# Digital Collaboration and Ethical Complexity: Insights from Virtual Mauritian Professionals Working in their Home Office

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of professionals working within virtual teams in Mauritius. Using narrative identity theory, the study analyses narratives to understand how individuals construct meaning around remote collaboration and identity in the remote workplace. Key themes that emerged include maintaining work-life balance, sustaining high-performance routines, redefining professional identity, and navigating ethical complexities unique to virtual teams. Challenges of digital ethics, which include privacy concerns, blurred boundaries, and digital interactions, emerged as a central theme to participants' experiences. The study provides insights for organisations seeking to build resilient, inclusive, and ethically grounded virtual teams that can sustain long-term engagement and effectiveness. It is recommended to develop structured support mechanisms, including training in digital etiquette, privacy, ethical guidelines, and emotional well-being practices.

**Keywords:** Virtual Project Teams; Narrative Identity; Work Life Balance; High Performance; Professional Identity; Digital Ethics; Home Office; Privacy Concerns; Working from Home; Digital Collaboration.

## 1.0. Introduction

Monumental forces are continuously shaping the nature of work. Virtual collaboration, particularly in project-based environments, has emerged as a strategic response to these shifts. The concept of virtual work was introduced as early as the 1970s during the oil crisis, when remote access to office systems was employed to reduce commuting [1]. With the rise of internet accessibility in the 1990s, virtual teams began to formalize, requiring cross-functional and cross-border coordination. The nature of work was put to question once again when a pandemic, the novel coronavirus also referred to as Covid-19, was declared by the World Health Organisation on 11th March 2020 and was of international concern [2]. Although there have been pandemics such as SARS and MERS in the past, Covid-19 had a global effect, personal lives, economies, project delivery timelines, and collaborative practices were impacted [3]. Therefore, to mitigate the spread of the virus due to the exponential growth of infections and deaths, curfews were imposed through social distancing around the world, necessitating rapid adoption of virtual collaboration tools to maintain business continuity.

The concept of virtual team is not a new phenomenon and was quite significantly adopted pre-pandemic era but gained renewed prominence as organizations witnessed the operational advantages [4]. Virtual teams have been a subject of research for more than 30 years [5]. However, there are still areas that need to be investigated. A survey by [6] found that 64% of organizations maintain that working in a virtual team setting will most likely be a permanent arrangement, as 75% reported remote collaboration allowed optimal job effectiveness. These developments underscore a critical shift; the future of work is increasingly virtual. As project teams become more geographically dispersed and digitally dependent, understanding the dynamics, identity shifts, and support needs of virtual professionals becomes essential to building resilient and effective virtual environments. The objectives of this paper are to first address the gap in virtual teams' research from a local perspective, exploring respondents'

experiences of this phenomenon. Secondly, the impact of working from the home office will be discovered, and thirdly the work-life balance of respondents in their roles as professionals will be revealed. The narrative theory will be applied to understand how individuals construct their lives through the stories they tell about their experiences working at their home office. According to [7], narrative is the fundamental process by which people structure their experiences, convey meaning, and make sense of the world. He suggests that humans frequently use narrative to explain their lives and the events around them rather than depending just on logical or scientific explanations. According to [8] in a seminal work on narrative, explains that identity formation relies heavily on narrative. He contends that the narratives help individuals to understand themselves. To create a cohesive life story, each person's narrative identity is a dynamic process of integration in which their prior experiences are reinterpreted and connected. Because of the tales people tell about themselves, the "self" is not fixed but rather is always changing. Therefore, these theories will serve as guidance on interpreting respondents' narratives of executing project work from their home office journey.

The paper is structured by reviewing the existing literature in section 2, with methodology in section 3, followed by results analysis and discussion in section 4. Recommendations will be provided in section 5, and the conclusion will be presented in section 6.

## 1.1. Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the study are as follows:

1) Understand the perceived benefits of working in the Home Office.

2) Analyse the perceived challenges of working in the Home Office.

3) Examine how individuals in their home office construct their professional identity.

4) Understand the social perspectives of working in the Home Office.

5) Understand how individuals maintain a high performance while working in their Home Office.

## 2.0. Literature Review

According to [9] it is crucial to review the existing literature to identify gaps and therefore establish research objectives. The analysis of the knowledge base allows the positioning of the research to be conducted. This section, therefore details an overview of the work already done on virtual teams.

### 2.1. Virtual Teams

The concept of virtual team is not new and was quite significant pre-pandemic era but became more popular post-pandemic following the benefits it brings [4]. In a survey [9] found that 64% of organizations maintain that working in a virtual team setting will most likely be a permanent arrangement, as 75% reported remote collaboration allowed optimal job effectiveness.

Research on virtual ways of working gained attention in 'The Virtual Corporation' by [10] and in an article by [11] explaining new boundary-less organisations evolving in the needs of the global competitive market. However, the earlier work of [12] describes the innovative virtual organisation aimed at its adaptation to new challenges.

According to [13] refers to virtual teams as "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach, for which they hold themselves accountable'', since teamwork is recurring across different time zones, locations, and organizations, the term was coined. In the book 'Virtual Teams, Reaching across space, time, and organisations with technology' by [14], provide a framework making virtual teams practical and accessible. A renowned author [15] in the fields of digitisation, coins virtual teams as the workplace of the future, not bound by time, geography, or organisational boundaries. Technology has forged this new workplace, where collaboration, flexibility, and productivity will reach an optimum level. Virtual Teams is defined by [16] as groups of workers who are geographically and time dispersed, but by leveraging technology, can accomplish their tasks and communicate. On the other hand, [17] defines virtual teams as a group of geographically, organizationally, and/or time scattered workers, brought together by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to accomplish organizational tasks. Another perspective from [18] provides a more recent definition as 'A global virtual team includes a group of individuals who are reliant on technology for communication, knowledge sharing, and project management purposes, spanning across geography, space, and time to work interdependently toward a shared outcome'. Research on the development of information systems [19] showed that remote workers conduct duties not only from their homes or official workplaces but also from other locations. The use of virtual work can be broken down into three categories: permanent or full-time; part-time (as needed, for instance by determining the frequency or amount of work to be performed remotely); and occasionally (less than once a week).

Types of virtual teams is researched by [20] and found seven: -

Networked teams - these are team members with variability and different expertise collaborating in an organisation to meet a common objective;

Parallel teams - A team formed by members of the same organization to develop recommendations in a process or system;

Project or product development teams - teams with specific expertise working on special projects for customers for an extended period of time);

Work, functional or production teams - team members in one department, for example, finance who can work remotely in any time zone;

Service teams - Supporting staff or call centers that work around the clock in different parts of the world;

Management teams - The management teams may span a country or the world, and meet with their colleagues and teams as the need arises; and

Action teams - These teams respond immediately as urgencies arise. NASA was used as an example during a space mission.

Synchronous and asynchronous technologies allow virtual organisations to bring dispersed talent together from limitless distances or locations [22]. This workplace is not bound by geography or time factor but is enabled by technology, where collaboration, flexibility, and productivity can be optimised. [23] likewise believe that virtual

working has become progressively more common in the workplace because of its ability to connect people, gathering them together across space, time, and organisational boundaries to collaborate. Another view from [26], the typical virtual worker holds a high-level position, is highly educated, experienced, well-paid, and regards the autonomy that they are afforded as a privilege correlated with a high professional standing. With very few exceptions, telework, remote work, virtual work, and work from home all refer to the same work mode. The broadest definition of remote work is when work is done entirely or in part at a location other than the default location. As a subset of remote work, telework is defined as distant work carried out with the use of digital equipment.

In a study by [20] documents the seven success factors of virtual teams. ICT plays a key role in enabling communication, providing the suitable technologies to team members appropriately trained. Processes and standards are the second success factor. While processes document areas such as planning, sharing of best practices and ways of working, standards cover norm establishments, procedures, and general routines. The third success factor is organisational culture, norms such as leadership, collaboration, and value creation drive the trust environment in which virtual team members work. Human resource management is the fourth success factor, supporting the team members through their career development and performance management while providing a support mechanism. Continuous learning is an important factor, as knowledge sharing, soft skills, as well as technical skills are vital. The sixth factor, leadership, has emphasis on communication, establishing expectations, resource allocation, and modelling behaviours. The last factor, experience, covers the trust establishing in an open environment, networking, and team members' time management, effective collaboration, and interpersonal skills. In Mauritius, the government has taken proactive steps to facilitate the implementation of remote work for both employers and employees amid the pandemic. This proactive stance is demonstrated through the introduction of two key legislative measures: the Workers' Rights (Working from Home) Regulations 2020 and the Work From Home Protocol for the Public Service 2021. According to [21] traffic congestion may have a comparable impact on productivity and attendance at work in Mauritius. The number of cars in the country exceeds 500,000, which results in a nearly 2:1 user-to-car ratio. A significant contributor to bottlenecks and tardiness at work has been traffic congestion. In contrast to traditional work, teleworking, as per a recommendation from the [28] may have been a suitable alternative because it allows employees to spend less time physically at work while still being more productive.

## 2.2. Benefits of Virtual Teams

Virtual teams are a crucial way of working to stay up to date with innovation, keep up with local market conditions and requirements. For these reasons, businesses use a virtual team approach to their work: mergers and acquisitions, searching for resources in other markets, the possibility for global growth, and luring talent from overseas. Working in this collaborative way has numerous benefits varying from knowledge sharing to operations improvements while delivering activities from different locations. Virtual teams provides organisations with the opportunity to become flexible while also be in a strategical position to respond faster in the war for talent as well as providing services in the increasing competitive marketplace [24]. Unique skills and creativity is available from any location to fulfil the organisations needs [22] which leads to better efficiency [25].

The importance of virtual teams for organizations is also because team members can communicate and perform their activities, despite the constraints of time and distance. Working virtually is beneficial for both employers and employees. The employees benefit from the flexibility of working from any location, such as from home or from a hotel room. This offers a good work-life balance and increases employee satisfaction. With the ICT advancements, the availability of experts benefits employers [30]. A summary of the advantages by [31] of virtual working as autonomy, savings on travel costs, improvement of employees' opinion of the company, increased productivity, reduction in infrastructure costs in the long-term, integration of people with disabilities, and talent attraction. [50] also iterate that working from home increases productivity.

In the Mauritian context, [21] found that time management was the most preferred advantage. All respondents who preferred to work remotely cited the benefit of having more time as a key factor in their decision. This was consistent with the availability of time and the freedom of having control over time on a personal level. For the respondents, reduced interruption and wasted time were important because they either had to take a bus to work or use a personal vehicle and be stuck in traffic. Work-life balance came in third on respondents' lists of concrete advantages of working from home. Employees who work a standard 9–5 schedule typically arrive home late and have little opportunity to strengthen family bonds other than on the weekends.

## 2.3. Challenges of Virtual Teams

Despite having numerous advantages, virtual teams encounter issues and challenges such as communication and team cohesion during the project lifetime. According to [23], despite the remarkable introduction of virtual teams, the existence of high levels of complexities still existent. With a focus on the social perspective, [27] reported concerns associated with virtual working as vastly outweighing the benefits in the literature. The most common issues appearing were distractions from home life and friends, the feeling of being isolated, difficulties in communicating and team working with colleagues, overworking due to the desire to prove that one is working, technology problems, lack of visibility of staff, and difficulty finding an appropriate work-life balance; all of which can impact productivity.

An elaboration by [31] on the number of cultural challenges that these teams face based on their diversity. These include language, culture, time zone, and experience. A significant level of agility is required to manage and bridge these differences. In other cases, a coworker may believe they are working harder than the others despite receiving the same pay. A worker may observe, for instance, that their coworkers do not react as quickly as they do. They become defensive and withdraw as a result. This hinders the effectiveness of virtual teams and commercial organisations overall. The interconnectedness of tasks is another difficulty faced by global teams. The job will be put on hold if any employees encounter unforeseen problems or obligations. All the team members must be scheduled on the same timeline for the tasks to be completed [32]. Employees working remotely may feel alienated from their coworkers and the culture of the company. According to a Harvard Business Review research, remote workers feel excluded and overlooked for assignments and promotions [33].

In the Mauritian context, [34] finds barriers to virtual work in the public sector, such as having difficulties in accessing information to get their job done, a lack of equipment, and difficulties in collaborating with colleagues.

On the other hand, [21] found the lack of opportunity for employees to interact directly with their direct reporting line was the most highly ranked aspect of virtual work's drawbacks. Meetings were conducted by Visio conferencing, Google, Zoom, and other platforms. The proper exchange of information appeared to be challenging. The abrupt separation from in-person interactions and the job was a major obstacle. According to respondents, they received insufficient instruction on how to utilize and be proficient in ICT for communication and collaboration.

It is clear from the literature that virtual work provides increased flexibility and work-life balance however, there is an absence of structured education and training for remote team members to be comfortable in the digital setting. [35] highlight issues with digital collaboration skills, self-management, and team coordination. Team members are expected to adapt not only to new technologies but also to new norms of communication, professionalism, and privacy, often without formal support. [36] found that the abrupt shift to virtual work increased technostress, cognitive overload, and emotional fatigue, following the absence of training and limited guidance. [37] similarly argue that remote work demands ongoing development of digital, emotional, and organizational competencies, not just access to tools. The absence of continuous learning and support systems can result in decreased engagement, inconsistent performance, and blurred professional boundaries. These findings iterate the need for organizations to not only implement digital infrastructure but also to invest in educating their virtual teams on the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of remote collaboration.

In the context of this study, to understand the position of virtual project work in Mauritius, three key research questions were focussed on:

1. What are the experiences of respondents in their daily life while working in their home office?

2. What are the impacts of working at the home office on respondents?

3. How does working at the home office affect the respondent's role as a professional?

## 3.0. Methodology

This section details the methodology used in the research. [38] believe that research philosophy is a major determinant of how the study will be conducted. This research was inductive in nature, guided however by narrative. [9] identifies narrative inquiry as stories respondents are telling to provide insights into their lived experiences. Narrative data is then necessary to investigate a person's perception of reality through the lens of the narrator, who is the one with the greatest knowledge of a story. Through their stories, informants offer a view into their emotional environment in addition to the distinctive needs and strains this world imposes on them [39]. Analysis of these narratives allows a deep dive into the social reality of the respondents.

Therefore, the questions asked to encourage them to reflect on their journey were:

- "Can you tell me about your typical day working virtually at home, how you navigate through it, and how it impacts you from a positive or negative perspective?''

- "How does your work-life balance while working from home affect your role as a professional"

### 3.1. Sample

The target population was respondents from the ICT industry working in virtual project settings, and a purposive and snowball sampling approach was adopted, considering the challenge in identifying the previously unknown population. Direct emails have been sent to organization members of the Outsourcing and Telecommunications Association of Mauritius (OTAM), and recruitment efforts were also done on LinkedIn. Selected participants were encouraged to refer their peers, allowing the population to expand, but however maintaining the objectivity of the scope. Fifteen semi-structured interviews on Microsoft Teams, in the form of a narration, was conducted to gather insights into the respondents' personal experience. The methods used were strictly aligned to the research objectives and approved by the ethics committee of the Open University of Mauritius after being weighed against potential harm. Before conducting the interviews with the sample population, a pilot study was conducted with selected respondents working in a virtual setting, resulting in a few minor changes to the structure of the data gathering for efficiency.

### 3.2. Methods of Analysis

The transcription functionality on MS Teams was used to extract the data. Narrative analysis explored the meaning of the events in the storytelling. A thematic analysis then identified codes in the data with the use of Atlas ti, which was then developed into themes. Identifying these recurring themes in the narrative was then interpreted and aligned with the narrative theory and identity.

### 4.0. Results and Discussions

The data collected through the semi-structured interviews were transcribed manually. It was crucial to ensure accuracy and preserve the richness of participants' responses. A thorough review was conducted to correct any errors and ensure consistency and accuracy of information collected. To maintain participant anonymity but have a consistent labelling approach, a simple cipher-based method was used to distort initials. This approach involves shifting each letter of a participant's initials forward by a fixed number of positions in the alphabet by three. This transformation is systematic and reversible, allowing the decoding of the labels if necessary while preventing direct identification. By applying this cipher uniformly across all participants, confidentiality without sacrificing the ability to track and reference individual contributions throughout the qualitative analysis is maintained.

Once transcribed, the data were imported into ATLAS ti, to facilitate systematic coding and organization. To start with, an initial coding was conducted by highlighting meaningful text and assigning descriptive codes. These codes were then grouped into broader categories to identify emerging themes. Throughout the process, analytical memos were used to capture reflections and insights, and views within ATLAS ti helped attribute relationships between codes and themes. This structured approach ensured a transparent and rigorous analysis aligned with the research objectives.

Table 1 shows significant codes found relevant and were then grouped into themes. Each of the themes developed was carefully defined to capture the essence of the data and its significance within the context of the study. Each theme was then introduced within a section and accompanied by an explanation of its relevance. Illustrative quotes from participants were included to provide evidence and to give value to their experiences. The quotes were selected to highlight key aspects of the theme and support the interpretation. The meaning of each theme was then

discussed in relation to the research question, drawing connections between participants' narratives and the broader conceptual framework of the study. This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the data while offering insightful interpretations. Additionally, it was key to maintain the transparency and credibility of the analysis, while ensuring that findings were not solely a product of subjective bias but were firmly rooted in the data.

The thematic analysis from Atlas ti produced Table 1.

**Table 1.** Themes and codes

| Theme | Representative Quotes & Recurrence |
|---|---|
| Remote work-life balance | Routine (10), responsibility, family (9), flexibility (4), self-care (12), adaptability (2) |
| High-performance Remote Work habits | Time management (5), discipline, efficiency (1), productivity (6) |
| Social perspective of Remote work | Isolation (2), workaholic, mental health (1), distractions (2), disruptions (1), growth and development (3), socialisation (2), extroversion (2), boundaries (2), introversion (1) |
| Professionalism in remote work | Identity (2), stress management (1), professionalism (2), work life balance (29) |

## 4.1. Remote Work Life Balance

Work is an essential element of daily life; however, family obligations sometimes overlap. The balance between the demands of one's personal and professional lives is referred to as work-life balance. This idea of work-life balance has been around for a while, but since the late 1970s, it has become important to people, businesses, and governments. Over time, the idea has changed to eradicate gender bias and embrace inclusivity for all workers [40]. From a narrative identity theory perspective, according to [41] individuals construct their self through the stories that they tell about their lives. MT has constructed a personal narrative where she sees herself as someone who successfully balances the demands of work and personal life. This becomes part of her identity, by framing her work-life structure as an ideal or optimal scenario: 'This balance between work from home and work from office suits me, I get to have the best of both worlds'. On the other hand, KE tells the story about how his work structure aligns with his values or needs for well-being, providing a sense of control and stability: 'I work at my home office three times a week, which helps to balance my life.' Alternating between working from the home office contributes to a better work-life balance. This arrangement allows team members to meet the demands of both their professional and personal lives, leading to greater satisfaction and a more integrated lifestyle. These accounts reflect the principles of the narrative identity theory, as by narrating their work life arrangements in their home offices, MT and KE construct their identities around work-life balance.

Respondents were able to include self-care in their schedule while working in a virtual setting. [42] in a qualitative study, found that respondents placed a great value on their personal well-being. The priority of health was supported by the fact that, over time, improved health and well-being also result in improved productivity and balance at work. Similarly, in this context, HR, a Project Manager, states: 'I can balance my life and I can go to the

gym in the morning'. Having control over one's schedule allows the participant to integrate personal health routines into daily life. The ability to exercise in the morning suggests that this person can prioritize their well-being without sacrificing work or family time. This statement focuses on health, having the time to go to the gym in the morning frees up the rest of the day for other activities. From a narrative identity perspective, this statement is seen as an individual who constructs her life around autonomy, health, and wellbeing, integrating professional responsibility which flexible work can provide to her.

PA mentions: 'I can manage my life and schedule. Working virtually allows me to have a healthy lifestyle. This reflects how the flexibility of working in a virtual project team provides the individual with control over their schedule, allowing them to balance work and health more effectively. KE 'I use my lunch time for a quick workout in my home gym.' ME states: 'Lunch time, if the weather is good, I take the dog for a walk. It is the right balance for me as I can go to the gym, spend more time with the kids, and the dog. I am also able to prepare healthy meals for myself and the family.' This statement highlights a good work-life balance, where the individual successfully integrates health, family, and personal well-being into their daily routine. The respondent takes advantage of lunch breaks to engage in physical activity, such as walking the dog, which not only benefits their health but also supports mental relaxation and time outdoors. This suggests that the flexibility in their schedule, likely from working at home or having flexible hours, allows them to prioritise personal well-being without neglecting work responsibilities. The ability to go to the gym and prepare healthy meals reflects the commitment to personal health and fitness, which is a central part of work-life balance. By prioritizing exercise and healthy meals, the individual ensures that they maintain physical health, which in turn boosts energy levels and productivity, benefiting both work and family life. The work-life integration is expressed through the narrative identity theory, focusing on reinforcing a sense of self being in harmony with work and personal life. This aligns with [41] who states that narrative identity integrates past experiences, present actions, and future goals into a meaningful and evolving self-concept.

'The balance allows me to look after my family.' This change in identity mentioned by KE is an example of how working at the home office has made his role as a parent and a professional more interlinked. [43] found that working in a flexible environment provides the opportunity for employees' time, in their work roles to manage their personal commitments which contributes to the work-life balance. Respondents iterated on the flexibility provided to them. DK thrives in remote work environments, where she can manage her time and work in a safe, controlled space. For this respondent, the ability to work from home isn't just a convenience; it aligns with her natural preferences for solitude and autonomy. This suggests that remote work can be a perfect match for people who find it easier to focus and recharge in the comfort of their own space. 'I have always enjoyed this flexibility since the beginning of my career. Having a balance between office and home is something I will not give up. I am an introvert and for me I prefer working from home in my own safe space and managing my schedule.' Working in the home office with no significant social interaction during the day, one experiences a blend of personal and professional space, potentially leading to a sense of isolation. This is because work can become absorbed into personal time, but there is less opportunity for interaction that typically occurs in a shared office setting. Considering she is an introvert, working in her home office may feel less isolating as it's her preferred setup.

However, this emotional separation from colleagues and external social interaction can, in some cases, create a feeling of detachment. MT highlights how flexibility in a remote work setting contributes to a shift in identity, in terms of self-care, personal development, and self-agency. The individual is no longer defined solely by their role as an employee but also by the choices they make regarding health, learning, and self-improvement. This shift can be interpreted as a form of identity transformation where they reclaim time that would have otherwise been spent commuting or caught up in office routines, enabling them to craft a new narrative that aligns with their current values and aspirations. 'I can sleep an extra hour and go to the gym a bit later than on my office days. I am also going to start a course, the extra time I used to sleep can be invested in studying.'

HR highlights that working from the home office gives the flexibility to engage in regular physical activities and meal prepping. Additionally, the mention of taking a nap suggests that being at home provides a chance for self-care during the workday, contributing to overall well-being and reducing fatigue. Additionally, while there's no strict "hard stop," the respondent has figured out how to balance her work commitments with personal care, such as meal prepping, napping, and studying. This is an example of how flexibility can allow for a more individualized workday that can be tailored to both professional and personal needs. 'I don't have a hard stop as my stakeholders are in another time zone, so I have to be flexible to be able to collaborate with them. This does not bother me as I can meal prep and sometimes nap. This work-life balance also allows me to study, be less tired after my workouts, and be able to plan healthy eating.' Additionally, flexibility in remote or flexible work arrangements allows HR to reshape her life story in a way that better aligns with her personal values, well-being, and goals. The respondent's ability to adapt to the routine and demands of her stakeholders, while also incorporating self-care practices such as meal prepping, napping, studying, and workout recovery, signifies a shift in her narrative identity. Her evolving story is centered on a more holistic approach to work-life balance, where personal health, learning, and wellness play a significant role.

NK states: 'I go to sleep rather late as I am a gamer. Most of the time, I miss my alarm and find myself switching on my work computer in bed and having my first meetings. I will then find some time to bathe and eat. I sometimes can have a power nap in between meetings. This helps me recharge and boosts my productivity.' The experience and narrative identity reflect a dynamic, integrated approach to work, where personal habits, productivity, and social connections are interwoven. By choosing a flexible, personalized work routine, he is crafting an identity of agency, comfort, and balance. His story is of navigating the complexities of work and personal life by embracing the freedom to tailor his approach to both. The balance between flexibility and in-person socializing creates a narrative of someone who values both autonomy and connection, embodying a modern work identity that is adaptive, intentional, and rooted in personal choice. [7] emphasized that storytelling is not just a way to communicate but a fundamental mode of thought that allows us to interpret our experiences and define who we are. NK's narrative reflects this interpretive process, where autonomy, comfort, and productivity are woven into a personal story that supports a modern, adaptive work identity linked to intentional choice and self-understanding. According to [41] personal narratives are an integration of experiences and individuals' stories, therefore shaping their present situation and future aspirations forming their identity over time. In this perspective, the work-life balance becomes a meaningful component of the respondent's lives.

## 4.2. Social Perspectives

Working from the home office allows employees to arrange their work around their lives, enhancing their quality of life. However, the complexity of well-being includes the social aspect among other factors [44]. Having colleagues who are in different time zones and have the requirement for flexibility in working hours to accommodate cross-time-zone collaboration could result in long hours without breaks or social interaction, leading to potential isolation during the workday. Long periods of isolation, especially if they lacks social engagement or a physical break from work, can lead to burnout. While she enjoys the flexibility of working from home, the absence of a hard stop to the day can result in overwork. VK states: 'Working at the home office for me leads to isolation and poor mental health.' Additionally, 'I am an extrovert, I don't like being confined at home'. The respondent's narrative is constructed around remote work being directly linked to social disconnection and declining mental health. It seems that she thrives in social settings, and working at her home office takes away her preferred way of functioning, leading to a lack of fulfilment, contributing to poor mental health and isolation. Linking to [7] remote work challenges her preferred way of functioning and shows a narrative of strain. Isolation also emerged where NK, a security analyst, enjoys the flexibility of working from home, but mentions being alone in a virtual environment without face-to-face interaction with colleagues or managers. This isolation may be more noticeable in remote roles where employees rarely meet their team in person: 'This way of working works for me; however, I do also enjoy going to the office for face-to-face SteerCo so I can meet my colleagues and use the opportunity to have a meal with them.' His narrative is that of integration and interpersonal connection.

PA enjoys flexibility but tends to work late into the night to catch up on work that was delayed by non-work activities. While this might initially seem like good time management, it can lead to overwork, poor sleep, and a cycle of fatigue. The lack of clear boundaries between work and personal time suggests potential for workaholic tendencies: 'I sometimes find myself working till quite late to catch up with my work, resulting from the non-working activities during the day.' This narrative of adaptation, where PA is managing the work and personal life. The experience of having to catch up on work due to her non-work activities during the day reveals a narrative of balance that is still evolving, one in which she is trying to figure out how to reconcile her professional responsibilities with her personal life. This evolving narrative also resonates with [7] who suggests that identity is shaped through the interpretive act of storytelling. [7] emphasized that people use narrative to make sense of complex experiences. PA's story illustrates that she is crafting an identity where the balance between work and life is central, and her ongoing efforts to reconcile these domains.

## 4.3. High Performance

[45] researched the relationship between work-life and its contribution to productivity and found a positive relationship. Respondents in their narratives agree to this statement. Key sub-themes of time management, routine, and discipline also emerged. 'Stepping outside and getting some fresh air helps my productivity,' says ME. Taking a break, according to [46], provides a boost to productivity. ME introduces the idea of stepping outside for fresh air to boost productivity. This highlights the importance of breaks and getting out of the work environment to refresh the mind. Taking breaks, especially when working remotely, can help prevent burnout, re-energise, and improve focus for the remainder of the day. Taking short breaks, especially in natural settings, can help prevent mental

fatigue. Stepping outside and getting fresh air allows the brain to rest and recharge, improving focus and cognitive performance when work resumes. These moments of recovery can enhance long-term productivity and efficiency.

'I believe I start my day with bad manners of having breakfast while checking my emails and schedule, so that I know what I have waiting for me in the day. In the first half of the day, I work for a full four hours without any interruption, as this time I perform at my optimal best. I then have my lunch break for a full hour. I try to keep this routine standard for the sake of discipline. I then have most of my meetings in the afternoon. And therefore, make the most of getting my work done in the morning as there will be no disruption.' DK's statement holds the key principles contributing to productivity, that is, time management, structured routine, and discipline. Avoiding distractions and having sufficient breaks to sustain productivity. The respondent states that she works for four uninterrupted hours in the first half of the day, which is when she performs at her best. Having a set schedule not only provides predictability but also helps them maintain focus and reduce distractions, allowing for deeper concentration. Recognizing peak productivity time (in this case, the first half of the day) and carving out time for deep work is an essential time management strategy. This period is when concentration and cognitive abilities are often at their best. 'Starts my day in the same mindset, irrespective of going to the office or working in a home office. It is important to have this balance of working at a home office and on-site. I am more productive in my home office, where I can focus and not have to worry about being late, the traffic, or having to rush home and deal with my tasks at home, or stress about the kids.' LV provides a narrative of work-life integration, where she successfully manages stress and productivity by choosing how and where she works. The flexibility of home office work allows the speaker to reduce external pressures, leading to a more empowered and adaptive sense of identity. The consistency in her mindset and routine reflects an adaptive narrative identity, one that is flexible and productive, yet grounded. Through her choices and strategies, she has crafted a narrative of balance, where both work and personal life are integrated in a meaningful way.

KE is balancing both working from home and the office. He mentions catching up on work during lunch or after hours, which could indicate a tendency to push beyond standard working hours. 'I will then start my working day later and catch up with my work either during lunchtime while eating at my desk or after hours.' HR's schedule includes flexible work hours to accommodate different time zones, but doesn't have a hard stop. She mentions using break times for meal prep or even naps, yet continues working long hours to manage tasks across time zones. These narratives reflect how individuals construct and adapt their identities through daily routines and work strategies, linking back to the narrative identity theory. DK's discipline illustrates a narrative of self-regulation and optimal performance. Her story frames productivity as a core identity trait, reinforced by structure. LV's account details the choice between home and office work. KE and HR, meanwhile, present evolving narratives where work blends into personal time, reflecting an ongoing effort to reconcile professional demands with personal life, illustrating how identity is continually shaped by the choices and compromises individuals make in their daily lives.

### 4.4. Identity

VK, I find myself working impossible hours when working at the home office. While she also struggles, an indication of overlap between personal life and professional life, she, however, states, 'I can balance my professional and personal life.' HR expresses confidence in her work ethic and ability to maintain her identity as a

professional, irrespective of location or dress code. While acknowledging awkwardness in external factors, this does not impact her identity. 'Whether at the office or at my home office, I maintain the same professionalism. Maybe at home I will mostly be in a T-shirt or the company polo shirt and not be wearing makeup, but that does not take away who I am and the quality of my work. However, sometimes I do feel awkward when the dogs decide to run around, jump on me, or bark for no reason. But I don't feel any impact as such as a professional.'

'When the kids are home, it's difficult as my working area is in the living room. School holidays can even be worse. It bothers me when they are shouting and are noisy with the dog. It can sometimes even be embarrassing during meetings when they are shouting or interrupting and asking for snacks. I feel an impact on myself as a professional, but I get some comfort when I am sometimes in meetings and witness similar situations with my other colleagues. Also, the balance compensates this overlap as a mom and my professional life.' ME experiences an interaction between her role as a parent and a professional. Even while disruptions make her sometimes question her professional identity, the experiences she shares with colleagues and the general work-life balance she has provide emotional support. Her story illustrates a challenging balance to her sense of self in which professionalism is put to question to encompass both proficiency and flexibility in a domestic setting. 'I don't see any impact on my professional life as I do what it takes to get my work done and maintain my balance. When the kids are sick, it does cause an imbalance, but it's all about controlling the situation.' From a stress management point of view, KH exhibits high resilience, proactive coping, and a challenge-oriented mindset. While being aware of occasional imbalances due to family responsibilities, he believes maintaining control and balance, reinforcing control rather than being overwhelmed, is the solution to manage the situation and avoid stress.

Work-life balance recurring among the respondents is strongly linked to identity, as it is not only about the logistics part of daily life but a fundamental part of how they manage their role, sense of fulfilment, and perception. While [7] thinks that narratives are the way that people make sense of their realities and understanding of themselves, it can be deducted that most respondents narrated their work-life balance as success stories: 'I manage my career and my family roles successfully'. Another example is 'I don't see any impact on my professional life as I do what it takes to get my work done and maintain my balance.' Narratives also allow meaning to derive experiences in lives and make it a recurring theme in their life stories, such as the balance between their professional and personal life. If their identity gets disrupted, the focus is mostly on the meaning behind the challenges.

The quotes are reflections on how respondents build their identities through the lens of work arrangements, using those choices to define who they are, what they value, and how they navigate their personal and professional lives. This is a key feature of narrative identity theory, where people form their self-concept through the ongoing process of storytelling.

### 4.5. Building Resilience in Virtual Team Members

The narratives emerging from this study reveal major gaps in the structure and professionalism impacting the effectiveness of virtual project teams. While participants demonstrated adaptability and resilience in navigating remote environments, their experiences also exposed significant challenges such as social isolation, blurred boundaries between their personal and professional lives, and challenges around digital norms and expectations.

These insights demonstrate a lack of formal guidance and policies, highlighting the need for workforce upskilling tailored to remote project work.

This aligns with the literature emphasizing the role of continuous learning in sustaining high-performing distributed teams. [47] advocate targeted development programs focusing on digital communication effectiveness, autonomous decision-making, work-life integration, and inclusive collaboration practices, which are central to project success in virtual settings. Similarly, [36] show that the absence of structured training in digital tools contributes to emotional strain and cognitive overload, both of which can hinder project timelines and team morale.

Although several professionals in this study developed and adapted personal strategies, such as setting discipline and routine, having dedicated workspaces, and time management, these were informal and inconsistent. [37] emphasize the importance of providing support to ensure that remote team members not only perform effectively but also sustain long-term well-being and engagement. The need for training and structured professional development in virtual teams is therefore crucial. Organizations must invest in learning initiatives that build competencies in digital project tools, privacy awareness, virtual etiquette, emotional intelligence, and collaborative leadership. Without such support, virtual project teams are still subject to issues such as burnout, inequality, communication breakdowns, and digital exclusion. This study confirms that success in remote and hybrid environments hinges not only on technological access but on intentional efforts to develop professional identity, digital fluency, and inclusive collaboration norms among all stakeholders.
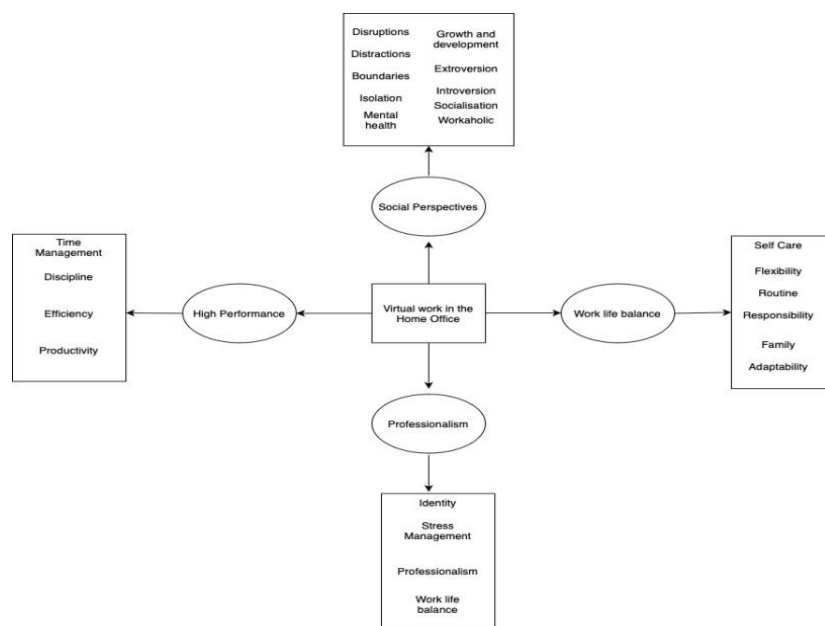


**Figure 1.** Virtual work in the home office

Figure 1 details the connection between the themes and representative quotes forming the basis of the findings of this research. The four themes of virtual work in the home office, High Performance, Work Life Balance, Professionalism, and Social Perspectives, shape the remote work experience. High Performance emphasizes the importance of time management, discipline, and productivity, which are essential for maintaining efficiency in a home setting. Work-life balance highlights the need for flexibility, routine, and adaptability to manage both personal and professional responsibilities. Professionalism focuses on sustaining a strong work identity and

managing stress. Social Perspectives explores the psychological and interpersonal effects of remote work, such as isolation, mental health, and the need for boundaries.

## 4.6. Discussion

This study reveals the nuanced and often contradictory experiences of professionals working within virtual teams in Mauritius. Remote collaboration shapes work routines but also ethical boundaries and identity narratives. Participants' reflections provide insights into the tension between work-life balance and boundaries, flexibility and overextension, and connection and isolation dynamics that are increasingly central to digital workspaces. The ethical dimension of remote work is deeply embedded in participants' experiences. [48] identifies five key risks in digital ethics: ethics shopping, ethics blue washing, ethics lobbying, ethics dumping, and ethics shirking, which are particularly relevant in remote contexts. The experience of HR with working across time zones without a hard stop reflects a form of ethical shrinking, where the burden of managing fatigue and boundaries is placed entirely on the team member. Yet, she adapts by integrating self-care practices like meal prepping and napping, crafting a resilient identity despite systemic pressures.

[49] theory of contextual integrity further illuminates how privacy norms are disrupted in remote work. Participants like VK and ME describe moments where domestic life intrudes into professional settings, for example, where children interrupt meetings, pets causing distractions. This challenges the traditional expectations of professionalism. These disruptions are not inherently unethical, but they violate contextual norms, leading to feelings of embarrassment or diminished credibility. However, as ME notes, shared experiences with colleagues provide emotional validation, helping to restore integrity and reinforce identity. The flexibility of remote work also enables ethical agency, which allows individuals to prioritize health, learning, and personal development. MT's decision to use extra time for studying and HR's integration of workouts and wellness into her routine reflect a shift toward self-authored ethical narratives. These choices align with [48] recommendation to translate ethical principles into practice.

Ultimately, the study shows that digital ethics is not an abstract concern but a lived reality for remote professionals. Identity, performance, and well-being are shaped by how individuals navigate ethical boundaries, create autonomy, and adapt to evolving norms.

## 5.0. Recommendation and Conclusion

Organisations should work in partnership with educators, HR specialists, and digital learning designers to create responsive training modules that prepare employees not only to function but to thrive in the project ecosystem. From an organisational perspective, virtual teams should have charters and tailored policies, considering key themes hindering a good work-life balance, such as isolation or workaholic tendencies. A sense of belonging, collaboration, and well-being must be encouraged in the form of buddy or mentorship programs with regular check-ins.

Managers must also have the relevant training to detect any detriment to work-life balance and provide the coaching or guidance needed to promote inclusion. Incorporating a routine of continuous feedback from team members will ensure a stronger belonging with increased engagement. Virtual coffee breaks, or fun activities, are

also recommended to promote team bonding. Support for mental health and wellness initiatives is also a way to accompany team members in their journey. Fostering a culture of balance, such as having designated blocks in calendars to reduce burnout. Time management training is a way to educate team members to better manage their schedules. Organizations must move beyond compliance and foster environments where ethical resilience is supported through clear guidelines, empathetic leadership, and inclusive digital cultures.

By having in place regulations or policies that put employee welfare and work-life balance first, organisations can combat negative issues that arise during remote employment. Enforcing the right to disconnect to safeguard employees' personal time and creating uniform remote work policies to define expectations around working hours and workloads are important steps. Fostering a healthy balance between work and personal life requires supporting flexible scheduling, appropriate breaks, and access to mental health resources.

To conclude, narrative allows for collecting stories to understand the participant's lived experiences [9]. Working from the home office can be highly effective; however, there are several downsides, such as juggling work and personal obligations, overcoming loneliness, and maintaining organisation. This study examines the lived experiences of participants working from their home office from a Narrative identity perspective. The stories collected were focussed on respondents in Mauritius. Key themes of work-life balance and productivity can be deduced. There were sub-themes such as isolation, workaholism, family, self-care, time management, discipline, flexibility, and distraction. The study suggests that while virtual team members adapt to remote working environments with varying challenges and successes, virtual work in the home office is shaped by multiple interconnected dimensions performance, balance, professionalism, and social context. Each area reflects the practical and emotional realities of remote work, from managing time and stress to maintaining boundaries and social connections. These experiences not only affect day-to-day functioning but also contribute to how individuals construct their personal and professional identities over time.

## 6.0. Future Suggestions

The following are suggested for future improvement of the work:

1) Conduct frequent data gathering and surveys which can contribute to having insights into the effects of remote employment as this way of working evolves further.

2) Future research can focus on further understanding the effects of sub-themes such as isolation and workaholic tendencies.

3) Narrative technique can be applied on a larger scale to have more insights into the lived experiences of participants within teams in other countries, working in shared spaces or other strict virtual work settings. A deeper understanding of the lived experience of virtual professionals will allow for bringing more support, training, and policy interventions.

4) Analyse generational perspectives on the phenomenon to understand views in digital confidence to understand if there is a need for collective professional development.

5) Understand the phenomena through the lens of other alternative theories such as Social Identity Theory.

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### Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to this work.

### Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

### Authors' contributions

All the authors made an equal contribution in the Conception and design of the work, Data collection, Drafting the article, and Critical revision of the article. All the authors have read and approved the final copy of the manuscript.

### Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the ethics committee of the Open University of Mauritius.

### Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable for this study.

### Informed Consent

All participants in this study voluntarily gave their informed consent prior to their involvement in the research.

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