behavior toward work-life balance.

This paper, therefore, focuses on male full-time/regular workers, finds out the influence and changes that telecommuting due to COVID-19 has on their WLB awareness, and explores how they are generated. A series of interviews with 6 male workers (from Mr. A to Mr. F) indicated 1) the +impact of WHF on their work and life, 2) the commonality between childcare and managing workplaces, and 3) changes in the importance of "experiencing" consciousness born from the experience of WFH. Conclusion, limitations, and future research are discussed. Based on the series of interviews with 6 male workers (from Mr. A to Mr. F), this paper found there are several interesting points that could be worth pointing out to discuss. Conclusion and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Male Full-Time Workers, Work from Home (WFH)

Introduction

The impact of COVID-19, which has continued since the beginning of 2020, has unintentionally brought to the fore various problems regarding human resources in Japanese companies. The declaration of a state of emergency to prevent the spread of infection has greatly restricted economic activities, which led to a concern about the rising unemployment rate, disparities in the treatment of full-time and part-time workers, and labor shortages in the medical and nursing care fields. In addition to these macro issues related to the labor market, COVID-19 promotes the prevalence of "work from home (or WFH hereinafter)". Working remotely, also known as WFH or telecommuting, is defined as one of the flexible work arrangements that make effective use of time and place using ICT (information and

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communication technology). Other types of remote work include 1) "mobile work" that works while traveling or on the go and 2) "satellite office" work that works at a facility other than the home base (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare). Before COVID-19 in Japan, working remotely was a kind of unique work arrangement for workers who have to take care of children/elderly, salespersons working mostly outside their workplace, and engineers who can handle their tasks at home. For many others such as male full-time workers, working remotely is "non-typical" and is therefore the choice that they have never picked by paying the price.

This paper focuses on working remotely as "work from home" because this work arrangement has exploded in popularity due to the spread of COVID-19. According to a survey of companies conducted by Tokyo Shoko Research, the rate rose from 17.6% to 56.4% when the first state of emergency was declared. After that, although it decreased after the state of emergency was lifted, it rose again to 38.4% when the state of emergency was declared for the second time (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2021). In other words, more than 8 out of 10 companies either had never experienced work from home before COVID-19, or it only applies to some employees (e.g. short-time employees or mothers raising children). It means that it was a way of working.

It can be said that the change in work style due to COVID-19 was a very big (and possibly painful) change in Japanese companies, where the value of "going to work itself" is widespread. In particular, for many male full-time workers, who themselves were not eligible, this change is thought to have had a significant impact not only on their work but also on their lives outside of work.

As remote work has been spread out, more issues are pointed out issues related to the "work style" itself (e.g., how to evaluate invisible subordinates, diversity and personnel evaluation, handling of transfer/weekly holidays, side jobs/side jobs, etc.) which have long been potential concerns in Japanese companies. According to a survey conducted by the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo) in June 2020, it can be seen that work from home includes issues in items such as communication, work efficiency, time management, personnel evaluation, progress management, and information security. For example, working from home tends to result in a lack of communication between employees and their superiors. In addition, working from home tends to lead to long working hours because it is difficult to distinguish between working hours and other hours. Managing hours of work becomes more difficult for companies since employees with children may have their work interrupted to take care of them. Furthermore, performance evaluation is recognized as the biggest challenge for the introduction of work-from-home for many companies.

Research Objective

Whether we like it or not, COVID-19 as an external factor has had a tremendous impact not only on the businesses of all Japanese companies but also on individual workers, especially their attitude toward "how they work" and "how to live". Especially for major male workers, it is speculated that the new work style has a great impact on how they look at their work and life since the majority of male workers in Japan have never thought that remote work is included in their work arrangement options. Therefore, this paper focuses on male full-time workers to understand their attitude toward work-life balance (hereinafter WLB) that may be influenced by these changes mentioned above. More specifically, this paper tries to find out how remote work changes their awareness of WLB by conducting in-depth interviews.

Literature Review

1. Work-Life-Balance (WLB)

Cabinet Office (2007) defines work-life balance (WLB) as a balance that everyone, regardless of age or gender, wishes to achieve for themselves in various activities such as work, family life, community life, and personal self-development. The reason why the Japanese government is actively working on WLB is that conventional work styles (e.g. regular/ lifetime work arrangement) and male regular workers have still dominated the majority of workplaces in Japan, which makes the government hold a sense of danger to the future Japanese society.

In Japan, where the population is declining and is aging, how to secure a labor force is a major issue (Iki, 2012). However, historically WLB has been introduced to society in order to promote a female workforce in Japan, so most of the HR practices such as childcare leaves are mainly targeted at female workers. As a result, there is a deep-rooted perception that the concept and system are "for female workers".

As a result of these female-biased systems and policies, ironically, there is still a large gap between men and women in both work and home, in terms of the ratio of labor market participation, working hours, wages, time spent on housework, and the ratio of taking childcare leave (see the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare "2014 Equal Employment Basic Survey", etc.). Regarding this gender gap, the size of the gap is by far the largest in comparison to other countries, and it has become a long-standing social problem in Japan that the gap has not been reduced for many years.

According to the latest data released by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 2022, the utilization rate of the childcare leave system, particularly the rate of women taking childcare leave is 85.1%. In contrast, 13.97% of men took childcare leave, which is a slight increase from the previous year's 12.65%, but we can see that there is still a large gap between male and female childcare leave acquisition rates. Looking at the reasons why male employees did not use the childcare leave system, "I did not want to reduce my income", The atmosphere in the workplace made it difficult to take the childcare leave system, or the company, boss, or workplace "Because I didn't understand" and Because there was a job that only I could do or was in charge of (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2022a).

In Japan, female full-time/regular workers who are applicable to utilizing various HR practices such as childcare leave are about 25% of the total workforce, while male full-time/regular workers account for more than 40%. Since more than 90% of managers (section chiefs and above) are male workers (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, 2014) and therefore "majority workers" in the workplace are male workers, it is easily assumed that their awareness and behavior have a great impact on the awareness and behavior of other workers in the workplace. Clarifying the attitudes of these male workers regarding WLB, will be a great clue when thinking about how to implement (use) not only WLB but also work-style systems in the workplace.

Research on work-life balance has a long history, and in Japan, research focusing on the impact of corporate WLB policies on individual WLB realization and workplace performance and achievements has accumulated over the past several decades. These studies have proven its effectiveness for companies as well as individuals. For example, a survey conducted by the Cabinet Office (2010) reported that companies and workplaces that actively work on WLB have better business performance. Wakisaka (2007) created the "Family Friendly Index", which is calculated based on factors such as the presence or absence of a system and the utilization of female workers. His index later influenced the recognition and recognition of family-friendly corporations by governments and private organizations. After

that, the flow of research shifted from the analysis of the system to the analysis of the operational situation. As for the reason for the transition, it is often said that policymaking alone does not lead to implementation and that the awareness of managers in particular has an impact on WLB policy implementation. For example, Hopkins (2005) states that managers' interest in WLB and their favorable attitude have a large impact. Carlson et al. (2011) published research results showing that workplaces, where superiors achieve WLB have a positive impact on their subordinates (Spillover).

2. Work from Home (WFH)

When it comes to where-to-work issues, especially 'work from home' or 'remote work', a large number of Japanese workers have been directly affected by COVID-19. In Japan, work from home or remote work is considered a form of telework, a flexible working style that makes effective use of time and place using ICT (Information and Communication Technology). Other types of telework include mobile working while traveling or on the go, and satellite office working at a facility other than the home base (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2022a).

In Japan, the working form of work from home is originally considered to be a work arrangement that is used only by specific workers (e.g., working mothers, etc.) and/or specific industries (e.g., information communication, consulting, etc.). As of March 2020 (just before COVID-19 hit Japan), the penetration rate was only 33.7%. However, as a result of the "forced" introduction by many companies due to the impact of COVID-19, although there are fluctuations, it has risen to 67.2% in March 2021 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2022b).

Regarding the impact of working from home on workers, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many studies have been conducted to examine its impact on satisfaction, work-life balance, working hours, productivity, income, and so on. In addition, the results of research on working from home during the COVID-19 crisis are gradually accumulating. For example, Angelucci et al. (2020) used individual data from a panel survey in the United States to show that people who did not work from home had a higher probability of unemployment and tended to be in poorer health. On the other hand, Morikawa (2020) uses original questionnaire survey data to verify the subjective productivity of telecommuting answered by workers and the possibility that productivity decreases to about 60 to 70% of that of office work. According to a study by Jiang, Ishii, and Oyama (2022), in telework introduced with the COVID-19 epidemic, clearly defining the work hours and not clearly defining the workplace is beneficial. It was shown that a good work-life balance leads to workers' mental health. In addition, consistent with previous findings, it was shown that even in the COVID-19 situation, the impact of work-life balance on mental health is stronger in women than in men.

As mentioned above, the survey shows more than 30% of workers have challenges working from home. Because working from home has never been the choice for the majority of workers before COVID-19 in Japan, it is easily assumed that challenge has a significant impact on how they live as well as how they work. Especially for male people, the impact of change in terms of work style must have a significant impact on their WLB. Therefore, this paper focuses on male full-time/regular workers, finds out the influence and changes that telecommuting due to COVID-19 has on their WLB awareness, and explores how they are generated. Specifically, in this paper interviews were conducted for male full-time/regular workers about WLB issues, mainly asking questions about taking childcare (and elderly care) leave, etc., and clarifying how they affect each other (e.g., how new work styles (work styles) affect your life outside of work). Inoue, Ishihata, and Yamaguchi (2021) examined the effect of working from home on participation in childcare for male workers.

Results of the regression regarding percentage change in time for housework and time with family indicated that that work from home increased the time for house chores and being with family, while they found no evidence that it reduced working hours or self-perceived productivity.

Past research introduced above indicates that a good work-life balance is extremely important not only for corporate performance but also for individuals. Also, managers' awareness of WLB and their own WLB experience, in addition to the introduction of the WLB policy itself, have a positive impact on the management and performance of their subordinates. For many male workers, working from home has become a completely new work-life balance experience, so it can be inferred that working from home has some impact on their WLB awareness. In addition, it can be inferred that the change in WLB awareness affects not only their own performance but also the performance of their subordinates and the workplace.

Methodology

The series of interviews were conducted between March 20 and April 11, 2022. Interviewees were male regular workers regarding their work-life balance (WLB). Initially, I contacted 14 out of 17 workers who were previously interviewed between December 12, 2014, and February 9, 2015, for the same topic using Internet mail, Social Network Services (e.g. Facebook), and other media (3 people could not be contacted at the moment). At the point of May 15, 2022, 11 out of 14 responded, and 8 people were interviewed. This paper introduces 6 people (A to F) who proceeded with the initial interview this time. The method of extracting a sample of the original 17 candidates was based on the roster of the graduate school to which they belong. Interviews were conducted in cases where consent was obtained. The demographics of the interviewees are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographics of Interviewees

ID	Age	Industry	Firm Size	Position
A	early 30s	IT	Small	Manager & Self-Employed
B	early 40s	IT Consulting	Large	Manager
C	early 50s	Auto Parts Manufacturing	Large	Floor manager
D	early 40s	IT	Small	Managing Director
E	late 40s	Construction	Large	Deputy Manager
F	late 50s	IT	Large	General Manager

Results

In this section, the results of interviews with six male workers (A to F) are described based on 1) their current workplace situation, 2) their views on work, and 3) their views on life (family).

Mr. A - IT Engineer

He is an IT engineer and has been a sole proprietor since before the Corona period, mainly working at a small IT company. Currently, he divides his energy into 50% working at the company and 50% working as a co-founder (technical advisor) in 2019. Businesses of the company have been hit hard by the virus, while the co-founded company was able to greatly improve its performance because the products it handled were in line with the times. He has been practicing so-called "parallel work" even before the Corona period, but he now has the impression that the level of understanding and recognition of this work style has increased dramatically after the virus hit the world.

Work Side: Before the Corona period, almost all meetings and discussions in the company he worked for were done face-to-face, but they have shifted to online, and they are still active in that state. The job as the co-founder was fully remote at the beginning. So now he has more time to work remotely. Since now he has a lot more freedom in how he uses his time, and therefore chances are also increasing in terms of finding new business opportunities as a co-founder.   While the style of working (= remote working) is increasing in the IT industry, it is becoming more difficult to build good/personal communication networks, which may affect the level of understanding customers. Because of the reason above, he tries to doubt his own perceptions and tries to increase the frequency of confirmation. In the case of managing/ evaluating subordinates, there is no big difference between face-to-face and remote (originally managed numerically). We strive to nurture young people by checking the results at a fixed point every day and measuring the transition.

Life side: He got married in 2017 and had their first son in 2019. His partner (wife) worked as a full-time employee in the public relations department of a transportation company until she gave birth, but returned to work in April after taking a leave of absence. When working remotely (at home), there are times when he can't concentrate on work because his children are crawling around. There are also issues such as how to deal with the fact that the decrease in income due to adjusting work for vacation and childcare is stressful for his wife. Overall, however, he feels that childcare and work have something in common. In the work of project management, it is important to know how to deal with problems when they arise, but childcare is the same. Monitor daily progress, talk to them, and deal with any problems that arise. Carrying out the work by repeating this process overlaps with childcare, which is interesting.

Mr. B - IT Consultant

He started his career as a System Engineer (SE), then changed jobs at a major Japanese consulting company, and is currently working as a consultant at a major IT company. In 2019, He started living in two bases in Tokyo and Nagano by choosing a "fully remote" type job. Due to Coronavirus, while the performance of the core business of the company has increased significantly, the improvement in the performance of the current business has had a negative impact on the attitude of the business transformation and new business initiatives that have been promoted for several years.

Work side: The work style system at the workplace has improved significantly. If you apply for remote work, you can move. The company currently has a remote rate of 70 to 80% (as of April 2022) when the state of emergency is declared. Job types are also changing to be more in line with actual work patterns and job types (=appropriate remuneration), which indicates that the company is aiming to get out of the business as a simple system integrator.

Life side: He started working from home all day, spending time with his three children (ages 12, 10, and 7) to pick them up from school, and see their homework after returning home. This makes it possible to grasp the children's daily progress, which greatly affects the depth of communication with them. The role at home that he is assigned (mentioned above) makes his work life change too. For example, all meetings are arranged during the day, meaning children are gone to school. This type of time management has a positive effect on the consciousness of how to work and how to manage subordinates. In 2020, his partner (wife) passed the entrance exam of the long-awaited veterinary school. Her first year was completely online, and the number of face-to-face classes increased in 2022. However, his way of working at home makes it possible for his partner to go and take classes in person.

Mr. C - Engineer at an Automotive Parts Manufacturing

Floor manager of the technical position at a major auto parts manufacturer (assistant floor manager in 2015). At the beginning of Corona, the atmosphere in the company was that "WFH is impossible", but when the government requested it under the declaration of emergency, WFH progressed at once. For a while, he was working fully remotely, but now is working remotely three days a week on a reporting basis (as of April 2022). Initially, he was somehow surprised that WFH was possible even in his department (developing dept.). Regarding diversity in the workplace (especially women's empowerment), the awareness and structure have changed significantly compared to that seven years ago. However, there is also an impression that the numbers are still ahead of the promotion of female workers. Currently, the average number of days of childcare leave for male workers is only 10 days (FY2020).

Work Side: Trial and error are still going on as to how to deal with subordinates as a floor manager remotely. When WFH had just started, he held short meetings every day, but now he is reducing the frequency because it is not cost-effective. Originally, there was a lot of outside work, and there was not much resistance within the department to proceed with work in the absence of a floor manager. He sometimes feels sorry for young people (especially new employees from 2020) because they have few opportunities to receive direct guidance from seniors.

Life Side: Communication with family members has increased dramatically due to the increased time spent at home due to remote work. When he is at home, I can finish work much earlier than usual, so he uses it for picking up children from cram school and lessons. Since he can take care of small house chores such as taking in the laundry (especially when raining) or switching on the rice cooker, his partner (wife) can go out and enjoy her time without concerning those house chores. His wife quit full-time work due to childbirth and childcare several years ago but recently she has been helping her father's tax accountant's office. Because of the part-time work, she decided to go back to school and learn tax accounting and accounting. Now she commutes to school for several days on weekdays, but this is also possible thanks to his remote work.

Mr. D - Managing Director

Managing Director of a small IT company. The position, which has not changed since seven years ago, is to look at the overall management while also looking at the floor. He feels that diversity in the company has progressed considerably. The awareness of managers has also changed, and there are no people who show rejection. From the perspective of securing a labor force, the company has been focusing on promoting gender participation and health management, and the turnover rate has been considerably low. His company also actively employs people with disabilities and foreigners mainly from Southeast Asia.

Work Side: After the COVID-19 hit Japan, the ratio of working at home and working face-to-face has become about 7:3. Currently he only comes to work once a week (as of

April 2022). Regarding online work, at first, there were problems with the communication environment at home, but now they have been resolved. The frequency of informal communication has declined, as interactions at eating out and drinking parties have disappeared. Also, the fewer days he commutes, the fewer days that he feels tired. Interestingly, the number of meetings increased dramatically, since we no longer have to think about the time spent traveling to visit customers. Such time used to be, in a sense, rest time, but no now such time is gone. Nonetheless, with the establishment of online meetings, it is significant that communication with overseas and local communities has become much more familiar.

Life Side: He has decided to shift to a work style of working from home six days a week, but there are no particular problems at home. My partner (wife) takes on occasional and one-time jobs (designing children's clothing) but basically concentrates on housework and childcare. The time that he used for commuting and overtime can now be used for time with children. He is doing a drop-off and pick-up for cram school and practice. During the period of the declaration of emergency (all schools are closed), he had a wonderful time with his son by waking at 5:30 to practice soccer, which now became his warmest memory.

Mr. E - Engineer (Architecture)

Deputy Manager at a corporate planning department at a major general contractor. The problem of shortage of human resources common to general contractors is also a serious situation in the company. The company's population pyramid is distorted, and there are very few people in their 30s and 40s who have physical strength and intelligence. Mid-career recruitment did not proceed as expected, and since the company is not popular, there are many problems with the quality of human resources. This month, we established a division specializing in Diversity & Inclusion as part of our medium-term plan. To receive certification for promoting women's participation in the workplace, there are some glimpses of the intention to improve even just the form. Online is spreading at once under the Coronavirus, and management meetings are also held online. Currently, the rate of attendance at work is set at 70% (about 2-3 days a week: as of April 2022), and adjustments are being made to clear the rate. Even if the Coronavirus is completely settled, this shape will not change. Since most of the employees working in the office are online, he certainly feels the lack of communication.

Work Side: After becoming a deputy manager, he continues to be the first to leave the office because he thinks it is important to show his subordinates to leave early. The number of socializing events such as drinking and dinners with coworkers has decreased, so there may be unconscious changes in communication within the department. However, at the moment he doesn't feel any particular problems so far. However, there are times when he feels sorry for the evaluation of his subordinates because it is judged only by the output (=the amount of effort they put into the process may not be reflected in the results).

Life Side: He had a baby girl in 2017, but at that time he didn't take childcare leave. The company was in a period of transition both institutionally and culturally regarding how to think about employees' work-life balance, and certainly affected his decision-making on whether he took leaves or not. Since the time for commuting has decreased and he can finish work almost on time under remote work, his physical fatigue has decreased significantly. Consequently, his energy toward work has improved greatly. In addition, he deeply enjoyed having dinner with his child, which had never done before doing remote work. He feels that being able to spend a moment in my child's life with me is a big plus for the way I approach my work.

Mr. F - General Manager of an IT company

Mr. F is a general manager of an IT company that is a group company in a major manufacturing industry in Japan. The current staff under his management is about 200. He is told that there are three years left until retirement. As with other companies, the shortage of human resources is a problem, and it becomes gradually difficult to make it in time unless hiring new graduates with a humanities (not technology or science) background. What has changed in the past several years is that the number of female employees has increased, probably more than 40% of all employees at this point. The rate of returning to work after taking (childcare) leave is quite high, so it's a good environment for them. In the case of employees with in-house marriages, there are cases where husbands and wives take turns taking leave. Women are often involved in software development and have high communication skills, so he feels that they are excellent as managers.

Work Side: Mr. F doesn't feel much about the impact of COVID-19 on the business side since he himself doesn't face difficulty in adopting remote work. He does it even before COVID-19 and is suited to him. Since his son left home after graduation, he uses his son's room for working. When he is at home all day, he sometimes works in a hotel room rented by the hour in the neighborhood, which becomes somehow a break for him as well as the whole family at home. There is however an impression to him that "time has stopped" in terms of socializing. Originally, interacting with people outside the company was part of his responsibility (as a manager of new product development), so he has fewer opportunities to be stimulated from outside and satisfy his intellectual curiosity. He has tried several online brainstorming sessions with clients, but he was not happy with the results.

Life Side: As mentioned, his son left home, and now he lives with his wife and his daughter. The three of them sometimes enjoy traveling together. His wife got her Financial Planner license about 10 years ago and is still working, so now he is in charge of preparing dinner when he is at home. There have been no major changes in family composition or lifestyle other than those mentioned above.

Below is Table 2 shows several key findings summarized from the interviews by interviewees.

Table 2: Key Findings rom the Interviews by Work- and Life Sides

ID	Age, Industry, Sze	Work Side	Life Side
A	The early 30s IT (Small)	Hybrid (main job)/ Fully remote (side job) No problem in managing & evaluating subordinates under work from home. However, sometimes feel difficult to build and maintain the social network that is crucial for doing business.	Paying attention to keeping a good partnership with his wife who decides to reduce working hours b/c of childcare. As a new father (since 2019), taking care of his baby has some similarities to managing projects.
B	The early 40s IT Consulting (Large)	Fully remote No problem in managing & subordinates subordinate under work from home	His wife is currently a full-time medical student since 2020 - making it better how to manage time for work and house chores than before. Taking care of children gives him a hint to managing subordinates.
C	The early 50s Auto Parts Manufacturing (Large)	Hybrid (3 days at home) Trial and error are stings going on as to deal with subordinates remotely. Feel sorry for newcomers (esp. since 2020) b/c few On-the-Job experiences.	His wife is currently a full-time student (accountant) - taking care of children and doing some house chores while she is out.

Table 2: Key Findings rom the Interviews by Work- and Life Sides (Con.)

ID	Age, Industry, Sze	Work Side	Life Side
D	The early 40s IT (Small)	Hybrid (office 3: home 7) the Frequency of "informal" communication & interaction is declined. Fewer days to be tired b/c fewer commuting working hours seems more concentrated. Work from home expands the possibility to do business outside of Japan.	No particular problems & challenges at home due to working from home Taking care of children's commuting to cram school and practice.
E	late 40s Construction (Large)	Hybrid (office 3: home 7) Recently promoted to a deputy manager socializing events and interactions are declined. Feel sorry for subordinates b/c he has to evaluate them with their output, not processes.	Enjoy having time with his child (never had dinner with her before COVID-19) Can put more time & energy into his child and home b/c fatigue from work is reduced.
F	late 50s IT (Large)	Mostly remote Doesn't face difficulty to WFH. Much fewer opportunities to be stimulated from outside and satisfy his intellectual curiosity.	His son left home (after graduating). After COVID-19, he is in charge of preparing dinner when he is at home. No significant change in life b/c of COVID-19, but definitely impact on his way of thinking about career/life in future.

Discussion

Though the results described in the above section are derived from the first stage (rough) interviews and cannot be generalized because of the characteristics of the sample, there are several interesting points that could be worth pointing out to discuss.

First, interviewees who do WFH generally see the impact of this work style on their "life (especially at home)" positively. The most frequent responses were to use the saved commuting time and overtime hours for taking care of their children (e.g., bringing them back from school, supervising homework, and playing with them). In addition, when the partner (wife) is away from home, they are responding to calls from their school and doing small household chores (e.g., taking in laundry and futons, preparing dinner, etc.). There was also a case in which an interviewee was in charge of making dinner himself when he was at home. Shortening (or reducing) commuting time not only saves time but also reduces mental and physical burdens, so it is presumed that they were able to actively face this role at home. Interacting with various family members also seems to have a positive effect on attitudes and awareness toward work.

On the other hand, the influence of work from home on "work" was mixed positive and negative. The most positive impact has been reduced commuting time and overtime work. Also, the physical and mental burden has been reduced due to the relatively shortened working hours. Reduction of commuting and overtime work however leads to the daytime schedule becoming busier and more congested. Working "away" from home also makes it apparent that there are problems with evaluating and supervising subordinates. More strictly speaking, they seem to feel sorry for the newcomers who have no chance to meet and be taught face-to-face, rather than seeing it as a problem. It indicates that interacting face-to-face holds several elements that make their business more efficient and effective and that cannot be replaced by ICT technologies.

Although it cannot be generalized from the nature of the sample and from a quantitative point of view, there seems to be a relationship between generations of interviewees and levels of change regarding WLB awareness after COVID-19. In many cases, interviewees in upper generations tend to mention very little about their "life side", especially about their children and families. This may be partly due to the levels of their

involvement in their families. That said, they are not uninterested in "life", and it seems that they have an awareness of issues specific to their age group. For example, Mr. F (and another interviewee not covered in this paper) repeatedly mentioned their career after retirement as a big issue. Ms. F seemed to be trying and eroding how to draw a future plan itself. It is interesting to see how the design of the later stage of their work career is directly linked to the subsequent "life" itself.

Among the interviews, it was found that the skills and knowledge generated by facing children and families are being applied to reviewing work processes, improving communication with subordinates, and developing human resources at their workplace. For example, by facing children's homework every day, they learned that they were able to 1) grasp their child's level of understanding from the daily homework, which enabled them to improve the quality of communication and 2) know what their child was good at or what they stumbled, which makes it possible to predict future troubles. They then found that the examples above can be applied when supervising subordinates. In addition, they said that there are many commonalities between dealing with various troubles and issues that occur in daily work processes as a project manager and dealing with various troubles that occur daily in the process of raising children.

Conclusion

This paper describes a series of interviews with male full-time workers asking about their attitude toward WLB after COVID-19, especially focusing on how WFH affects their attitude toward WLB. The results from the analysis cannot be generalized due to the nature of the samples, and all the results in this paper are from preliminary interviews which are neither well-structured nor organized. For this reason, additional interviews are necessary to further surveys. With these limitations in mind, this chapter presents a discussion of the results of the study.

First of all, it was found that the transition from person-to-person to WFH had a significant impact on interviews regarding WLB awareness. Especially for interviewees with younger children the awareness of both the work side and the life-side changes as they carry out working remotely. Also, changes in a life side affect their work side and vice versa: For example, to save commuting time and overtime and for spending more time with children, applying the ability to watch over a child's learning while watching homework to the ability to manage the performance of subordinates in the workplace.

An interesting point is that, whether they like it or not, as they are able to spend a certain amount of time with their families through remote work, their attitude toward family and their roles seem to change. More interestingly, the process of changing WLB awareness caused by WFH due to COVID-19 is very similar to the process of changing WLB awareness caused by changes in work styles faced by male expatriates in the United States that the author previously investigated (Kato, 2011). Even if these are not necessarily the changes that they desired, new "experiences" have some (mostly positive) impact on their outlook on work and life. From this fact, it can be inferred that accumulating various experiences allow individuals to consider the positions of diverse human resources.

On the other hand, it cannot conclude from the interviews whether changes in awareness necessarily lead to concrete actions. If it is important to reduce the physical burden on the partner by changing the person's consciousness and influencing the person's specific actions, then in a sense, it can be said that focusing only on consciousness is one-sided. However, as mentioned above, it is not the purpose of this research to investigate behavior or specific time, and in this research, "changes in consciousness born from experience" itself is an important element. In other words, WFH due to COVID-19 will allow people to use their time in a different way than before, and the ability to apply the positive emotions they

experienced there to thinking about people other than themselves is what is important for managers in the workplace.

For example, if there are more managers like Mr. B and Mr. E who experience irreplaceable time spent with their children while at home, they will have a different perspective when thinking about childcare and nursing care leave for their subordinates. As evidenced by case studies and statistics, in Japan, even if there is a system, the actual utilization rate is low. For example, in the case of childcare leave in Tokyo, 36.3% and 35.2%, respectively, said that "the atmosphere at the workplace was not conducive to taking childcare leave" and "there was no replacement staff at the workplace" (multiple answers: Business Labor Trends, 2022). The atmosphere of the workplace will change greatly if people in management positions have the experience mentioned in the interviews. Having a positive atmosphere in the workplace is also helpful when thinking about replacement staff for male childcare leave. For example, this can be used as an opportunity to review the division of work, eliminate the dependence of work on individual skills, and visualize and standardize work.

Also, as touched upon in the analysis, some interviewees found opportunities and hints for work through childcare and house chores. Both workplaces and homes are essentially organizations in a sense, and they all have in common that they are established under management. In terms of meeting the needs of the members of the organization and planning various ways to move toward the goals of the organization, there are many areas where the know-how and knowledge gained at work can be utilized at home. Also, it can be true that finding common ground between one's daily work and home may reduce feelings of reluctance and guilt about engaging in "life".

WLB, as defined by the Cabinet Office (2007), is "a state in which men and women of all ages can engage in a variety of activities, including work, family life, community life, and personal self-development, in the desired balance". However, because of the process of its introduction, it seems that the awareness that systems such as women's utilization and childcare leave are "systems for specific human resources" has taken root. A survey by Fujisawa (2020) also cites examples of companies that are trying hard to ensure that the theme of encouraging men to take childcare leave is not seen as a matter limited to a small number of employees. Lowering the level of resistance to awareness rather than increasing the number of male employees who find common ground is also important from the point of view of fostering the awareness that childcare and nursing care are not for some but for all workers.

As mentioned, this study focused on the results of 6 of the 10 subjects who had completed the preliminary interview. Full-fledged analysis and consideration will be left after conducting all preliminary interviews as well as more structured interviews. In fact, these preliminary interviews spent too much time catching up with the seven years, rather than collecting information about the changes after COVID-19. For future interviews, it is necessary to do a comparative analysis among interviewees possible by semi-structuring the content and asking questions that can be quantitatively analyzed as much as possible. In addition, regarding the "flexibility" of time that was mentioned in the preliminary interviews, the ripple effect of that flexibility can be visualized qualitatively and quantitatively and can be considered as one of the indicators of how to use time in the future.

In addition to the limitations mentioned above, there are several points that should be described at the end. First, the subjects of this interview are voluntary participants and are former graduate students and therefore do not represent full-time male workers in Japan. In addition, the findings from the interviews cannot be generalized due to the industry bias that interviewees belong. However, all interviewees are in managerial positions, and from this point of view, carefully tracing their changes in awareness will provide an opportunity to

learn how the experience of working from home will be utilized in the future at work and at home. There is no doubt that it has become a valuable opportunity for WLB research.

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