

# Chapter Seven: Findings on Conflict, Well-Being and Coping Strategies

## 7.0 Introduction

Entering into the second chapter of findings from the research, the remaining three research questions will be addressed. As the contents of the teleworker's psychological contract has been ascertained and the influence of technology on teleworker behaviour has been observed, this chapter will address three research questions with the common theme of conflicting obligations. RQ3 will investigate if teleworkers hold conflicting obligations, RQ4 will look at how these conflicts impact teleworker's well-being and finally RQ5 will reflect on the coping strategies teleworkers applied to manage conflicting obligations.

## 7.1 Research Question Three - Does teleworking lead to conflicting obligations between work and home life?

One of the most researched areas in telework is the blurring of the work-family boundary (Lewis and Cooper, 1999; Fonner and Stache, 2012; Valcour and Hunter, 2005). In this research, conflicting obligations was the concept used to represent demands that blur the teleworker's home and working lives (Tremblay, Paquet and Najem, 2006). Many of the antecedents to work-family conflict identified by Michel et al. (2010) including role overload, supervisor support, dependents in the home and many more can all feasibility emanate from holding obligations to others, notably the organization and home sharers.

Flexibility in work scheduling does not necessarily lower work-family stressors as noted by Shinn et al. (1989) who found structured flexibility programs such as telework offered no significant reduction in conflict and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into

focus the difficulties associated with managing home and work demands at the same time (Zhang et al., 2020). Therefore, it is still pertinent to investigate whether teleworking brings additional conflicting obligations between work and home. The focus here is to consider the main classes of teleworkers' obligations to their work and home and how these obligations may clash in a way particular to teleworking.

Before considering how obligations conflict, the following section will unpack typical obligations that the teleworker holds to those they share their home with (as teleworkers' work domain obligations are detailed under research question one).

## 7.2 Obligations to Home Sharers

For this research, only participants that co-habit their home with a romantic partner or family members were selected, essentially ensuring that they had strong emotional ties to the people they lived with. A full breakdown of participant details is available in Table 5.2 and Appendix 4.

The types of obligations varied between the various sub-sections of the sample (parent, partner, junior family member) but there were levels of overlap, particularly between parents and partners. The main categories of obligation were interaction, caring, and household maintenance obligations. The importance of ascertaining obligations to home sharers is to be able to understand how teleworkers are affected by conflicting obligations, which will be fully investigated in section 7.3 of this thesis.

### 7.2.1 Interaction Obligations

Teleworkers noted obligations to engage with other members of their household in conversation, break sharing and mealtimes. These interaction obligations were often drawn with parallels that would be found in the office, such as when interrupted by a colleague with a question or 'water cooler chat'.

Furthermore, when teleworking in the presence of partners, some participants were wary that their teleworking could impact upon them. In particular the obligation to finish work on time and not to encroach on the evenings and weekends were felt:

*“She’s pretty good. I would say it definitely has erm ... you know, I would say that I actually feel pressure from her to make sure I kind of try and switch off at six. So, I can you know, leave my phone away and spend time with her but then that kind of builds the pressure up on me because such a stressful situation because I know I’ve got work to do. Na, she’s pretty understanding but I wouldn’t say she hasn’t made a comment and I know it does get to her a little bit” (Stephen, IT Consultant, 27)*

*“So, she’ll come home from work and she’ll expect me to, you know, then stop working at that point. So, I’ve felt that pressure but typically I’ll just say yeah I’m ready to finish or I’m not, it just depends on where I am and what I’m doing” (Victor, Software Engineer, 25)*

Obligations to partners has rarely been investigated in prior telework research, which normally focuses on spousal relationships only when dependent children are also involved (Tremblay, 2003). However, this research found obligations to partners/spouses when teleworking and further research on this topic could bring a more well-rounded understanding to the teleworking experience. Including partners/spouses and other familial obligations helps to capture the experience of a wider range of participants and include interactions that are still demanding the time and attention of the teleworker.

### 7.2.2 Caring Obligations

Present in all participants to a degree, but most prominent in the parents of the cohort, caring obligations consisted of responsibilities to dependent children and were generally shared to some extent with a partner.

*“I do all the cooking and we share dual responsibility for the little man. We both take him to and from school. I do all the sports activities. It’s now pretty balanced whereas previously the burden was on my wife and it was probably 70/30. She does a four-day week and I still travel quite a bit.” (Bruce, Regional HR Business Lead, 44)*

Bruce reveals that things have become more balanced recently, but alludes to the fact that previously his wife took on most of the childcare. This is repeated across the sample, as in the case of Sally who is typical of many women within the sample:

*“It’s care of them. So, it’s meals, homework, after school clubs, care of the dog... if the shed roof came off, I wouldn’t go and face it, my husband would still do that at the weekend. I pretty much do everything else.”* (Sally, Directorate Coordinator, 41)

Objectively, it often appeared that mothers within the sample took on more than half of the co-parenting, although they would reflect that they felt things were shared and aimed few negative aspersions at their partners. Where responsibilities were split, even if not split evenly, co-parenting was common with teleworking parents and often both parents had flexible arrangements, leading to some negotiations:

*“So, that level of flexibility is there as and when I need it to be that I can just say to my colleagues, ‘I’ve got to go. My daughter’s ill. I’m off.’ So, there’ll be the odd thing that is with senior managers that you don’t really want to have to drop, in which case my husband and I play trade-off on the phone as to who’s got what important meeting when and we balance it between us [laughs].”* (Daisy, Lead Business Architect, 41)

Caring obligations, as one may expect, carried with them the most emotional weight and for almost all the parents in the sample had the power to override any other obligation:

*“A few of roles ago we had a director who had a bee in her bonnet that there’s never anybody in the office on a Friday... so there was a push to move flexible working so that there were people in the office on a Friday, and to shift the arrangements. But I can’t shift my arrangements because my son’s school for half the year they finish at twelve-thirty on a Friday so there’s nothing I can do about it. I don’t mind working in the morning but it would have to be from home as I can’t physically get back to north London for one o’clock. So, I said that’s my red line and you can challenge me on it if you like but you’re not going to get very far because if I have to pick one, I’m going to pick my son over my director.”* (Anna, Analyst, 41)

Anna provides as much flexibility to her organizations demands as possible, but reaches a ‘red line’ where her childcare arrangements are threatened. With childcare obligations taking primary concern for many participants, particularly women within the sample, there can be an unavoidable doubling up of responsibility (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993).

### 7.2.3 Household Maintenance Obligations

Categorised as needs indirectly relating to those the teleworker shares their home with, household maintenance includes laundry, gardening, appointments with tradesmen and shopping. Often these tasks are taken in the stride of the teleworker:

*“From home, if I’m at home and time permits, which is predominantly the case, I will stick the washing on, I will stick the tumble drier on, I will do the washing up, I’ve no problem with that. Also, I will put the dinner on, if my wife hasn’t already done it... but it’s just more convenient at home, it’s very handy, especially as I had a delivery today, I’m at home so I can pick that up and go from there.”* (Richard, Payroll Consultant, 53)

And even constitute a well-being practice:

*“Yeah, it does feel like win-win because I get to have that good balance. Where I’m not thinking oh when I get home at half-five I need to you know, go for a run, put the wash on, make dinner, go shopping, blah, blah, blah. Because I can like almost spread it out in the day and that to me that does make me feel grateful.”* (Rose, Student Recruitment Coordinator, 25)

Within the obligations felt toward home sharers, caring responsibilities are decidedly more important to participants. In comparison to household maintenance, caring obligations carry intertwined emotions such as guilt if not attended to properly (See findings section 6.4.4), whereas household tasks are seen as an opportunity to clear duties and benefit from increased leisure time. If household tasks are neglected, this was due to being not as important as dealing with a dependent child or family member. In comparison to interaction obligations with a partner or non-dependent family members, there is again less responsibilities tied to being available. Negative consequences are more likely when obligations relate directly to another person, dependent or not, than toward household responsibilities. Therefore, in hierarchical terms, caring responsibilities of a dependent child hold the most emotional weight, followed by the responsibility to being present for a partner, then final maintenance of the household and associated admin. These assertions are based across many responses within the sample, often following similar phrasings. For

example, participants would state that they 'had to' or 'needed to' attend to childcare, rather than 'like to' or 'it's nice to' spend time with a partner and household tasks attended to 'if they can'. There were also clear reflections of emotion when speaking of children than partners or household obligations.

This research helps to reaffirm the importance of caring responsibilities above any other topic when considering teleworking and reinforces the held belief that teleworking is most important to parents of dependent children whom they hold a direct and emotional obligation to (Maruyama and Tietze, 2012; Sullivan and Lewis, 2001).

### 7.3 Conflicting Obligations in the Current Research

When holding dual obligations with those who share the same physical space and cross the same timeframes, conflict between the home and work is possible (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985) and demonstrated on numerous occasions within the current sample. Conflicting obligations for teleworkers draw parallels from the established directions of work to home conflict and home to work conflict.

When choosing terminology, work-home conflict runs closely alongside work-family conflict, work-life conflict and work-home interference literature. The former terminology has been chosen as it is more readily associated with the home interactions experienced by teleworkers within the sample. However, research from across these terms will be used interchangeably to reference the findings (Aslam et al., 2011; Bakker and Geurts, 2004; Bell, Rajendran, and Theiler, 2012; Delanoëije, Verbruggen and Germeys, 2019).

The specific notion of obligations is drawn from conceptualisations on the beliefs held within the psychological contract (Herriot and Pemberton, 1997). In this instance, the teleworker will also hold a psychological contract with their home sharers whom they hold responsibilities to. Conflict between work and home occurs when two competing obligations require the same timeframe or drain a common resource from the teleworker, such as their attention or energy.

One of the more notable findings from the research on conflicting obligations in this sample was in fact the comparative lack of conflict between work and home responsibilities. The

following sub-sections will use data gathered in the research to show the bi-directionality of conflicting obligations and the manifestation of conflicting obligations, in their severity, malleability and persistence.

### 7.3.1 Examples of Work-Home Conflict

In the direction of conflicting obligation, the researcher will draw upon examples where obligations to work intrude on, hamper or overpower obligations that the teleworker had to their home sharer. As discussed under the previous research question, the autonomy exchange is of utmost importance to the teleworker and this exchange shows the effort teleworkers will undertake to maintain a system relatively free from conflict. Linda, who is very protective of the ability to fit her work around her home life reacts strongly to her new manager threatening to change her previous arrangement in which she had full autonomy over scheduling her working week which allowed her to factor many personal and household tasks into her day. Now her new manager wishes to access Linda's online diary to track her working time, presenting a potential conflict:

*“She doesn't know the job... we're struggling with her at the moment because it looks like she's going to be micromanaging. She said she needs access to everybody's diaries. She wants full access. So, what she's got at the moment is she can see all my electronic calendar busy/free whatever, but she wants to know exactly what we're doing all the time.*

*Researcher: How does that make you feel?*

*Like she can bugger off if she thinks she's gonna get that from me. If that's how she's gonna manage I won't stay... they won't want to lose me so if it became a conflict between the two, because I am really good value for money having been up [in the organization] and now I do it with my eyes shut, always got the biggest case load, I'm completely on top of it. So, I think she would probably have to back off if it came to me challenging that.” (Linda, Social Worker, 57)*

Here the teleworker holds themselves in high esteem, believing their past efforts deserving of increased autonomy, but the new manager hopes to exert a higher level of control upon her teleworking arrangements. To Linda, the prospect of losing her autonomy is a deal

breaker; however, neither party has breached the psychological contract, preferring to stay in an implicit equilibrium where ambiguity allows the system to keep functioning, rather than risk bringing the discussion out into the explicit open. Protecting psychological contracts are important for teleworkers, they desire autonomy over their working days to manage the diverse obligations they hold.

However, intrusion from the organization will often lead to home obligations falling to the wayside, as in the case of Kris when he receives communications out of hours:

*“I do feel annoyed, but my OCD means I want to look at it and I’m somebody that will just respond. It does conflict me and I do need to get better at it. What really attacks my morality is when I’m not spending time with my daughter and I was reflecting on this when I was on gardening leave, if I could take a period, like a few years out you know if you ever have another kid and I can just dedicate myself to spending time with my kids for their formative years, I’d buy into that, I’d be happy with that.”* (Kris, Retail Director, 40)

Kris reflects on a preferred future outcome where he is better able to compartmentalise his work and home space. Later in his interview, he goes on to state that his teleworking arrangement does give him the opportunity to spend more time with family, but conversely this does not solve the conflicting obligations to work and family as he is still required to juggle these responsibilities in the same place (home) at the same time (a long and changeable working day). One of the most common conflicting obligations in the current research is when work overcomes childcare, and it poses a sensitive topic:

*“...my husband has had to pick up the slack and it’s been a bit difficult... I mean in theory we can still have more clashes, you know I can see times where a client desperately needs something yet I’m supposed to be off at home or picking my son up or something and now that I’ve got two [children] I’m gonna be picking up two from the nursery. I dunno, I think the way, one of the best strategies to deal with it, is to keep someone else involved at work, more intermittently in what you are doing, on all your stuff.”* (Angela, Senior Solicitor, 28)

By having individuals in the home and work spheres that aid Angela at crunch points, she is able to continue working but is clearly concerned with how to cope when she returns from



maternity leave and has to care for her second child, as work often seems to force its way into precedence in her life. However, teleworkers do not always give in to demands from their organizations. When asked what they expected the organization to do to enable teleworking Anna said:

*“I suppose subliminally to not make me feel negative or guilty on those days. I get quite irritated if I get repeatedly asked to join a meeting on days that are clearly marked in my diary as non-working days. I will say to them - if you want me to participate in the conversation then you need to put it on a day I can do. I cannot, unless it’s an outlier or special favour, join a weekly Friday meeting. Both because it’s not a working day for me, I’m not paid to work that day, it’s not part of my schedule but also because they will enjoy the benefits of a three-year-old in the background if you try and involve me in that conversation. That’s not fair to anyone else in that conversation and it’s not fair to him either.” (Anna, Analyst, 41)*

Here Anna identifies that the requests from her organizations are unfair as it constitutes unpaid overtime and would result in her compromising the care of her child. She perceives an attempt by her employer to make her feel guilty, although we cannot know if this is the employer’s intention, the fact remains that this plays on the mind of the teleworker as an implicit obligation, albeit one they refuse to engage in, in this case. Anna’s example is another threat to her autonomy, but as in previous cases, this is not a complete violation of the psychological contract as Anna will allow it as an ‘outlier or special favour’ – going above and beyond on non-working days is the teleworker’s contribution to the autonomy exchange (availability for autonomy) previously mentioned under the findings section 6.3.2.2. Although buying their autonomy through productivity and availability would appear to increase the likelihood of work to home conflicts, the inherent flexibility that autonomy brings helps the teleworking system to continue without work to home conflicts developing into major issues.

### 7.3.2 Examples of Home-Work Conflict

Reversing the flow of conflicting obligations, the following are excerpts of the teleworkers’ experience where obligations to their home sharers is forcing precedence over those held to their organization.

*“I’ve been working late a lot at the moment, this started with actually my daughter being poorly, I’ve run out of annual leave for the year, so I went home to look after her the other day and she ended up needing some mummy cuddles and fell asleep on my lap, so I didn’t get to do any work. So, I was down by five hours and that was on a Friday, the end of the week, so I couldn’t really do much at all. But, I mean, I’m senior enough as well, but my department would trust me to make up that time, and I’ve made that up four times over this week anyway.” (Lydia, Overseas Employee and Compensation Aid, 38)*

When home obligations do override the teleworker’s day, there is often a penance that the teleworker must pay, in Lydia’s case making up hours. This theme is common and here, Gary talks through a typical day that is disturbed by the school run:

*“So, the Wednesday I’d do the school run, then I’d log on, I work up until three o’clock, so might have, like, half an hour to have some food. Then, I’ll collect the kids, bring them back, park them in front of the telly. If I need to do any emails, I’ll do the emails, whatever. Then, I’ll cook them dinner. So, I’ll probably log off at about four-ish or four-thirty-ish. Do them dinner, whatever else, da-de-da, wash them. You know, everything else that needs to be done, and when they’re asleep – let’s say nine o’clock they’re asleep – I’ll probably sort the kitchen out and then I’ll log on and do whatever else I need to do.” (Gary, Economic Manager, 42)*

Elongation of the workday in an attempt to avoid conflict is a known behaviour within telework (Davis and Polonko, 2001; Sullivan and Lewis, 2001), although it allows the teleworker to complete both tasks, the effect of the conflict is still imparted on the individual as they become overworked.

Although it is not always possible to simply dissect how one obligation appears to override or disrupt another, it does give a different conceptual approach to an under-researched area: the mechanisms involved in managing home and work whilst teleworking. By understanding role conflict through a system of psychological contracts we can understand it as a system where by individuals can manage their psychological contracts across different parties. By managing conflicting obligations through their own flexibility, teleworkers are

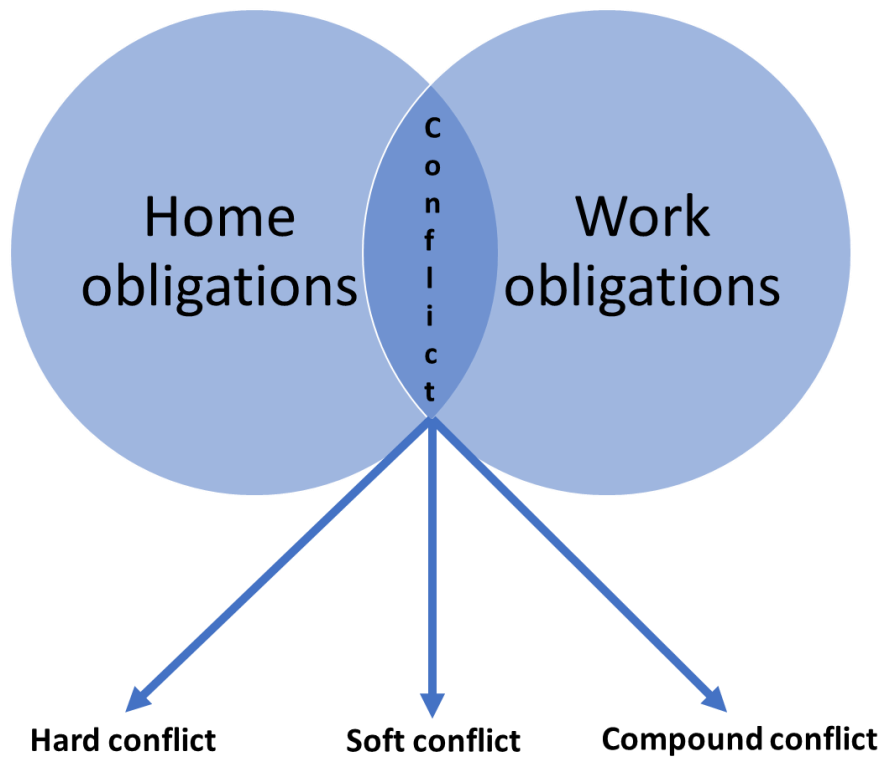
able to prevent escalating to psychological contract breach, even if this is detrimental to their own lived experience.

Looking toward the management of conflict, the attempts made to prevent an outpouring of dissatisfaction was in itself a sign that that conflicting obligations exist, even when managed. This topic will be revisited in detail when assessing coping strategies under the fifth research question in this thesis.

Across both work-home conflict and home-work conflict, the amount of conflict was tempered considerably by the teleworker's autonomy in their roles, but this does not mean conflict disappears entirely. The next section will attempt to bring a nuanced vision of teleworker conflict.

## 7.4 Defining Types of Conflict

After establishing the bi-directionality of conflict, the research turns to explaining how the conflict is felt. The strength and features of the conflicting obligations within the study are sorted into three categorisations: hard, soft and compound. Below is a visualisation of the three types of conflict that emerged during the data collection and analysis. Following this, a table that identifies the key features and consequences of these types of conflict.



**Figure 7.1** Teleworker obligations and types of conflict

Conflict type	Features	Consequences
Hard conflict	When one obligation/set of obligations take precedence over another (normally home v work or vice versa), where keeping the obligation to one party will result in failure to serve another	Loss of autonomy Stress increase Letting a party down
Soft conflict	When one obligation/set of obligations take precedence over another, but both parties can be served through juggling of schedules	Mild inconvenience Sense of accomplishment if well managed Gratitude to organization/home for allowing flexibility
Compound conflict	A collection of soft conflicts that have become the norm	Acceptance of conflict as a norm Remixing of home and family life

**Table 7.1** The key features and consequences of three types of conflict

### 7.4.1 Hard Conflict

To define a hard conflict in this research, it is a conflict where two obligations occur simultaneously and choosing to fulfil one will result in an inability to do another. Hard conflicts were characterised as causing distress at the unsurmountable crunch point between work and home obligations, then often followed by a period of guilt laden reflection. Hard conflict was sporadic among sampled participants, but was a serious matter when it occurred. For Stephen, his work encroached on time he needed to complete his PhD, he had managed this situation adequately in the main, but when he could no longer find time for his relationship with his partner a hard conflict ensued:

*“If I’m brutally honest, I actually went to see a counsellor about it four weeks ago... the stress was really reaching the roof and I couldn’t be productive anymore because my anxiety was so high and that anxiety also actually came from my relationship with my partner as well because I feel like I have to switch off at six, you know, to put time into the relationship, because I know that you can’t have a relationship if you just completely neglect the other person. So, then my relationship also felt pressured, my work felt pressured, and everything was fighting against each other and I mean, from a session [of counselling], it was quite obvious, I didn’t give myself any time to actually make sure I’m doing the things I enjoy doing to make sure I actually feel relaxed.”* (Stephen, IT Consultant, 27)

Reaching this point within one year of working for this company showed that Stephen was subject to immense pressure to deliver for a demanding job, in addition to attempting to finish his PhD and maintain a relationship. Three-way conflicting obligations had forced Stephen’s own well-being to the bottom of his priorities. The conflict is in clear focus and illustrated around a specific time of the day when Stephen feels the need to stop working at 6pm to begin a period of relaxation with his partner, but his other obligations made this impossible to engage in as the autonomy exchange could not be flexed any further.

Angela had been teleworking for several years when the opportunity to move to a four-day week was trailed to allow her to spend more time with her young son, however times where she was due to be caring for him can often be overtaken by work demands that appear at short notice:

*"I mean there are times the two have clashed, work has ended up taking priority and I've ended up dropping home stuff to do the work and essentially my husband has had to pick up the slack and it's been a bit difficult." (Angela, Senior Solicitor, 28)*

When Angela's husband picks up the slack this can lead to resentment and annoyance of the arrangement from the husband, for instance when Angela was drawn into work on a non-working day whilst she was trialing moving to four days per week:

*"...in the afternoon I came back, did more work, it was awful. Then I was in tears at the end of the day because it was... and my husband was really cross, because also, it's worse if you are supposed to be there and present and you're not, so all day my son is saying, 'What's Mummy doing? Is Mummy coming down? Is Mummy doing this, can I play with Mummy? What's Mummy doing?' Because I was upstairs and he knew I was supposed to be spending time with him. It would have been better for me to have not done that just gone to work that day and not being there and then no one would have expected me to have been around and my husband would have got on with the day." (Angela, Senior Solicitor, 28)*

This hard conflict has had a detrimental effect on the teleworker who was not only distressed having not been able to spend time with her husband and son, but the additional factors that her husband needed to look after their child and although that was not unusual, he now had to deal with the added upset their child felt from Angela's inability to maintain her familial obligations. Beyond the teleworker's emotions, this clearly also had a detrimental effect on her home sharers.

Not all conflicts in the experience of teleworking were as clear cut and obviously detrimental as these examples, the next section will focus on the more subtle interplay of soft conflicts noted within the study.

#### 7.4.2 Soft Conflict

Many respondents described what the researcher will refer to as 'soft conflict'. In these instances, work and personal activities do counteract each other, but the conflict can be managed via an array of coping mechanisms. These available flexibilities result in soft conflicts concluding without a dramatic 'crunch-time' outcome. Blurring of boundaries can

contribute to soft conflict in a gentler fashion than direct, hard conflicts. Working together from home with one's spouse can be a cause of soft conflict, especially if you add in the care of children:

*"When he [husband] is at home that can be distracting. Yeah, so can be a little bit frustrating, but you kind of get used to it. It's more frustrating when we've got our foster daughter and children. So, when they're around, then that doesn't work very well.*

Researcher: *Okay, so they, they come in and out?*

*Come in and out. Yeah. So, they've got their own home, but sometimes we might be doing looking after childcare. So recently we've had them stay for like a week during half term. Yeah, that's difficult because if I'm trying to work from home, they want me to play. If they physically know I'm in the house, yeah, they don't really take no for an answer."* (Patricia, Senior Statistician, 51)

Perhaps at its softest, the conflict of home interests is almost imperceptible as Bruce and his wife enjoy their time together, but they distract and distance themselves from the work they need to do:

*"Once you're both home working I think it becomes distracting as we are like "shall we go for a coffee? What shall we have for lunch?" it's a bit like being in the office where you think as you're both working from home you can have that informal chat, but you forget that you're working for completely different organizations with nothing in common."* (Bruce, Regional HR Business Lead, 44)

Interestingly, in this research, both Bruce and his wife Miranda were interviewed (separately) and both go on to explain that their work often has to be completed in the evening, potentially suggesting the coffees, lunches and chats that they enjoy during the day leads to catching up on work in the evening. Soft conflict can distract teleworkers and lead to a time and productivity discrepancy that needs to be addressed down the line, such as out of hours working. These knock-on effects are particularly relatable to teleworkers as they are already equipped and experienced with working in their own home setting.

While Bruce and Miranda's situation is born from both sharing similar roles, having a lack of understanding for a partner's working from home schedule can also lead to conflict when the home sharer expects extra from the teleworker:

*"My fiancé definitely has this thing about saying, 'Oh well, you're at home; do you think you could do this?' So, for example the shopping. For the past month I've gone shopping on my own because I may go in my lunch break or before work and log on at ten instead of doing it after work when he gets home at six, or if I say we've run out of like bananas or tea bags or something and he will be like ah, 'Will you nip down the shop in your lunch break then?' I'm sort of like, 'Okay, well, you can just pick them up on the way home?' Now it doesn't feel like a big issue, but he definitely feels like I have more time than he does. Which is true in some ways then at the same time sometimes I do have to remind him actually, I do have a job to do. I know I'm here, but still I've got to focus." (Rose, Student Recruitment Coordinator, 25)*

When the teleworker chalks up household tasks that they complete on their teleworking time it can develop into a misunderstanding in the psychological contract that they hold with their partner. In this case Rose's partner may be assuming she has the extra time to complete these tasks, if Rose feels hard done by in this situation there is potential for spousal conflict. Rose manages the conflict by flexing her schedule, logging onto work later or using her lunch hour, and these changes hold potential detriments to her organizational obligations and her self-care. The soft conflict discussed by Rose has been occurring for a few months as she is quite new to teleworking but it shows signs of becoming a routine, when soft conflicts become continual and consistent, they can grow in terms of disgruntlement for the teleworkers into a compound conflict.

### 7.4.3 Compound Conflict

The concern of continued minor conflicts is the effect of adding one instance upon another until the pressure builds to a greater extent where the teleworker will face a serious negative consequence. When discussing telework conflict, Gary was asked if there was ever a crunch period:



*“Yeah, all the time. Well, actually, this January, because my daughter is sitting the entrance exams for some of the private schools. We’re sort of debating which way to go and preparing for that, it’s like a constant battle to get her to do stuff and that was a crunch, because my wife has stuff to do for her Masters, I’ve got deadlines at work, she’s got exams. So, it’s, like, everything – the car broke down, you know? So, it’s, like, de-de-de-de-de, a long list of things that all happened at the same time.*

Researcher: *What was the outcome?*

*We shout at each other. I mean, the outcome is you get it done eventually, but it’s a tough time for a few weeks. Yeah. The honest answer is, you know, at the time we try our best, but it never works really well, it just, kind of happens, but it’s hard.”* (Gary, Economic Manager, 42)

Solving compound conflict is perhaps harder than dealing with individual flashpoints as they develop slowly over time. These points are expected by the organization as part of the deal and often normalised by the teleworker as their working routine. Consequently, the obligations to work long hours and undertake caregiving responsibilities can wear individuals down:

*“I’m physically tired, mentally tired, emotionally wrought out because of the hours I’ve been working at the moment... My husband is nagging me as well, because it impacts him and the kids, as well, so I guess there’s an element of that.”* (Lydia, Compensation Aid, 38)

When teleworkers are exposed to conflicting obligations from home and work life in this way, it is their own personal time that is affected first and foremost. This can lead to a decrease in well-being (Shaw, Andrey and Johnson, 2001) and create a situation that becomes hard to escape from. Managing these dual obligations could lead to questioning if there is a loss of one’s overall autonomy in life through this process, which if maintained, would appear likely to leave the teleworker exhausted. The teleworkers from the sample often accepted certain conflicting elements which could be initiated from both work and home spheres, often stating that things would be considerably worse without teleworking arrangements. However, some indication that teleworkers have fallen into dysfunctional routines due to acceptance and gratitude of their circumstances can also be made.

Kris encapsulates how losing the clear separation of work and home life brings conflicting obligations as he has to be an 'everything person' when he teleworks:

*"...that neatly takes us on to the mental well-being piece and I think this is a bigger problem. So, you had the safe zones, which are clearly demarked, work and home life, I think that created some quite neat structures that our minds could accommodate, when they blurred together, that's tough, I think, particularly when you're a parent. There's sometimes an expectation that you're doing all of those things at once. You're not, you're not the work person at work and the home person at home, you're this kind of everything person, you're a bit of a parent, you're doing a bit of the dishes, you're also doing your work and that's tough. I think mentally, there's a lot to take on there."* (Kris, Retail Director, 40)

Mental strain derived from the continued expectation of being able to handle different obligations could lead to a detrimental well-being outcome for those experiencing compound conflict.

Although it is known that organizational factors can affect when individuals experience breaches and to what degree (Robinson and Morrison, 2000), there is seldom investigation into persistent small breaches that teleworkers with compound conflict endure in psychological contract research, nor whether different types of breaches are considered more or less serious. Investigating the impact of compound small breaches within the psychological contract opens a new aspect of understanding the continued management that goes on in maintaining psychological contracts.

## 7.5 Technologys Role on the Levels of Conflicting Obligations

As previously attested to in work-life conflict literature, removal of communication boundaries paves the way for increased conflict (Köffer et al., 2015; Kossek, 2016), but in the current research, teleworkers have adopted a number of workarounds to prevent serious incidents of conflict.

With the levels of conflicting obligations now established (hard, soft and compound), and the viewpoint of hyperconnected teleworking technology introduced in the previous

chapter, we can note that hard conflicts are more readily avoided as temporal flexibility allows work to take place from any location:

*“So as an accountant I used to have two massive filing cabinets full of everything, and now everything is on that laptop. At one point I had to take my daughter to Italy, to drop her off.*

Research: *To Italy, the country?*

*Yeah, and my bosses were on holiday and it was month end and I was like ‘I know it’s really inconvenient.’ But I had my laptop and I could just go to the hotel room and I was doing it in the airport lounge and I can just do stuff. I’ve got everything. If someone wants a tiny receipt for an expense claim or an invoice or invoicing customers then everything is there.” (Miranda, Finance Manager, 47)*

However, technology potentially increases the chance of soft and compound conflicts as teleworkers blur the boundaries between home and family life:

*“Sunday night was probably my worst night for it. Because you get a nice dinner on a Sunday. And I’ll sit watch TV and thinking oh God I’m thinking about the week already. You’re going to feel it starting to sort of claw at you, God it’s close, its coming and you get the temptation to pick up your phone and get your email and why did I look at my email? Boss has sent something through, shit. I need this done before nine o’clock on Monday morning... and once you’ve done it, and you’ve seen it’s there, it’s in your mind and once it’s there in your mind, you think, well, I can get up at five o’clock in the morning to do it. Or can do it now. I’d rather do it now very quickly, get it out of the way and then try and enjoy the rest of my Sunday night because you know, it’s not there.” (Sven, Sales Manager, 46)*

Although this encroachment of work through technology is not exclusive to teleworkers, the experience of working regularly within their home potentially makes them more susceptible. In the sample, it proved to be a common issue. Kris goes on to add that he feels the strain of having his work and home space merged together:

*“...mentally straining, it affects your home relationships. You never quite know where you are, that there’s no demarcation between your home life and your work life.*

*Because often your workspace is your home space at the same time. So, it can be mentally challenging, I think.” (Kris, Retail Director, 40)*

With enhanced technology allowing teleworkers to do more work remotely, the effect of conflicting obligations could be seen as a double-edged sword, with less direct conflict and more subtle disturbances, as work and home life are juggled. A further example could be drawn from the recurring theme of the commute – teleworkers were generally pleased to avoid commuting, but many participants acknowledged that this led to starting work earlier and finishing later. As with many aspects of teleworking, a change in one sense can cause equal and opposite effects in another direction.

## 7.6 Research Three Question Summary

The interplay of conflicting obligations adds an additional element to research into the psychological contract. In the traditional sense of the psychological contract the teleworker holds with their employer, they face a range of expectations and obligations which are clearly challenging, and at times, appear to show breaches. Breaches, as Morrison and Robinson (1997) describe, are a failure for the other party to deliver on what was promised. Conflicting obligations show the potential to cause breaches, but by flexing their routines, teleworkers are able to maintain obligations to work and home, thus avoiding many of these potential breaches. When psychological contracts were breached in the sample, typically through not affording autonomy or requirements to work excessive hours, these breaches did not develop into violations - the affective, emotional reaction to a breach occurring. This suggests that teleworkers hold quite robust psychological contracts, and that through the buffer of their telework flexibility and gratitude for their teleworking opportunity, can cause a repeated series of conflicting obligation scenarios without the feeling of the psychological contract being breached or violated.

A conclusion can be made that teleworkers inherently look to secure highly implicit psychological contracts, as this fits well with the concept of high levels of personal autonomy. To be able to manage the complexities of home and work-life, highly flexible implicit psychological contracts are key and teleworkers accept the conflicts they experience from the organization into their home in order to maintain the status quo.

Within the status quo, technology operates a dual role for teleworkers. It both presents items that can increase conflicting obligations, such as the intrusion of work into the home space, but then presents solutions as the mobility of devices adds to the places and times work can be undertaken. By using that flexibility teleworkers can soften hard conflicts between work and home.

The aforementioned additional element concerns the possible three-way psychological contract interactions that include the teleworker's home sharers in addition to the organization. When the teleworker's obligations conflict, they are placed into a position where they are at risk of breaching one of their psychological contracts, typically when the conflict is hard and there is a discernible 'crunch' point. In the cases of soft conflict, the teleworker is able to exercise high degrees of flexibility to juggle their schedules and fulfil both contracts to some extent, potentially at cost to their own personal time. Continual management of soft conflicts is tricky and can be extrapolated to form the concept of compound conflicts, where the expected ongoing effects of avoiding breach would lead to a degradation in the employees well-being. More on this topic will be assessed later in the next section on well-being effects.

The application of a new way to understand conflict by realising it manifests not only in heated flash points (hard), but also in more subtle ways (soft), that can accrue over time (compound) paves the way to understanding telework pressures in a way that has not been used before. It also opens up psychological contract research to become more detailed when assessing complicated relationships rather than focusing on clear breaches of the psychological agreements at work.

Teleworking undoubtedly does lead to some conflicting obligations between home and work life, the mechanisms of which are reflected in their psychological contracts. The following section will look to illuminate the potential well-being effects of conflicting obligations before the final research question will seek to attend to the perceived lack of conflict noted by many participants by unpacking the coping strategies of teleworkers.

## 7.7 Research Question Four - What Impact do Conflicting Obligations Have on the Well-Being of Teleworkers?

From the research findings so far, it has been ascertained that conflicting obligations exist for modern teleworkers. Now the focus of the thesis will turn specifically to the effect these conflicting obligations have on the well-being of the teleworking participants of the sample.

## 7.8 Context of Well-Being in the Current Research

Well-being is a broadly discussed topic. To begin this section of findings, the researcher will map out how well-being is situated in the current research and the merits of finding individualistic meaning of well-being.

Defining well-being presents challenges due to its idiosyncratic nature. Jahoda's 1958 work attempts to identify criteria that promote psychological health, which formed the basis of mental health research across the next thirty years, when mental health research moved away from defining mental health as an absence of disease and toward a state of well-being (Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Waterman, 1993). According to Harter, Schmidt and Keyes (2003), in the workplace, well-being is understood through a process of meeting basic needs, reminiscent of Herzberg's two-factor theory (1959), and more recently self-determination theory (Gagné and Deci, 2005), and workers' well-being has often been considered alongside a wide range of terms and conditions (e.g., fair remuneration) and job characteristics (e.g., autonomy).

Although there may have been merits in approaching the participants with questioning around a pre-made structure of what employee well-being should contain, the researcher noted issues with this approach. As the teleworker is engaged in multiple spheres of interaction (work and home), focusing on elements designed to understand workplace well-being could fail to capture the entire teleworker experience. In addition, taking into account the aforementioned idiosyncratic nature of an individual's well-being and the format of semi-structured interviewing, there was an opportunity for the teleworker's to 'self-define' their well-being. During the interviews, participants were asked to convey what the term well-being meant to them, then articulate how these factors related to their teleworking

practices. Bruce typifies the main features of well-being that were identified across the sample, namely mental ease and physical activity:

*“There are several elements, first and foremost is the mental well-being, so for me that’s my ability to concentrate, focus and compartmentalise and not let everything blur into one. I know when things are getting on top of me because my anger with the kids rises, it’s that. There is also a physical state, so again when work becomes too much, exercise becomes very little, which for me has a significant impact on my wellbeing.” (Regional HR Business Lead, 44)*

By approaching well-being with each participant’s personal definition, the researcher avoided pushing biases of what well-being *should* mean to participants and what elements it *should* contain. By using this method, well-being was well articulated throughout the sample and participants were, on the whole, conscious of the importance well-being has within their lives. No clear demarcation could be made against the age, gender, career stage or job role in terms of the importance well-being had to the individuals.

Well-being is cited as one of the most paradoxical outcomes of teleworking practice (Anderson, Kaplan and Vega, 2015; Song and Gao, 2020; Standen, Daniels and Lamond, 1999). The current research will investigate the role conflicting obligations has upon individual’s well-being.

## 7.9 The Role of Conflicting Obligations in Teleworker Well-Being

As identified in the previous sections, conflict manifests for teleworkers in varying degrees which have differing impacts upon well-being. The following sections will examine how the differing levels of conflicts which were previously identified (hard, soft and compound) influence the self-reported well-being experiences of the teleworking participants.

### 7.9.1 Hard Conflicts and Well-Being

When faced with hard conflicts, the teleworker must make a difficult decision that will invariably lead to letting one party down. These parties will normally consist of the line

manager, representing the organization, or a home sharer, representing family. Hard conflicts created the most detriment to well-being.

Hard conflicts threaten the autonomy of the teleworker as they are unable to remain in control of their working pattern, causing a knock-on detrimental well-being effect. Most often hard conflicts occurred due to a time crunch scenario, usually emanating from an increased workload:

*“There was a Christmas dinner that my friends have every year, a group of about forty of us getting together and I just couldn’t get done what I needed to get done in that time. I knew it was going to be late and so I had to just make a phone call and say, ‘I’m not gonna make it’, to a barrage of abuse at the other end. ‘Come on, you can’t do this’ but I had to get this [work] done tonight. That night I ended up finishing doing what I was doing at gone two o’clock in morning.*

*Researcher: How did that make you feel?*

*Pretty pissed off.” (Sven, Sales Manager, 46)*

Here, the negative well-being effect is missing out on socialising due to workload, which was then facilitated by teleworking, allowing Sven to continue working late into the evening without any friction that may have occurred if he was in the office, where signals to stop working may have kicked in. In this scenario work demands trump other commitments, but this was not always the case:

*“I run a kids club with my wife on the estate and I have an agreement with my work where I finish a bit early on the Thursday so I can go do that and my work was piling up, but I also had like a bunch of things I need to get done before 5pm for this kids club. I was kinda like oh, [hyperventilating actions] I can’t do both of them, I can’t do all of this, like which one do I do? I kinda thought the responsibility was on me so I’m you know, I’m working from home. If you’re in work, you can’t have that same struggle. You know, in the end I actually did the home stuff and then caught up thenext day.” (Victor, Software Engineer, 25)*



Although work did not take precedence, stressors to Victor's well-being arose by the difficult decision making. Furthermore, the work need did not disappear, but was moved on to the next day, presumably adding pressure to that day's work instead.

Whilst these examples help to illustrate examples of conflicting obligations during teleworking, the following excerpt from Stephen adds layers as to why teleworkers could be particularly vulnerable to conflict:

*“With the PhD is a positive side as well because I've often used my work hours to do that, but obviously, that's not necessarily in my control... You don't really have control of your time. You can't set barriers. You can't set rules. Because you're not interacting with the same people every day, you don't see their faces, you don't have that human connection, I feel like there's probably less empathy when working over technology. So, I've worked with some people quite high within my company and they'll just send you a message and they'll be like 'I need these ten slides tomorrow' and they know it means you have to work overnight.”* (Stephen, IT Consultant, 27)

Stephen tries to squeeze his PhD work into his teleworking days, but reflects on how he has very little control over whether he will get that opportunity. Without autonomy over his scheduling, he is at the mercy of colleagues with whom he feels disconnected, due to their relationship being purely digital and lacking the empathy he may expect from physical colleagues.

Hard conflicts negatively impact well-being and increase stress through the feeling of loss of control and the process of hard decision making. Fortunately for this cohort, hard conflicts that affected well-being were not proliferated across the sample in the numbers one may expect given the prominence of conflict in previous teleworking research, and given the high workloads of teleworkers in the sample. Some explanation for this can be offered in the management of conflicts and that teleworkers may be adept at avoiding hard conflicts by shuffling demands, which lead to what have been termed soft conflicts.

### 7.9.2 Soft Conflicts and Well-Being

Unlike hard conflicts, where resolving one demand leaves the teleworker unable to meet another, soft conflicts can be managed in order to maintain the needs of those at home and

in the organization. Soft conflicts can result in the teleworker feeling inconvenienced, but alternatively, they feel gratitude for their flexibility which allows them to succeed in soft conflict management, which in turn provides a sense of accomplishment. Beginning with gratitude, Gail has a hectic work and home life, but her company gives her the flexibility to manage both:

*“There aren’t many work positions and companies like this that offer this type of flexibility, so yes, it is life changing to be able to do everything that I need to do family wise and be able to work and to fit everything around.” (Gail, Business Manager, 50)*

Autonomy plays an important role in the management of soft conflicts; the teleworker is able to use workarounds that allow conflicts to be lessened or avoided. These workarounds often involved the teleworker using their temporal and spatial flexibilities that are inherent within their roles:

*“I normally work from eight to four-fifteen, but school drop off is at eight so by the time I get back its eight-thirty, so I’m slightly behind. I don’t need to pick them up until five because they go to afterschool club so I have a bit more flexibility there. It means I can carve up the day however I want and I make a point of trying to leave the house and go for a run or walk and run an errand some point in the middle of the day to get my head away from the screen. I don’t see it as a negative thing that I use time between things to do household chores like empty the washing machine, load the dishwasher, as it’s actually quite good for your mental health to just step away for a minute and do something else and step back again.” (Anna, Analyst, 41)*

The impacts of successful management of soft conflicts lead to an increase in the well-being of teleworkers as they had found a way to ‘have it all’ while deliver expectations as both a good employee and as a good parent, partner or family member:

*“It works, when he’s [husband] away I give up more for breakfast club and even if I shorten my day I can work more in the evenings to catch up.*

Researcher: *Tell me more about working in the evenings, how does that pan out?*

*If he's away and I've shortened anything I quite like it because it's nice and quiet. It's a good time for me.*

Researcher: *So actually, you would class that as an enjoyable activity?*

*Yeah, I don't mind.*" (Miranda, Finance Manager, 47)

Miranda feels self-accomplishment for handling these conflicts in a way that for many may be seen as unusual in a mainstream context, but a way that is well crafted for her family's requirements. Exhibiting a non-traditional working pattern with irregular disengaging and re-engaging from work allows teleworkers to maintain familial commitments using the increased flexibility that telework allows.

Managing expectations from family also helps to temper the amount of conflict that may be present during teleworking:

*"We have had a half term when he was at home on the Monday and I was like, 'Well I'm still going to work and you can just play on your Switch [games console] and give me a nudge when you're hungry and thirsty but I've got to work today and if you can hear me talking then don't come in the room because it means I might be on a call.' He was really good about it. That worked really well. He's now at that age but I think this is probably the first year I've been able to do that with him. [Previously] He's just interrupted too much and hassled and, 'I'm bored, and when are we going out?' [laughs].*

Researcher: *How did you find dealing with that?*

*So, that's stressful when you're there trying to work and cover childcare at the same time which, again, is part of that kind of contract with your employer that when you're working, you're working and when you're looking after your kids, you're looking after your kids, it's less conflictual now"* (Daisy, Lead Business Architect, 41)

This was one of many examples where ground rules for family were presented. However, this quote used a softer approach when compared with many which followed the dictat of 'if the door is closed I'm working'. Daisy has trodden a fine line between demands of work and home, but as her child grows up, she is able to manage the two-way pull more subtly, with less stressful effects.

Soft conflicts did not show detrimental effects when studied in isolation. In fact, the ability for teleworkers to balance these varied tasks whilst staying in control appeared to result in positive well-being. Management of soft conflicts appears to be an introjected, extrinsic motivator for teleworkers (Deci and Ryan, 2012), where they are motivated out of a desire to seek the approval of both their employer and their home sharer and, when successful, can boost self-esteem by being able to manage the complex lives that teleworkers lead.

However, delivering across work and home spheres via a series of balancing acts potentially neglects the longer term effects of such a style for maintaining obligations. The effects of ongoing soft conflicts has little previous research and the final type of conflict, compound, will begin to explore this area.

### 7.9.3 Compound Conflicts and Well-Being

Accepting soft conflicts over an extended period of time gives rise to compound conflicts, which can potentially degrade well-being, as it is known that long-term stressful situations contribute to ill health (Teasdale, 2006). From the current study, compound conflicts were accepted as a norm for most participants.

Jeff, an experienced teleworker and manager, reflects on the effects that small challenges can have over an extended period of time:

*“...you can be reached at any point at any time of day or evening, or night and for some people probably that’s challenging right? Because there are some people without the experience that I have. Yeah, they will feel obliged to respond to an email or a Teams message. You know and I know it could be very difficult for them because they probably feel like they cannot and do not switch off and [the ability to switch off comes] only with time and experience and confidence within yourself in terms of the job that you’re doing. You then start to think, well, no. At the end of the day, I think if you continue, you know, if you don’t switch off, you’ll have burnout, right?”* (Jeff, Sales Manager, 48)

Jeff foretells the dangers of continual intrusion of work into personal time, focusing particularly on the negative effects that could affect junior members of the workforce without the ability to assert control over their schedule. If expectations of continual

availability – which will conflict with non-work obligations – is established early in a teleworker’s career then there is a good chance this will build into a long-term compound conflict problem. This information is particularly pertinent, as many of the sample began teleworking from the outset of their working careers, with Miranda showing surprise on the number of ‘new people’ taking on telework:

*“I’m amazed how many more of our new people are taking it on without kids, without any reason to.”* (Miranda, Finance Manager, 47)

Within this study, it was not possible to assess how the age when you begin teleworking affects the levels and amounts of compound conflict one experiences, but it would be sensible to assume the longer period spent teleworking, the more compound conflicts develop. One of the younger members of this sample went on to explain that when their workload became unmanageable, her company did not take action until it was too late:

*“We do a resource review every week and my hours were for the last few months, my hours have been showing that I’ve been doing too much against my contracted working week. But it’s like, no one, no one really took any notice of it until it got to breaking point.”* (Louise, Service Delivery Manager, 31)

While Louise’s example was more down to her remoteness from others (normally five days per week), rather than conflicting obligations, it demonstrates that young and isolated teleworkers can experience virtual presenteeism and negative compound effects. In this case, the compound effect of delivering additional work over the period of a few months. This suggests it does not take long for compound effects to create a serious breaking point.

Compound conflicts also have significant negative effects for teleworkers with family. Here Gail has been asked how her continued routine of remixing her working day to include evening working is affecting her well-being:

*“Sometimes it can be stressful, sometimes I feel guilty about it, so I have the children back from school and we know they’ve got homework and things to do, but they do understand. So, sometimes I might only need ten or fifteen minutes, sometimes it could be a couple of hours, but I also know I can make up that time later. As an example, say it comes to Friday then I might finish work, say, at two, especially in the*

*holidays, and spend a bit more time with the children so I, kind of, know I can make up for it.*

Researcher: *You mentioned an aspect of guilt, where do you think that comes from?*

*I think that's the mother, that's the mother side of me. I suppose I feel I need to give my children that attention, I should finish work, shut down, and spend time with the children, so it's a personal guilt. It is quite hard, and I talk to – I've got some other friends who are working mothers, you know, we do find it difficult sometimes, we all have that kind of guilt, but, at the end of the day, we shouldn't we are doing it for them, for the benefit of the family.” (Gail, Business Manager, 50)*

Gail tries her best to manage this situation, taking an early finish when she can, which prevents the conflict turning 'hard' as she is able to mentally offset time working one day in the evening for extra time with the children another day. However, this is not enough to expunge the negative feelings and she internalises an ongoing sense of guilt, one that she perceives is shared with her peers.

Teleworkers 'remixing' the working day was suggested by Hilbrecht et al. in 2013 and participants regularly referenced the need to rework their daily or weekly schedule to maintain their home obligations. This remixing, in the current study, led to compound conflicts, and were more likely when teleworking schedules were unduly demanding. Perhaps teleworkers accept soft conflicts as successfully managing their obligations, made possible by teleworkers' autonomy. Sally describes a daily remix:

*“I generally get up quite early and try and do a bit of email and just get settled before breakfast and school and all of those things, then do breakfast and school, come back to sit down at the kitchen table to do a bit of to work. Then at lunchtime, I'll probably have to take the dog for a walk or go for a run and then finish up in the afternoon. What I try and do now is make sure I've got big tasks planned, because otherwise it's just easy to look at the pile of washing and go, 'I'll do that', I'll see a shelf that needs organised, the dishwasher hasn't been cleaned, I'll generally do all those things as well though anyway.” (Sally, Directorate Coordinator, 41)*

Whilst Bruce shows the effects on the working week:

*“Typically, once the kids have gone to bed both my wife and I have a space where we might do some work. She’s probably in the worse situation as she does a four-day week, but her workload is five days in four so she’s constantly having to do extra. What we try to do – Sunday is a good example, if I take all the kids to hockey, she has a window where she can do some work. Saturday afternoon they all go to Stagecoach [acting club for children] so there is a three-and-a-half-hour window where we both can do stuff we need to do.”* (Bruce, Regional HR Business Lead, 44)

Compound conflicts is a novel idea for future research. However, with the cross-sectional data in this sample, it is difficult to infer the effects of compound conflict. Compound conflicts are also occasions where potential breach is explored from the perpetrator’s side (as the perpetrator seeks to juggle obligations), rather than taking only the view of the victim of potential breach. The perpetrator’s perspective to psychological contract breach is also an under-unexplored avenue in psychological contract literature and therefore compound conflicts offer a means to examine this topic.

## 7.10 Role of the Line Manager in Conflicting Obligations and Teleworker Well-Being

The line manager represents the conduit of contractual obligations and organizational policy, of which some will pertain to maintenance of well-being. The line manager’s role is key as their interpretation and implementation of the organizations values and rules will directly influence employees’ experience of teleworking:

*“I think it’s just the way that we operate... as a whole the department is quite keen on looking after people’s well-being and my line manager in particular is very keen on looking after my well-being, she’s very into the whole mental health side of stuff.”*  
(Lance, Data Analyst, 26)

Naturally, in cases such as Lance’s, his line manager’s actions have a direct link to his well-being as there is clear and demonstrable concern shown for well-being and healthy working practices. The line manager also follows the organization’s teleworking policies closely, helping to create a stable and explicit set of expectations.

Key for the teleworker in assessing their line manager's maintenance of their relationship is the amount of autonomy that they are afforded in their roles and in their teleworking schedules:

*"I'm also very supported [by her line manager]. If I've got problems if I'm going through difficult times, or if I need to change if you know something's not working, she will change it..."*

Researcher: *Are there any sort of extras that you expect from your employer to support your flexible working, is there anything particular that you kind of expect from them?*

*...is to management of my own time. So, for example, when there are days when I have a bad headache or don't feel well, I expect to be given the autonomy to say, I'm going to work a shorter day today... reasonable expectations. The support to do my job when working, but in flexible ways." (Millie, Operational Researcher, 27)*

Autonomy regularly presents itself as a powerful commodity that teleworkers strive to retain. Therefore, when managers respect autonomy it often leads to positive line manager relationships. In addition, by setting reasonable expectations, supportive managers like Millie's help to temper the virtual presenteeism behaviour noted across the sample.

### 7.10.1 Line Managers and Psychological Contract Fulfilment

Supporting the maintenance of good psychological contracts with line managers and positive sentiment toward teleworking arrangements often came through the concept of gratitude for their teleworking positions:

*"I rely on my manager, the partner in my team to just being understanding about, you know, 'I'm really sorry, it's five-fifteen I really need to drop off this conference call now' [to pick up child] and him being like, 'That's fine, that's fine, I'll consult with you afterwards' and he's going to carry on the rest of that conference call, and he's got to then catch up with me afterwards which might not be so convenient for him. I do feel you have to work quite hard to prove that you're working. I think my boss gives me the benefit of the doubt, he really does. But I'm still really keen to be very*



*responsive on the phone or by email when I'm working from home to prove that I am working. I'm not messing around. I'm not watching telly, I'm not swanning off, I am working. I'm putting in the time and the hours."* (Angela, Senior Solicitor, 28)

Angela shows high levels of gratitude to her line manager for helping her to balance the obligations to her work and childcare. Even this moderate favour of catching up with Angela on a conference call motivates her to pay back with hard work, to prove herself perhaps beyond the level expected, to maintain her teleworking arrangement.

The result of having a good line manager relationship was often a well-maintained psychological contract that led to high levels of well-being, repeating findings of previous studies (Gordon, 2020; Parzefall and Shapiro-Coyle, 2011). A bad line manager relationship does not necessarily guarantee poor well-being, but was a contributing factor to dissatisfaction with work and with teleworking practices.

### 7.10.2 Line Managers and Psychological Contract Breach

When line managers behave in a way contrary to the company line on teleworking, this can be detrimental for the teleworker's well-being, as in Anna's case, where her manager repeatedly asks her to join meetings from home at times when she isn't working:

*"You can see a big difference between the different parts of the organization who are more or less used to that sort of operating [teleworking] model... I get irritated by it, it's a question of respect, if you're on holiday then you'd like me to respect that and I expect the same from them."* (Anna, Analyst, 41)

When obligations are breached by a line manager, there is a distinct agitation demonstrated by the teleworker, but normally this falls short of full psychological contract breach and violation as the teleworkers are normally keen to maintain their teleworking status. In general, very few psychological contract breaches were reported by teleworkers. When assessing the lack of breach in the sample it may be due to no teleworker within the sample having their teleworking privileges revoked. The closest instance was where a teleworker's manager implied a reduction in autonomy of work scheduling and increased transparency in knowing the teleworkers daily activities (details of this case involving Linda were covered in section 7.3.1 - Examples of Work-Home Conflict). Beyond this, the hypothetical idea of

teleworking being revoked by their line manager was posed to participants. The response to this from the participants was mainly negative and showed expressions akin to breach of their psychological contract, although due to the hypothetical nature of the question, it was oft met with puzzlement, as if this situation simply would not occur in reality.

On occasions where breach did occur in the sample, the participant was more likely to refer to the situation being difficult, rather than directly attributing the issues to their line manager, such as Stephen's issues noted upon the next page. Parzefall and Shapiro-Coyle (2011) postulated that the felt experience of breach is lessened when participants attribute the breach to environmental factors rather than deliberate actions of their managers and this proved to be the case for teleworkers within the sample.

## 7.11 Role of Technology in Teleworker Well-Being

Focusing on how technology affects well-being in regards to conflicting obligations leads us to understand firstly that technology also solves at least as many issues as it creates for teleworkers, as seen under RQ3. It is central to allowing telework to happen at all. The hyperconnected technology used by this sample allows high quality work to take place irrelevant of location. The location of telework taking place within the home can also have a bearing on well-being of the teleworker (Johnson, Andrey and Shaw, 2007; Ng, 2010). Indeed when the location of work enters the familial space, it is expected and this needs to be addressed:

*"I had a study built when we extended our house, so I suppose it was a little bit strange at times, it was a long time ago, nine years... then moved to a laptop, so was a little bit strange, but then it just became normal practice, I kinda kept my work separate, I never sat in the living room and worked with the TV or something like that you know... work was in the study, when I finished work, that was it, done." (Flynn, Senior Economic Analyst, 59)*

Many of the participants weren't as fortunate to have a dedicated office space, finding kitchen tables sub-optimal, but acceptable. The more potentially conflicting element associated with technology occurs in the temporal field rather than the spatial.

Interruptions from and usage of work technology outside of working hours was proliferated by a large part of the sample:

*“To be honest, I do constantly keep an eye on my emails, so that doesn’t bother me, and I have responded to emails quite late at night, sometimes first thing in the morning. So, yes, for me that’s not an issue, it’s part of my role and, again, it’s part of me being responsive.”* (Gail, Business Manager, 50)

As in Gail’s case, use of technology outside of normal working hours is not seen by the teleworker as conflicting. This would see Gail, in the categorisations of Nippert-Eng (1996), as an integrator who see the intermingling of her home and work lives as a positive factor on their well-being. With the improvement in the ability to collaborate easily through team working apps and over mobile technologies, the integrating standpoint matches well with the current trends in teleworking.

However, if the teleworker prefers to segment their work and home life, they may find this harder with the intrusion of hyperconnected technologies negatively affecting their well-being (Mazmanian, Orlikowski and Yates, 2005; Cousins and Robey, 2015). Take the experience of Stephen as an example:

*“Yeah, I’ve took a lot more perspective out of it (the counselling). I reprioritized what’s important. For example, I had knee surgery a year ago, you know, that needs an hour in the gym every day. I wasn’t doing it. I wasn’t doing it at all. Now, I am, that’s important and I’ve got a lot better at delegating and saying no and being realistic. So, you asked me about what methods I used to kind of break up my work and my PhD, I block off my diary to make sure that in the evenings I actually don’t have anything to do because I’ve either turned down work which I don’t have capacity to do or I’ve time boxed my day well enough that I’ve completed all my tasks. So yeah, it’s learning my limits and being able to make sure that I’m leaving space to relax and enjoy myself.”* (Stephen, IT Consultant, 27)

Stephen’s work requires quick turnarounds on projects which had meant working via team working apps into the evening and on his non-working days, leaving him physically and mentally depleted.

When teleworkers preferences and the organization's working methods align, there is little friction. Participants that appear to enjoy integrating work around family and feel little discomfort in taking work calls or messages in family time fit in well with demanding organizations, whilst the same behaviours would leave segmenters stressed, and potentially increase the chance of conflicting obligations as they are unprepared or unwilling to engage in work at these times.

Seeing the matching and mismatching of the organizations' expectations of integration/segmentation is reminiscent of Schein's (1965) early writing on the psychological contract and the effects on the matched/mismatched employees job satisfaction echoes Kotter's (1973) examination of Schein's idea. Further exploration of how teleworkers manage to assimilate or resist the technological expectations of their organizations will be presented under findings relating to RQ5.

## 7.12 Research Question Four Summary

When assessing the well-being implications that conflicting obligations have on teleworkers, the three levels of conflicting obligations all present different outcomes. Hard conflicts create the most apparent negative well-being effects, namely stress. On a surface level, soft conflicts should appear to produce mild negative well-being effects, however in isolation, this does not seem to be the case for the current sample. They offer an avenue for teleworkers to present some pride for their ability to manage their complex arrangements, potentially explained by the introjected extrinsic motivations associated with self-determination theory and certain benefits of a well-engineered working and home life. Finally, compound conflicts present an interesting new approach to understanding teleworking processes and the possible long-term cognitive load they place upon the individual.

When productivity and availability expectations remain high the teleworker adheres to these expected norms, delivered via temporal and spatial means. The effect on the well-being of the teleworker then comes down to the ability to control their home and life spheres under these pressures. If successful, participants reported improved well-being, if unsuccessful there were noted stress increases. However, teleworking was not seen as the

cause of these problems, rather that they would try to better organize their lives to make things work. The alternative of going back to fully office-based work was not seen as desirable.

The roles played by the line manager acts as the conduit of organizational policy and values means they are the key actor in the teleworker's psychological contract and their management of teleworker autonomy is central to how their employees fair when navigating conflicting obligations.

In addition, the technology available to teleworkers produces the double-edged sword that both causes conflict by eroding the barriers between work, but also the autonomy that provides the flexibility for teleworkers to adjust their schedules by opening out when and where they can perform work, aiding in shaping the unusual working patterns that accompany the 'new norms of work'.

More on these strategies used by teleworkers to cope with the conflicting obligations that they experience will now be discussed.

## 7.13 Research Question Five - How do Teleworkers Resolve Conflicting Obligations?

Under the previous research question findings, the existence of conflicting obligations and the potential for detriment to well-being we have been noted, as has the fact that teleworkers manage their home and work lives exceptionally skilfully to lessen potential burdens. This chapter will look in further detail as to how this is accomplished.

Throughout the process of conducting the interviews, the researcher was almost always left with the same distinct feeling that individual teleworkers were making their arrangements work. Despite cataloguing a combination of challenging situations and stipulations that are involved in their day-to-day teleworking regime, they have crafted a way to a high functioning routine. The researcher has taken into consideration the potential social desirability bias from the teleworkers of this sample (see methods chapter, section 5.7), but by and large it appears they find successful coping strategies to enable them to telework effectively.

The following sections of this research question will identify what coping strategies were used by participants. This section will be structured as three categories of internal moderators (i.e., factors that operate as coping strategies): those that are part of psychological contract interactions, practical steps that are unique to teleworking, and general features and techniques that help employees work effectively. In addition, the external moderators brought forth by the teleworker's home sharers and organizations will be assessed.

## 7.14 Internal Moderators for Conflict Resolution

Firstly, this research question will examine the coping strategies that teleworkers used to alleviate the stresses of their conflicting obligations. These techniques moderated the demands of work obligations from their organization and home obligations from their home sharers.

The term 'internal' relates to the notion that these moderators exist within the mind of the teleworker and although they do not operate in a closed system due to the interaction with others, they have emanated from an internal effort made by the teleworker.

### 7.14.1 Psychological Contract Moderators – Expectation Management

Expectations and obligations sit at the heart of the psychological contract and throughout the sample, teleworkers impressed upon those that shared their homes the 'ground rules of' their availability when working at home. These measures set the expectations of availability for interaction, location of work and time of work:

*"I always work more than nine to six, nine to five. So that's for sure, okay so I think it's more your own discipline rather than kind of fixed hours and actually at home I can shut the door, I can have my own office which I don't have in in the [main] office and I think it's training your home, you know your people you cohabit with, training them to respect your privacy, respect the door which is shut. I think that everyone is now kind of understanding that they need to knock, and if you knock, and we say no, because I'm on the call, you know, doing something important. So, I think everyone is kind of on the same wavelength here."* (Bernard, Sales Manager, 46)

Often this involved explaining to children the boundaries around working from home:

*“...it’s something, we’ve taught him, how to play independently as well as with us, so I would just say ‘OK, mummy needs to do this for twenty minutes’... So, I think he’s learnt that there is a balance that you can do, so it’s not a bad thing. Or he could do his homework at the table whilst I work. So, if it’s in the evening and things have spilled over, or I’ve had to do something a bit later, then he could be sat with me.”*

(Susanne, PA to Head of a Private School, 41)

When setting these boundaries, we can see a rigid approach from Bernard with ‘the door is shut’ to a more flexible approach from Susanne who tries to include her children in her work. This represents two distinct ways of boundary setting within the sample. To some extent the teleworker would also set these parameters with their line managers, however, often the line manager would take the lead in ensuring that work-life balance could be achieved:

*“I was very lucky because she [line manager] was very good – she was very understanding with me and being able to see when I had too much on and pulling back and showing me that its ok to pull back. It was learning from her rather than her telling me what to do.”* (Anna, Analyst, 41)

Maintaining reasonable expectations with line managers helped to negate stressful teleworking situations, such as work overload. However, not all managers were as proactive in setting expectations. When reassessing her teleworking situation going forward, Susanne cogitates on the process required to establish her limitations:

*“I would drip feed to him [her manager] and find out what his expectations are and then understanding what my limitations are and my limitations aren’t what I can’t do, it’s when I should be doing it, or can do it, and how flexible I am. In some ways, I’ve probably made a rod for my own back because I’ve been over-flexible. Because on the days that I’m not working, which would normally be a Monday and a Friday, so because they know I could be [working], and I’m flexi in my hours, then maybe they take that for granted.”* (Susanne, PA to Head of a Private School, 41)

Expectation management could be seen as included within the process of negotiating the teleworker's psychological contract, such as needing flexibility for childcare from their organization, but the price paid for these arrangements can be quite demanding. Setting expectations can act as a first move in tempering potentially conflicting obligations, but with the other parties able to push back against these expectations, negotiation begins.

### 7.14.2 Psychological Contract Moderators – Negotiation

Negotiating by the teleworker was key in creating a functioning system in the teleworker's life, balancing home and work demands with a range of give and take scenarios. These scenarios played out across home and work psychological contracts. Negotiations from both sides often fell short of creating explicit boundaries, this helped avoid breach by keeping elements of the teleworker's psychological contract implicit.

Typical negotiating of home responsibilities with home sharers included taking time to spend with each other, who would do household tasks, shopping or childcare responsibilities:

*"So, there'll be the odd thing that is with senior managers that you don't really want to have to drop, in which case my husband and I play trade off on the phone as to who's got what important meeting when and we balance it between us."* (Daisy, Lead Business Architect, 41)

Conflicting obligations can be avoided by comparing schedules and having flexing schedules to ensure that children are cared for. This proved to be easier when both parents were teleworkers.

Negotiating telework arrangements with the organization occurred through the line manager. The strength of these negotiations varied somewhat based upon the sector the teleworker worked in. In the public sector, where policy was strong and teleworking contracts clearly laid out, the need to negotiate teleworking arrangements was reduced:

*"I'm working from home on Thursday because I need to take my dad to hospital. I'll spend an hour driving him and picking him up in the evening, so it's not that big of a deal, but I think if you had to be in the office it would create an interrupted dynamic"*



*with my line manager because I would be asking for permission which I don't think is something that you actually do often... I think my relationship with my manager is as a result of not having that as a barrier. I'm not quite sure what I'm getting at here. I think the relationship I have with my line manager as a result of flexible working is a lot more collaborative and a lot easier to sort of deal with because I don't have to like, feel like I need to ask for permission to do something... it feels less hierarchical, I'm not a fan of hierarchies in general, it just doesn't feel as awkward. It's not the same as like, being at school, like ask your teacher." (Jackson, Operation Research Analyst, 25)*

In contrast, private sector organizations typically ceded more responsibility to the line manager for negotiating time spent working from home, productivity and availability demands, or the negotiation process of establishing teleworking in the first place:

*"Because initially, I would say that my boss was sceptical, and he needed to be persuaded – he was a bit worried, you know, how would it work? If I can't see you ... Which is funny, because I could be working in the same building as him, and he might still ring me when he's at the other end of the corridor, and we would have a conversation, which I could clearly do from anywhere... So, over the years, I think we've built up a rapport, and he trusts that I will get work done. So, I just gradually, over six months, drip fed how this could work, and we agreed that we'd have a trial period." (Susanne, PA to Head of a Private School, 41)*

Beyond the dual sets of negotiations teleworkers partake in with their home sharers and organizations, they also find time to indulge in internal deal striking:

*"It's hard just to sit at a desk all day when you're by yourself. So, if I can say, right I'll put a wash on and then do this while the wash is on and then I'll get up and make a cup of tea, do that and then it kind of like keeps you ticking over in a way to have like all the tasks to do... like I'm gonna make something to eat once this is done or, if I finished it by this time, I don't have to pick up my child 'til six I can watch TV programmes from five o'clock 'til six o'clock." (Sally, Directorate Coordinator, 41)*

Internal negotiations show how teleworkers lives are constantly being balanced and rebalanced without knowledge of the external parties through micro-decision making.

These internal deals were often fuelled by gratitude (e.g., attending to some household tasks because it's their turn) and guilt (e.g., attending to some household tasks, because of not going into the office). Beyond internal deal striking for mundane aspects, teleworkers also struck internal deals as rewards for getting through difficult periods of telework, more on this in section 7.14.5.

Negotiations could also consist of all parties (including internal deal striking) operating at the same time. Even in the simple act of picking up children from the school run, all parties play their part. Home sharer negotiations to organise who will drop off and pick-up was also often dependent on how the organization allowed the teleworker to flex their hours, and on top of this, the teleworker would in some cases strike an internal deal to pick up their work again in the evening. One of the most common ways of repaying temporal flexibility for things like the school run was to pay it back to partners at the end of day, in some cases to considerable deficit for the teleworker and became one of the key practical implementations used when teleworking.

### 7.14.3 Practical Teleworking Moderators – Workday Elongation

Beyond direct negotiation of the psychological contract, teleworkers used practical work-arounds to avoid hard conflicts in their teleworking routines and maintain some autonomy over their lives.

Traditionally workday elongation would be thought of as a negative intrusion on non-working time (Grant, Wallace and Spurgeon, 2013). However, this was a key element to 'the remixing' of the working day described under the previous research question and teleworkers accept and craft long working days into more favourable arrangements:

*"So, I'm mature enough now, to be able to say actually, it's three or four, I just need to go and drop this letter off and go to the Post Office. Then, you know, if I'm working 'til six or seven that doesn't really make a difference. I'm also flexible enough to realise that I'm going to take my conference calls on the village green, because if it's a summer day, and I can sit outside with a notepad and pen and my earphones, I'd much rather take my conference call on the green than I would sitting behind the*

*bloody desk somewhere and if that has a positive impact on my morale and my work, then happy days.” (Kris, Retail Director, 40)*

Mixing household tasks and errands into long workdays is a sensible way of organising the day and using flexibility to change the location and working environment helps to negate undesirable experiences associated with long hours. Changing working patterns in this way normally emanated from a trial and error process, where early career teleworkers spoke on how it takes time to understand when is acceptable to pause and reshuffle working:

*“...I would start very early or very late. I think that’s just my mood on the day, I think if I’ve gone to bed late then I’m waking up at like nine or ten and cracking on with work. On some days I’ll go to bed at a normal hour and wake up the time I’d start my normal commute, except instead of being stuck on the train for an hour I just start working, so I can start at seven, half seven.*

Researcher: *So, when your working day is over do you find it easy to switch off?*

*No, so if I’m in the office and started, rocked up to the office at eight in the morning and I’ve done my seven and a half hours and it’s like four o’clock and I’m like done, like I clock off and I end up feeling like I’ve got the whole afternoon to myself and its really good. Whereas [when working from home] I can wake up at like seven and do loads of work until like four and then I end up thinking, could do, could do more here if I’m honest, I’m not tired or anything, I’m already at home, there is no reason for me to stop, besides... I think occasionally I’ve done like a seven to seven before, just by accident.” (Jackson, Operation Research Analyst, 25)*

Workday elongation, as in Jackson’s case can build up quite subtly when at home. For the sample, generally once the teleworker has gained more experience in their profession, they found it easier to flex their routines and find the right pattern that works for them, this was amongst some of the benefits of teleworking tenure.

#### 7.14.4 Practical Teleworking Moderators – Teleworking Tenure

Earlier in the section on teleworker obligations (7.3.1) it was established that the effect of tenure within the world of work had little effect on levels of obligation, however, tenure of telework had some clear effect on autonomy behaviours. Members of the sample that were

experienced teleworkers tended to exert more autonomy over their scheduling than those who were new to teleworking. The reasoning for this could be explained by individuals who had longer teleworking tenure simply being held in higher rank at their respective organizations, but arguably more so because they had moulded their routines through a process of trial and error:

*“There are some people I work with who all down tools at five or six if we’re very quiet, but quite often in the evenings I will be talking to the States on my time.*

Researcher: *How do you find that?*

*I think, honestly, early on I found it annoying, I think partly because of the intensity, you know, fifty-hour weeks aren’t unusual but now that I’ve been there a while and I’ve worked out the way things work, if you like, I now make it work better. So, if I do work really early in the morning, or I am doing quite a lot at night, then I will try and flex a bit during the day, maybe even just to see a friend for lunch or take a couple of hours out maybe doing some church stuff. So, it’s better now, but probably the first year, year and a half it wasn’t so good.”* (Alan, Global Marketing Executive and Part-Time Church Minister, 50)

Taking time to understand how much implicit flexibility is afforded to teleworkers can prove difficult and it took Alan over a year to read between the lines.

*“I would say, in the last three years I’ve become very controlled about how I do and don’t want to look at emails in the evenings, for example. Go back five/six years I was certainly - it was new, well it felt new certainly, and there was a novelty factor about it, but yeah, I tend to use it a little bit on the train sometimes, but it’s very rare that I do it in the evenings at all.*

Researcher: *So, you talk about there was a novelty factor, and when that wore off what sort of process did you go through internally to decide to make that change, around checking the emails and stuff?*

*Part of it was a practical change, just literally adjusting settings, so it didn’t flash up on your phone how many emails you’ve got that are unread. So, you know, a relatively small but I guess a practical change there. So now when I look at my*

*phone, I have no idea whether there are unread emails in there or not, so to speak. The other thing I think I would say is just probably a bit more of a professional maturity that realises that there is very little reward by looking at things out of hours, you're better off resting and then being woken the next day in a refreshed manner, rather than trying to do everything immediately.” (Gordan, Continuity and Resilience Manager, 41)*

Some of these factors, such as adjusting settings, could be applied without the effect of tenure, with some teleworker training from the organization. However, the aforementioned implicit learnings from Alan take time to occur naturally with experience. The effect of tenure and experience in the nuanced processes of teleworking, including how available and productive one must appear to succeed in their roles but maintain work-life balance shows teleworking to be a process honed over time, one where conflicting obligations can be lessened with intelligent use of implicit cues as well as practical adjustments.

#### 7.14.5 Traditional Moderators – Rest and Relaxation

Coping strategies were not always disaggregated for teleworkers specifically, traditional self-rewarding behaviour that may also be applied by non-teleworkers was also present in the study. Often participants would gesture that busy times at work were ‘par for the course’ and conflictual times at home were ‘to be expected’ and that they evened out these stressful periods with leisure time to maintain work-life balance. The process of going on holiday was often referenced by the sample as a circuit breaker to daily stress:

*“A week before I went on holiday, before I was told I needed to offload some projects, I’d been working twelve-hour days for about three to four weeks and just couldn’t get on top of it. It was just coming in thick and fast...”*

Researcher: *That sounds like quite an extreme length of time to be working like that.*

*Yeah. Then I had a two-week holiday and it was like ‘Ahh, okay. Yeah, I was just working to get to that holiday.’” (Louise, Service Delivery Manager, 31)*

*“You can work your absolutely nuts off for a year, but if you know that you’ve got two weeks all-inclusive in St. Lucia at the end of it. Do you know what? I’m going to*

*knuckle down for two weeks in St. Lucia, I don't care, I'm gonna enjoy that massive grand holiday at the end of it. Even if it means you're kind of working yourself into the ground a little bit because you know, you've got that time to reset coming up where you can literally go to somewhere that doesn't have TVs or radios and lie on the beach."* (Sven, Sales Manager, 46)

Research on the impact of holidays by Sonnentag (2003, 2012) show their importance as a restorative tool. Kaspereen (2012) also shows that relaxation interventions decrease stress levels when administered regularly, but it is difficult to ascertain the strength of the effect that yearly holidays may have across a longer period. For David the holiday releases a range of feelings from excitement through to dejection throughout the year:

*"I think I'd go crazy if I didn't have that to do and actually even more important than the doing, I think it's looking forward to it. So actually, the holiday almost starts with the booking... and I can feel myself in July getting really sort of excited about the holiday, but in the back of my mind was it'll come and then it will go by in a flash and then I'll feel down, well not feel down, but I've then got another whole year to wait for my next two-week holiday."* (David, Internal Auditor and Director of Business Assurance, 50)

Michishita et al. (2015) demonstrated a link between high blood pressure and a lack of holidays, suggesting the role of taking scheduled breaks in the calendar is important in maintaining health and well-being. The facet worth noting from this coping strategy is that conflictual or stressful situations can be ridden out if there is an anticipated break at a later point.

#### 7.14.6 Traditional Moderators – Personal Aptitudes

Teleworkers from this sample displayed a high level of capability, self-organization, and self-discipline to undertake the dual challenges of home and work obligations. This may be unsurprising as managers within the sample attested to only fully trusting employees to telework when they believed them to have the right aptitudes. This is backed-up by previous research which shows teleworkers to be highly proficient and productive workers (Bosua et al., 2017; Neufeld and Fang, 2005).

Throughout the study, the differing mixes of personal aptitudes went some way to explaining how individuals cope with potentially conflictual teleworking. One participant proved to have a diligent work ethic, a calm approach to problem solving, a strong moral compass which helped them cope with having two young children (that they were co-parenting with their wife) and a full time executive global marketing position and a part-time role as a church minister. They discussed regularly working twelve-hour days that included late evenings, early mornings and weekend work to cover roles, but nevertheless reflected favourably on their teleworking arrangement. The participant also compared their current situation with previous roles (seventy-hour weeks in the office and before that, military service) and appreciated the inherent flexibility they now have as a teleworker.

A key personality trait that helped temper potential teleworking conflicts was a preference for integrating work technologies into home life:

*"I probably work slightly longer hours from home because I'm not commuting, so I don't really mind that. Once my official working day ends I might pull the laptop out again when my daughter is in bed, but that doesn't change if it is a working from home day or not."* (Lisa, Senior Analyst, 40)

Similar to workday elongation, Lisa's approach fitted her personality where they choose to integrate across the week, irrespective of if they are contractually teleworking that day. Lisa displays a strong work ethic and later in her interview she states that she has become 'much more strict' with her evening working since their baby arrived. Suggesting tempering of workaholic tendencies.

Some workaholic tendencies within the sample also helped teleworkers cope:

*"You work for a company like mine, it is vastly intense. It's like something that most people have never seen before and a lot of people only manage to survive it between three and six months because it's so fast paced, so intense. You've got to be right at the top of your game. Absolutely all the time. And you got to be willing to work super, super, super hard. And when I talk about super hard it's not just within the nine to five spaces it's outside that space where it's needed."* (Sven, Sales Manager, 46)

Workaholic behaviour seems at odds with the concept of a coping strategy as it is often associated with burnout (Maslach, 1986; Schaufeli, Taris and Van Rhenen, 2008), but when used in conjunction with facilitating factors, such as holidays or a supportive family that accepts or moulds to this behaviour, it decreased conflict between work and home.

## 7.15 External Moderators for Conflict Resolution

In addition to the internal moderators that required effort to enact upon the part of the teleworker, there were also external moderators that were bestowed upon the teleworker that aided in reducing conflict. When teleworking, it is a much less conflictual process when all parties to psychological contracts share common expectations (Duxbury and Higgins, 1998; Peters and Den Dulk, 2003). Shared expectations are more likely when home sharers and the organization show compassion, consideration, respect and flexibility, this provides crucial support to the teleworker.

### 7.15.1 Family Support as a Moderator

A sentiment presented by many participants was how those who shared their home showed high levels of understanding, empathy and acceptance of the situation.

Jeff finds that when he teleworks he is less distracted than when he shares an office with colleagues:

*“So, I don’t really get many distractions... my wife will sit sort of in the kitchen and do her job. We tend to break for lunch together, but in terms of distractions, teleworking remotely with a spouse, partner, whatever you want to call it, personally It’s nice, I like it, but I don’t really get too many distractions other than when I’m on the conference call and I might be talking quite loudly. I’ll get a shout from downstairs saying ‘Shut up! I can hear your conversation!’ Yeah it works really well, we’re great together, we tend to finish or log off at a similar time actually.” (Jeff, Sales Manager, 48)*

When sharing their home with another teleworker, participants were often able to sync up their routines. This strategy of syncing was harder to enact with dependent children,



although due to being brought up around teleworking, they were often understanding of their parents' commitments:

*"He sees it as a boon as he gets pretty much free access to the tv.*

Researcher: *How old is your older son?*

*Eight and he's quite good at understanding that I just need to get on with things so if there's something you want then come and talk to me but otherwise just leave me be."* (Anna, Analyst, 41)

Younger teleworker's who lived with parents and siblings benefitted from a light load of household responsibilities to begin with, but this was in conjunction with outwardly helpful advice and guidance from parents who had experience of teleworking:

*"Because I stay with my parents, also siblings, and I've seen them work flexibly. So, I kind of understood that [telework] and it's quite supportive in the civil service, you know, seeing how it works. So, it wasn't alien to me."* (Justin, Research Assistant, 25)

Justin's benefits are two-fold, he receives familial advice as well as having a supportive employer.

Much of the conflictual elements are moderated when family members work with the teleworker to enable their working practices. However, the conflicts are rarely removed completely, but it raises the chance of conflicts staying 'soft' as family members give more flexibility in addition to the flexibility that teleworkers have available themselves.

### 7.15.2 Organizational Support as a Moderator

Less prevalent than familial support, but important nonetheless, was the organization's actions to allow teleworkers to avoid conflict in their roles.

The public sector employees often remarked that they felt supported by strong telework policies, but they were still essentially at the mercy of their line managers who had the biggest impact on how the organization followed through on their intentions:

*"It works for what you want it to be, gives you freedom. I feel a lot of my friends from Uni are in roles that they are very supervised or I've got friends that have to clock in*

*and clock out and you feel you have responsibility for your own work, which I like... a couple of months ago I was a bit all over the place and they were like, just as long as you are doing your hours, fit it around... they were absolutely fine with that and so it is kind of at the discretion of your line manager and they can kind of make it work.”*  
(Jenna, Social Research Officer, 23)

Furthermore, when line managers have similar outlooks on life and work as the teleworkers they support, this increases the harmony of the working relationship:

*“I think we’re quite similar. I think we have a lot in common. I think we have the same approach to work and work life balance in that it’s important to do things and change things and do things well, but It’s not the kind of be all and end all of our lives. I think we both know that we’ve got other things but that work is important. We know the bits that are important to us, but there’s the acknowledgement there that this is kind of our lives as well.”* (Sally, Directorate Coordinator, 41)

Congruence between personal and organizational viewpoints is likely to increase motivation and satisfaction in one’s work (Ryan and Deci, 2020). However, often in the private sector there was less support for teleworking and this housed most of dissatisfaction in terms of teleworking experience:

*“My last line manager, if you weren’t in his face, and you weren’t actively volunteering, and if you were in the wonderful remote world doing stuff, he’d start to feel like he’d lost you a little bit. He’d start to say... and I remember a couple of times, he’d go, ‘I feel like you’ve disappeared.’ Now for me, that’s less about whether I was adding value. That was more about the fact that in a remote world if you don’t have very specific tasks like I do, if you’re working on obscure projects, or you’re managing people, it’s really difficult to prove what you’re doing... It’s massively demotivating because you think if only you can see what I’m doing, but actually you can’t and it’s a failure of me. Yeah, so you know, if there’s one learning I had on my exit, as you know, probably why I started to look at moving on, is when you’re flexible, you have to dedicate time to proving what it is that you’re doing because you’re not in people’s faces.”* (Kris, Retail Director, 40)

## 7.16 Research Question Five Summary

The effects of conflicting obligations approached from the perspective of the psychological contract provided a new insight into both the experience of teleworking and psychological contract research. One common theme throughout these internal moderators is the fact that they often required increased effort on the part of the teleworker through managing expectations, negotiation solutions and extending the working day. External moderators that provided support for the teleworker helped smooth out conflicts, and flexibility from both home and work allows the teleworker to keep conflict points at bay.

Surprisingly, the levels of conflict and their effects were more muted than the researcher had originally expected. This is perhaps because the effects were moderated by the coping strategies and workarounds noted in this final section of findings.

Table 7.2 adds the conflict resolutions discussed in RQ5 to the previously displayed Table 7.1 on the key features of conflict from the findings of RQ3.

<b>Conflict type</b>	<b>Features</b>	<b>Consequences</b>	<b>Resolutions</b>
Hard conflict	When one obligation/set of obligations take precedence over another (normally home vs work or vice versa), keeping the obligation to one party will result in failure to serve another	Loss of autonomy Stress increase Letting a party down	None – one party must be let down (work or family)
Soft conflict	When one obligation/set of obligations take precedence over another (normally home vs work or vice versa), but both parties can be served through juggling of schedules	Mild inconvenience Sense of accomplishment if well managed Gratitude to organization/home for allowing flexibility	Scheduling Non-traditional working patterns Negotiation Increased effort
Compound conflict	A collection of soft conflicts that have become the norm	Acceptance of conflict as a norm Remixing of work and family life	Compound conflict becomes part of the teleworking norm; thus, resolutions are not sought

**Table 7.2** Types of conflict with resolutions

# Chapter Eight: Discussion

## 8.0 Introduction

This thesis began with a review of research relating to psychological contracts, telework, work technology and worker well-being literature. The research questions sought to understand the key content of teleworkers' psychological contracts, the effects of technology on modern teleworkers and how their working arrangements affect their obligations to work and home life, including the knock-on effects to well-being. 42 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 41 professional teleworking participants, each of who shared their home with family members or partners. The findings offer insights and evidence to address the research questions. The discussion will consider the implications of these findings in terms of how they complement, challenge and add to the current body of research on both the psychological contract and the experience of teleworking.

This chapter will begin with a table (8.1) containing the research questions, along with key related findings and contributions. The discussion will then turn to elaborating in greater detail the contributions under each research question. Following this, the limitations of the study will be discussed, followed by future research recommendations, and practical implications. Finally, the conclusion will surmise the thesis as a whole.

Research Question	Main Findings	Main Contributions
RQ1 - What are the key content elements of a teleworker's psychological contract?	Autonomy is far and above the key psychological contract expectation that teleworkers have and in return teleworkers are obliged to maintain high levels of productivity and availability.	<p>The crucial importance of autonomy for teleworkers.</p> <p>Introducing a set of facilitators to the psychological contract exchange specific to teleworkers.</p>
RQ2 - What role does modern technology play in teleworking?	Modern technology is omnipresent in teleworking and the use of hyperconnected instant messaging and team working applications increases the ability to collaborate effectively remotely, driving productivity and availability in tandem.	<p>Adding insight to how technology fosters and reinforces virtual presenteeism and always-on culture.</p> <p>Presenting a way to understand how increased teleworker availability interplays with these concepts.</p>
RQ3 - Does teleworking lead to conflicting obligation between work and home life?	Teleworking does lead to conflicting obligations, but is well managed through skillful adaptations made by teleworkers.	<p>Introducing a conflict typography which positions soft conflicts as a teleworking norm.</p> <p>Assesses how the build-up of these 'soft' conflicts can develop into larger compound conflicts for the teleworker.</p>

**Table 8.1** The main findings of the thesis and their contributions to knowledge

<p>RQ4 - What impact do conflicting obligations have on the well-being of teleworkers?</p>	<p>Unmanageable conflicts lead to an increase of stress and dissatisfaction; however, the rate of these conflicts is low.</p> <p>Smaller and more constant conflicts cause moderate inconvenience, the compound effects of these conflicts present a threat to teleworker well-being.</p> <p>Compound conflicts can be difficult to recognise for teleworkers due to their subtle escalation.</p>	<p>The impact on teleworker well-being can be connected to the conflict type, helping to understand teleworker well-being outcomes.</p>
<p>RQ5 - How do teleworkers resolve conflicting obligations?</p>	<p>Through a system of negotiation and support with home sharers and their organization, flexing their temporal and spatial work boundaries and focusing on the positive aspects of their teleworking arrangements.</p>	<p>A range of coping strategies are presented.</p>

**Table 8.1** The main findings of the thesis and their contributions to knowledge cont.

## 8.1 Discussion of Research Question One

The psychological contract was situated at the heart of the current research, providing the theoretical lens to view the felt experience of teleworkers as they manage their home and work lives. It was found that autonomy plays a central role in teleworkers' psychological contracts, complimenting previous research (Azim et al., 2012; De Cuyper et al., 2010; Hiltrop, 1995; Kickul and Lester, 2001). Teleworkers placed great emphasis on autonomy and viewed it as the key psychological contract content element that teleworkers expected from their organizations. Autonomy has been stated as one of many psychological contract elements in previous research (Lam and de Campos, 2015; O'Donohue et al., 2007), but appears to be particularly important in the current study due to the teleworking nature of the cohort. As seen in Sewell and Taskin (2015), autonomy, or the perceived sense of it,

plays a key role in shaping how telework is conducted. Teleworkers have previously exercised autonomy as a means to 'have the best of both worlds' (Mirchandani, 2000), particularly when childcare was involved (Delanoëije, Verbruggen and Germeys, 2019). This demonstrates that autonomy is not a byword for freedom from practical demands, in that teleworkers do not simply choose when and where to do their work as a matter of privilege, instead autonomy gives teleworkers a sense of control over their multiple and sometimes conflictual roles.

### 8.1.1 The Autonomy Exchange

The psychological contract is by definition an exchange agreement (Shore and Tetrick, 1994). In the current research, the exchange for the teleworker was focused upon autonomy for increased productivity and availability. As noted by Taskin and Devos (2005), expectations of what an individual can achieve and the responsibilities they are given often increase when afforded teleworking arrangements, if teleworkers are not afforded autonomy to manage this, their experience of telework suffers. However, even when autonomy *is* afforded to teleworkers, tensions still exist. Sewell and Taskin (2015) inferred that simply presenting someone with autonomy does not remove the difficulties associated with working across different spaces and at different times.

The current research focuses on how autonomy affects teleworkers. The autonomy exchange brings both new opportunities for the teleworker to engage in home life, but also intrusion of work into their home lives and work intensification and extensification (i.e., extending the hours worked per day). For some participants, it seems that they would go to great lengths to secure the autonomy offered by teleworking, in terms of exchanging it for high levels of productivity and availability to their organizations.

Autonomy in previous research has often been considered an important job characteristic (Parker, Axtell and Turner, 2001); it has much less been considered as a crucially important lever as part of psychological exchanges. The importance of autonomy to the exchange of teleworkers contributes to current knowledge and warrants further investigation for samples of teleworkers and non-teleworkers.



Recent research on autonomy by Basile and Beauregard, (2021) and Howard et al. (2021) and recent review papers from Charalampous et al. (2017) and Schlachter et al (2018) all alluded to the contradictory role autonomy plays for teleworkers, giving more or less than it takes depending on the individual study or case. Introducing the psychological contract as a mediator to explain this phenomenon is a major contribution to research.

Deeper into this conceptual contribution, the researcher examined facilitators that enabled the exchange, situated under the surface of the psychological contract, a new contribution to the field. The following section presents these facilitators to the teleworker's autonomy exchange as a model with potential future application and assess how they interrelate with existing academic work.

### 8.1.2 Facilitators - A Model for Understanding Psychological Contract Exchanges

Much previous research has centered upon the contents of psychological contracts (Aggarwal and Bhargava, 2009; Herriot, Manning and Kidd, 1997; Rousseau, 2001b), but less research has been conducted on the facilitators that operate in the background of the exchange that allows the contents of the psychological contract to be fulfilled. In their research on newly created psychological contracts, Tomprou and Nikolaou (2011) used the term 'facilitators' to describe co-workers who inform on what may go into a psychological contract with a given organization, but who are not directly involved in the exchange. Delobbe, Cooper-Thomas and De Hoe (2016) draw from social exchange theory to suggest training and exchanges with leaders and team-members equate to facilitators of the psychological contract exchange. They go on to propose that these can predict subsequent content elements as part of a 'reciprocation spiral', ascertaining that newcomers to an organization that show high levels of personal obligation will value training as a psychological contract content element.

The facilitators identified in the current research to underpin the exchange are presented in the Table 8.2. They are shown as secondary and primary to the psychological contract exchange, where the secondary facilitators can be seen as features of the primary facilitator. The line manager influences the flow of trust.

Primary	<b>Willingness</b>		<b>Trust - Outgoing</b>		<b>Trust - Incoming</b>	
<i>Line Manager Relationships</i>						
Secondary	Guilt	Gratitude	Reputation	Avoidance of Mockery	Contracts	Policy

**Table 8.2** Facilitators of teleworkers’ psychological contract exchange from the employee’s perspective

Organizing facilitators in this way presents an opportunity to take the premise of facilitators and construct them in a way in which they can be applied to future research. The most prominent facilitators will now be explored with the goal of furthering knowledge of how teleworking psychological contracts are maintained.

### 8.1.3 Willingness, Guilt and Gratitude

The primary facilitator of willingness is supported by the emotions of guilt and gratitude experienced by the teleworker. Previous research conceptualises willingness at work as an action toward a certain scenario, such as willingness to work in teams (Benrazavi and Silong, 2013), to work overseas (Borstorff et al., 1997), to work with older people (Carlson and Idvall, 2015) or younger people (Borus, 1982). This research presents willingness as applied to teleworking.

Guilt was observed as a feeling drawn from several sources. Firstly, teleworkers expressed guilt for not being fully immersed in family life due to work intrusion. This form of guilt would appear to counter willingness to engage in work behaviours. However, the act of placing work secondary to home commitments triggered a subsequent reaction of guilt toward letting the organization down. The teleworker is placed into a balancing act where the teleworker must use their autonomy to prevent their psychological contracts to either party being breached.

Gratitude was felt by teleworkers as response to the organization for allowing employees’ autonomy. If we add into the balancing act scenario above, an organization or line manager that gives flexibility to teleworkers, it alleviates the teleworker’s feeling of guilt for letting a party down and, as a result, the teleworkers feel gratitude toward their organization or line manager. In this way, guilt and gratitude complement each other in the creation of willingness towards the employer.

Although previous research has suggested ways for management to actively control the psychological contract (Paul, Niehoff and Turnley, 2000; Wellin, 2016), it was unclear from discussions with the managers in this sample if they actively engaged in manipulating their staff by pulling on the strings of guilt and gratitude (although self-desirability bias may prevent such discussion). However, it was noted that teleworking managers understood that 'letting them get on with it' and being understanding of parenting led to them getting more out of their teleworking employees whilst also, intentionally or not, avoiding taking concerted responsibility for their teleworking staff.

#### 8.1.3.1 Willingness and Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) helps to explain how willingness is experienced and informs the lived experience of psychological contract obligations. Under SDT, willingness would reflect behaviour that is intrinsically motivated (Deci and Ryan, 2012). The idea that psychological contract obligations are willingly discharged runs counter to how obligations are often assumed to be experienced within psychological contract research, where discharging obligations is seen as more effortful rather than intrinsically motivated. Understanding willingness as a motivation to fulfil psychological contract obligations is a novel approach and compliments current research into better understanding psychological contracts beyond standard effort-laden reciprocal arrangements (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019).

#### 8.1.3.2 The Felt Experience of Psychological Contract Obligations

When obligations are assessed in psychological contract research the focus is on how obligations affect the exchange (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2002; Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994), rather than how it feels to be obligated. As mentioned, previous research on the psychological contract depicts discharging obligations as requiring employees' concerted effort (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006) and the current research shows that teleworkers do go to great lengths to maintain these obligations. However, teleworkers in general did not begrudge or report discharging obligations as excessively effortful. It is therefore suggested that feeling willingness to maintain an obligation alters the felt experience of that action.

Willingness turns external effortful obligations into internal motivations. With teleworkers willingly exchanging high levels of productivity and availability for autonomy, there is an

increased risk of organizations knowingly or unknowingly exploiting this exchange. This has the potential to lead teleworkers unwittingly into overworking scenarios that threaten their work-life balance and future research is recommended to assess this possibility.

#### 8.1.4 Outgoing Trust; Reputation and Avoidance of Mockery

Trust has often been acknowledged as a key element in relationships between employees and the organization in both psychological contract literature (Atkinson, 2007; Guest; 2016; Robinson, 1996) and teleworking literature (Harrington and Ruppel, 1999; Kaplan et al., 2018; Kowalski and Swanson, 2005). In addition, to the aforementioned interconnectedness of trust within the key tenets of this research, it is also a determinate in allowing autonomy (Langfred, 2004). Therefore, as one would expect, it operates as a primary facilitator in the autonomy exchange.

In the current research, trust can be seen as outgoing from the teleworker and incoming from the organization. Firstly, we can assess how the second level facilitators of reputation and avoidance of mockery combine to signal trustworthy behaviours from the teleworker to their organization. Establishing trust is key to avoiding psychological contract breach (Robinson, 1996) and trust is identified as a process that must be built up by both parties for exchanges to operate (Atkinson, 2007). The importance of trust in the current research is doubly noteworthy as trust is also a key feature in teleworking (Martínez-Sánchez et al. 2007) and a feature that teleworkers often have to earn (Park and Cho, 2020). To earn trust, a teleworker must work hard to avoid stereotypical misconceptions of their work ethic, productivity and availability (Clear and Dickson, 2005; Olson, 1988) despite these being regularly debunked (Lister and Harnish, 2019).

These misconceptions also ran through the current research and were perceived more by employees rather than managers. Teleworkers from the current sample were at pains to present versions of themselves to the organization to counter negative stereotypes of teleworker behaviour and showed frustration in some cases when being mocked by others in the organization, although this rarely came from their line managers, thus preventing breach. This appears to unbalance the psychological contract, with the organization inputting less than it receives, in a way unknowingly exploiting the intrinsic motivations that the teleworker holds to prove themselves and protect their autonomy.

Reputation, or the importance of not having a bad one, were seen as key to ensuring managers trusted employees to conduct teleworking and allowed the teleworker autonomy over their schedules. Avoiding mockery ran along similar lines with teleworkers distancing themselves from misconceptions, but also teleworkers knew they must stay within implicit boundaries set by the organization, typified by 'not taking the Mickey'. It is also worth noting that home sharers never appeared to engage in mocking the teleworker, perhaps suggesting that those closest to the teleworker better understand their true work ethic.

This research shows that building trust is a concerted effort for teleworkers, who have to work hard to establish a favourable reputation. Borrowing from McGregor's well-known 1960 work on Theory X workers (who are inherently lazy and unmotivated), the teleworkers in the current study had to consistently work to prove themselves to be Theory Y workers (intrinsically motivated to work).

### 8.1.5 Incoming Trust - Contracts and Policy

The importance that telework policy has for creating wider organizational trust is shown in previous research from Brown et al, (2016), where contracts help teleworkers to understand their roles and responsibilities when teleworking (Mirchandani, 2002), but are noted as varying immensely.

Within the current project, the amount of trust communicated through employment contracts and organizational policy contrasted between the public sector (with clear teleworking policy and flexible working contracts) and the private sector (with murkier policy and standard contracts). In the latter case, the importance of the line manager is enhanced as teleworking decision making is left to them.

Furthermore, only one third of the sample expressly remembered having a teleworking contract over a standard one. Although organizational policy may have filled this gap for some, again the importance of the line manager to communicate the expectations of teleworking falls to them. This equates to the teleworker putting a large amount of trust in this individual to uphold a fair teleworking arrangement.

### 8.1.6 Trust - Line Manager Relationships

In regards to the psychological contract, line managers are often seen as the embodiment of the organization (Collins, Cartwright and Hislop, 2013; Herriot, Manning and Kidd, 1997) and have been found to play a key role in enabling trust (Bartram and Casimir, 2007; Saunders and Thornhill, 2003). In a teleworking context, line manager communications have also been found to generate trust in the organization (Ndlovu, Quaye and Saini, 2021).

In the current research the power of the line manager mediated the fostering of trust across the sample, the effect of which was underlined by the relative weakness of policy and relative lack of explicit teleworking contracts. Further research that refocuses the work of line manager involvement in teleworking would be welcomed as currently it is unknown whether they realise the level of importance they hold in creating trust in teleworkers. Replication of Peters, Den Dulk and de Ruijter's 2010 study of managers' views on allowing telework would be welcomed. After the paradigm shift in teleworking post-Covid-19, refocusing this kind of study to examine line manager communications whilst managing teleworkers would be particularly pertinent.

Illegems and Verbeke (2004) suggested that the conventional view of managers being highly involved in teleworking policy would be replaced by HR departments, however, there is suggestion within this thesis that the influence of the line-manager is still strong in the day-to-day working of teleworking arrangements. Although, good line manager relationships helped to expedite information around teleworking expectations, harmonious line manager relations were not present across the sample. Interestingly, even negative line manager relationships, from which trust was not drawn, fell short of outright psychological contract breach, again suggesting the 'power' in the psychological contract lies with the line manager. The following sub-section considers why breach was a rare occurrence for the teleworkers.

### 8.1.7 Psychological Contract Breach or the Lack Thereof

Psychological contract breach has been one of the most researched aspects of the psychological contract since Rousseau's conceptualisation of it in 1989, and the

consequences of breach have been shown to exert a more significant effect than that of psychological contract fulfilment (Conway, Guest and Trenberth, 2011).

Often cited in psychological contract literature is a list of promises that employees look for from their organizations in order to obtain fulfilment (Rousseau, 2001b). However, the teleworking cohort from this study placed autonomy in their roles far above any other inducement (though trust and good ICT also featured notably). Ongoing autonomy became the yardstick of psychological contract fulfilment. This suggests that if the key inducement of autonomy was provided by the organization then the psychological contract had a good chance of being fulfilled.

It was observed that, through the autonomy exchange, teleworkers reported the need to show high levels of productivity and availability. Due to having a wide range of workplace seniority in the sample, this notion was also confirmed from a top-down viewpoint, where teleworking managers also stated that they afforded their teleworking staff autonomy if they were productive and available when working remotely.

Breach and violation of the psychological contract rarely occurred. This could be due to the relative ease of maintaining the autonomy for productivity and availability exchanges between the teleworker and the organization. This is not to suggest the teleworkers in the sample had easy lives, but that by having autonomy they were able to maintain productivity and availability. Additionally, teleworkers and managers seek to maintain highly implicit, flexible and malleable psychological contracts. At some points in the research teleworkers and teleworking managers appear to step back from enacting ultimatums that would cause breach, acknowledging that although certain situations are not perfect, they operate functionally (See section 7.3.1 for examples).

By both parties building in the flexibility that autonomy brings, conflicting obligations are less likely to create breach of the psychological contract. Flexible management of psychological contracts presents a new insight into how breach can be avoided by both parties in the exchange and presents another clear contribution to theory. With autonomy as the central item of teleworkers' psychological contracts, this enhances the importance of flexibility. Teleworking psychological contracts present an avenue to explore how the exchange is managed flexibly through autonomy, thereby avoiding breach.

The idea of teleworkers holding more robust psychological contracts than office-based counterparts has received little research attention, but the use of flexibility to avoid conflicting obligations developing into psychological breach is a topic for future research. As is the implication that breach will become a less important factor in teleworker psychological contract literature, calling for creation of new measures specific to this type of employee is to understand the nuances unique to teleworkers, else there is a propensity to assume breach free teleworker psychological contract equates to fulfilled psychological contracts.

In summary, the contributions brought forth from RQ1 show an exchange for teleworkers focused upon autonomy and a complementary system of facilitators that help deepen the understanding of the felt experience of the psychological contract and suggest avenues for future research.

## 8.2 Discussion of Research Question Two

Appreciating the advances in teleworking technology is a difficult process. In the timescale of completing a PhD. The advancements in technology threaten to overtake the current discoveries that the researcher is trying to convey. The period of this PhD, late 2010s into the early 2020s, coincides with steady innovation in communications technology, including the advancement of 5G, improvements in the usability of mobile telephone devices for computing, and the rise of team working applications. Setting the scene of teleworkers in a hyperconnected age (Swaminathan et al., 2020) means working more intensely from mobile devices, including conducting meetings and research, not just receiving and sending emails, and a rise in the expectation of response times wherever one is working.

### 8.2.1 The Role of Hyperconnected Technology in the Autonomy Exchange

Drawing from the autonomy exchange outlined in the previous section, it was apparent how hyperconnected technology influenced the exchange. Autonomy is enabled by hyperconnected technologies, as it increases teleworkers ability over where and when they work. It was undoubted that teleworkers appreciated the quality of hyperconnected



technology and in many instances heaped praise upon the way it aided their ability to telework. However, hyperconnected technology also increases teleworkers' availability and workload. Understanding how this plays out in practice is nuanced, but the current research puts forth three concepts that combine to explain the process of teleworker overwork.

### 8.2.2 Relating Similar Concepts of Availability

The current research drew upon existing literature from the fields of presenteeism (Cooper and Lu, 2018) and always-on culture (McDowall and Kinman, 2017; Turkle, 2008).

Whilst the autonomy for availability exchange takes place as a deal between the teleworker and the organization, the researcher also observed an internal driver under the guise of virtual presenteeism and at the cultural level influence of always-on.

Virtual presenteeism is at an embryonic point of development, thus, the current research looks to shape its definition. Although the current study did not directly assess working whilst the teleworker is sick, other aspects of the teleworkers working behaviour that did not fit directly with always-on at a cultural level or the autonomy exchange at a micro level resonated with other concepts associated with virtual presenteeism, namely an internalised need to appear available and overworking whilst teleworking. This internalised availability again relates back to the intrinsic motivation of SDT. Teleworkers in the study were rarely expected to present with extreme levels of availability and in some cases actively discouraged to do so by their line managers. Although, implicit psychological contract expectations could be imposed upon the teleworker by line managers that exhibited over working tendencies and increased availability.

This calls for further investigation in how concepts driven by new technology interrelate and effect the experience of employees, particularly ones that rely on technology such as teleworkers.

### 8.2.3 The Difficulty of Maintaining True Autonomy

The apparent difficulty for teleworkers in finding the point of delineation between achieving autonomy that allows for the balancing of work-life demands, without sliding into a

progressive series of availability activities that eventually removes the autonomy to distance oneself from work presents a clear and present threat to well-being.

When a teleworker desires autonomy, they are likely to increase their productivity and availability to increase the likelihood of autonomy being awarded. This process can be seen in the autonomy exchange. The more endemic this behaviour becomes, we see the teleworker engaging in virtual presenteeism, which is reflected back to them through the prominence of always-on culture in the media and in some cases by others in their organization. The result of this continued excessive working would feasibly cause an increase in the expectations the organization and potentially home sharers have for the teleworkers productivity and availability. At this point, one would question if the teleworker is actually enjoying autonomy or a facsimile with has replaced actual autonomy with a perceived version. Further testing on how teleworkers feel at a psychosomatic level would be welcomed, a suggestion also made by Charalampous et al. (2017)

One puzzling element comes from the lack of awareness some teleworkers appear to show toward an arrangement so skewed to benefit the organization. However, as referred to by Cooper and Lu (2019), presenteeism can be partially explained by SDT, in particular noting that individuals with high autonomous drive will more likely resonate with intrinsic values of work. For our current sample, this fits neatly. If autonomy is desired and this makes the overwork intrinsically rewarding, teleworkers would be happy, with good levels of well-being. However, this doesn't fully explain the teleworkers that engage in the behaviours without enjoying positive well-being.

Further exploration to test this potentially paradoxical process would be welcomed. The data extraction method of any such study would need careful consideration, self-reporting measures or diaries would appear feasible but the sense that the teleworker may be too implicated within the system could be an issue. Therefore, a complimentary study featuring the teleworker's home sharers may provide a supplement of data to cross reference the self-reports.

In summary, hyperconnected technology can be seen as a double-edged sword for the teleworker. Its flexibility presents an invaluable method to prevent hard conflicts between home and work from arising, but also increases the amount of soft conflicts due to this very

flexibility. Further comment on how the difference of conflict type effects the sample will be discussed in the following sections on the presence of conflicting obligations on teleworker well-being.

## 8.3 Discussion of Research Question Three

Previous literature on conflicts that teleworkers experience has been mixed in its severity, citing clear disruptions to work-life balance (Golden, 2012; Johnson, Andrey and Shaw, 2007), reporting of severe work-life conflict is expected to increase as results of studies conducted during the Covid-a19 pandemic surface (Elbaz, Richards and Provost Savard, 2022; Graham et al., 2021; Howard et al., 2021). Other examples show that conflicts are equal those of working in an office (Moore, 2006; Sullivan, 2000), to findings that welcome telework as a way to reduce conflict (Tremblay, 2003). A potential explanation for the wide-ranging results could be due to the way conflicts are measured and understood.

Hard conflicts in the current research were rare due to teleworker autonomy negating many potential 'crunch points'. However, through in-depth interviewing with participants, a subtler way of understanding teleworkers conflicting obligations was uncovered and the concepts of hard, soft and compound conflicts will now be presented with reference to how it can expand upon previously held knowledge.

### 8.3.1 A New Typology of Conflict

Conflict for teleworkers between their home and work lives has been well researched previously, but tends to focus on the presence of conflict (Tremblay, Paquet and Najem, 2006), the direction of the conflict (Delanoeiye, Verbruggen and Germeys, 2019) or the impacts of the conflict (Golden, 2012). Although additional research has approached moderating factors that lead teleworkers to experience conflict (Abendroth and Reimann, 2018), as yet, the researcher is unaware of previous attempts to create a typology of conflicts for telework that focus on the severity of the feeling experienced and its' consequences, providing another clear contribution to theory.

The current research viewed conflict as the clash of obligations through the lens of the psychological contract. Whilst obligations to the organization may be somewhat clear, supported by employment contracts, line manager interactions and experiences of the role and obligations to home sharers may be less well developed. In this research, psychological contract obligations were also operating in non-work relationships, such as with spouses, partners, and family members. For example, teleworkers reported obligations relating to childcare arrangements, cleaning, cooking, gardening, walking dogs and shopping. The teleworkers often ran home errands during working hours to help the efficient running of the home. Teleworkers also tended to their personal projects, what may be referred to as obligations to one's self, where they would spend working time on self-improvement such as going to the gym or practicing other leisure activities which they believe will enhance their well-being.

With the obligations to home sharers identified and analysed, the researcher suggested the categorization of conflicts into hard, soft and compound. This categorization presents a new way of understanding both breach within psychological contract theory and the lived experience of teleworking. One reason that these formations of conflict fit well within psychological contract theory is that they appreciate the psychological contract as a process (Conway and Briner, 2005). This is particularly important for soft conflicts turning into compound conflicts. Their applicability to telework comes from understanding how familial relationships differ from work-based interactions, where perhaps teleworkers are reluctant to have open conflict with a family member or spouse, more so than with a work colleague. Teleworkers commonly reported small conflicts and how they accumulated over time.

Soft conflicts were shown to be manageable by teleworkers. Scenarios that appeared conflictual, such as needing to pick-up children during the work day, were greeted by responses such as 'what conflict?' with the researcher needing to explain that two things happening at the same time would, to a person removed from the situation, appear conflictual. For the experienced teleworker their workarounds viewed the conflict as just another instance of managing flexibility.

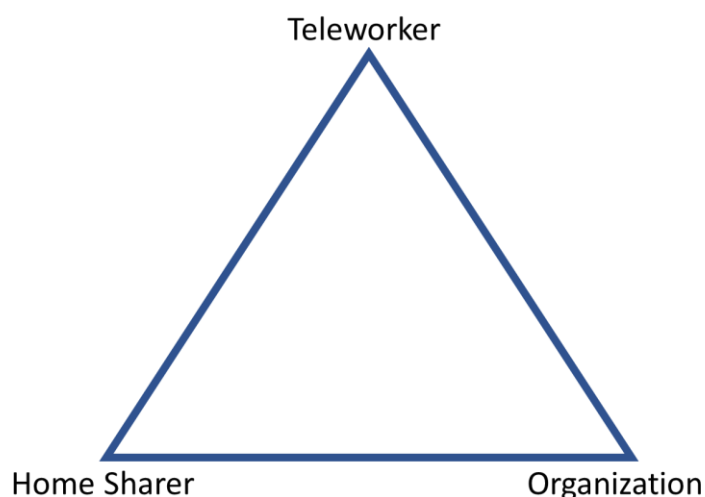
Nevertheless, soft conflicts were found to have the potential to become a norm in teleworkers' lives and on occasion accumulate to compound conflicts, which were found to be more problematic for teleworker well-being. Soft and compound conflicts can extend our

knowledge of instances that are taken for granted by teleworkers, but create a platform from which such conflicts impact well-being.

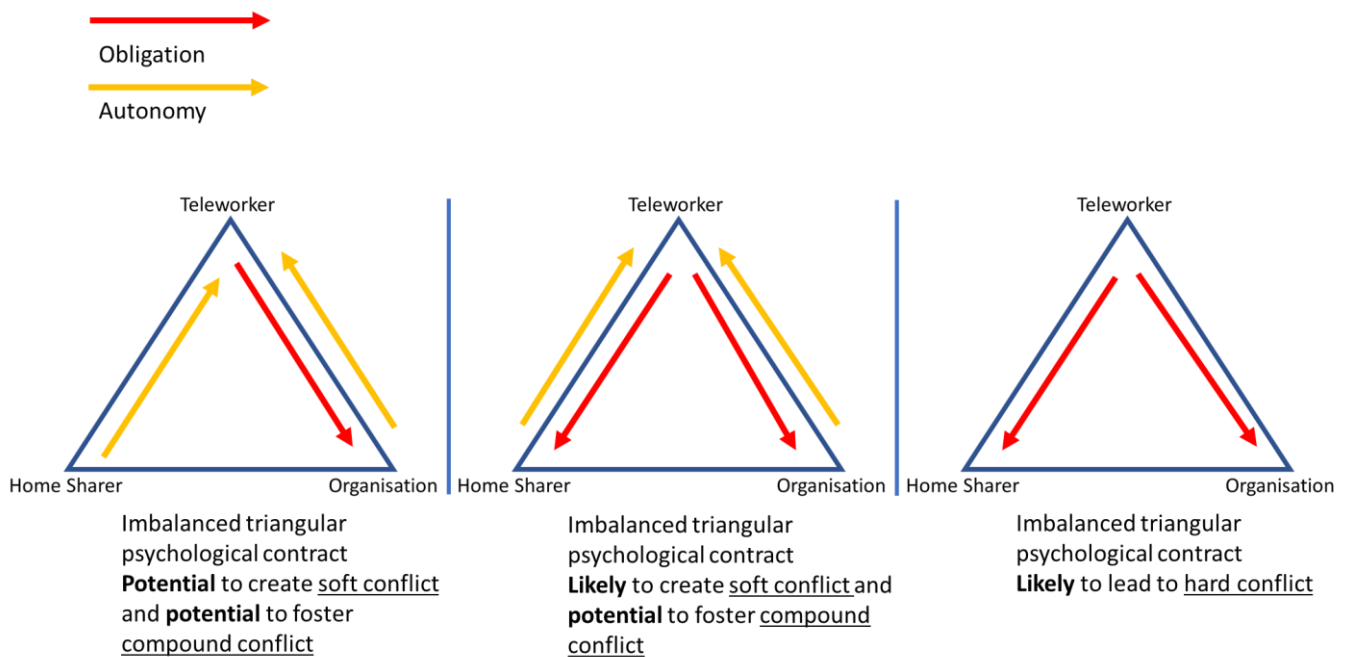
When other actors (home sharers, line managers) are also flexible in their approach to teleworking, this can again soften conflictual situations. The added flexibility partially explains the relative lack of breach and violation of the psychological contract as the home sharer and line manager representing the organization both enact a level of flexibility that allows shuffling potential conflicts so as to avoid breach.

### 8.3.2 Visualising a Triangular Psychological Contract

With three parties involved in the psychological contract, this lends to the visualisation of the teleworker's psychological contract as a triangle. Within this triangle the teleworker shifts the obligations to different parts of the triangle in an attempt to maintain a functioning system. By prioritising different parties in the triangular psychological contract, the teleworker acknowledges that this may lead to the detriment of their personal well-being as they will need to 'make up' to the un-prioritised party at a later time or date as to avoid breaching their psychological contract. This issue will be alleviated or compounded by how much autonomy they are allowed in return from the other parties.



**Figure 8.1** The Triangular Psychological Contract



**Figure 8.2** Conceptualisations of balanced and imbalanced triangular psychological contracts

In figure 8.2 we note that the severity of the imbalance corresponds to the level of conflict experienced. The more autonomy or less obligation the ‘softer’ the conflict and vice versa for ‘hard’ conflict. It should be remembered that the states of these triangles are not static and could fluctuate on a day-by-day or even hour-by-hour basis.

### 8.3.2.3 Applied Uses of Conflict Categorization

Teleworking has been established as a complex and nuanced form of work and has for some time needed a process to help understand the role conflict has upon teleworkers (Boell, Cecez-Kecmanovic and Campbell, 2016; Shin et al., 2000; Solís, 2016). The psychological contract can be used to understand conflict affecting teleworkers in the following ways.

For researchers, applying the conflict categorization could be useful across quantitative and qualitative means. Previous quantitative survey design on the psychological contract has focused on what would be considered hard conflicts (Rousseau, 2001b), potentially missing the subtler soft conflicts that exist. This too can be applied for qualitative interviewing, with awareness of the impact soft conflicts building into compound conflicts has, researchers may be able to tease out narratives from participants previously thought to have negligible effect on the psychological contract.

In summary, the typology of conflicts presented in this thesis and the triangulation of the psychological contract invites a new way of understanding the subtle and complex conflict that teleworkers experience on a daily basis.

## 8.4 Discussion of Research Question Four

Considering the aforementioned range of conflict levels, deciphering the impact on well-being for participants is challenging. Previous research has often shown that well-being of teleworkers is dependent on a number of variables. Anderson, Kaplan and Vega (2015) look at within person preferences, Pyöriä (2011) the role of the manager, while many look at family and the home environment (Johnson, Andrey and Shaw, 2007; Kossek, Lautsch and Eaton, 2009; Standen, Daniels, and Lamond, 1999). The variable from the current research considers all of these elements as they combine to inform the level of conflicting obligations present for the teleworker.

Hard conflicts can be shown to cause a negative well-being effect, most commonly stress. However, soft conflicts did not illicit poor well-being and were part of a well-managed teleworking routine. Compound conflict acts as a process, depending on how developed the conflicts have become could affect the well-being impact. Other moderators, such as the teleworkers ability to manage dual obligations could also be a factor and more research, particularly longitudinal, on this concept would be welcome. If soft conflict could be recognised in teleworkers, then re-explored at a later date, the journey of a conflict could be mapped and its well-being implications flagged.

Participants from the sample continually brought their interpretation of their well-being back to work-life balance. The discussion will now try and tease out several specific themes that emerged from this umbrella term.

### 8.4.1 Work-Life Balance

The concept of work-life balance is well known in academia and was also referenced frequently by participants. Objectively, the teleworker's description of work-life balance appeared skewed to serve the organization's work demands rather than teleworkers' life domain. That being said, the positive comments from participants around the extra family

interactions they were able to undertake when teleworking should not go unstated, even if working commitments needed to be shaped into unusual patterns to facilitate this.

With a large body of research suggesting teleworkers are more productive (Bosua et al., 2012; Kazekami, 2020; Ruth and Chaudhry, 2008) it has become part of the reasoning for companies to facilitate teleworking. With this kind of thinking garnering mainstream media attention after the Covid-19 pandemic, teleworkers may feel immediately obliged to work harder away from the office than when in-office just because they are teleworking. One example used frequently by the sample was extension of the working day at both 'ends'.

#### 8.4.1.1 The Commuting Time Trade-Off

As found in classic studies by Di Martino and Wirth (1990), time saving gains from removal of commuting was welcomed by teleworkers, but much of this saved time was exchanged for working time in the home domain. Impacts of increased working hours are known to decrease well-being (Schaufeli, Taris and Van Rhenen, 2008). Perhaps the most interesting facet of this trade-off is the question of why teleworkers are happy to exchange commuting time for working.

From the current research it appears that teleworkers can 'claim' the commuting time to be what they want it to be, thus still holding autonomy over the time, even if they choose to use it for work. Secondly, it would appear that the gratitude for avoiding the actual process of commuting makes this more palatable. This process is of course supported by having the appropriate hyperconnected technology. Participants often referenced the ease of logging onto work, some even from their beds.

#### 8.4.1.2 Availability Levels and Well-Being

Increased availability to work is linked to emotional exhaustion (Dettmers, 2016), specifically Brauner, Wöhrmann and Michel (2021) show that negative health and well-being effects grow in tandem with the extent of extra availability employees give to the organization over and above their contracted hours.

Mixing telework, virtual presenteeism and always-on behaviours also alerts to possible negative well-being effects (Hadjisolomou, Mitsakis and Gary, 2021; McDowall and Kinman, 2017). Some of these effects and events were reported by participants, most of whom



realised that they were in a bad routine and reflected on ways to amend. Others accepted or apparently enjoyed their fate in an always-on role.

#### 8.4.1.3 The Impact of Segmentation and Integration

One method to alleviate the burden of increased availability was for teleworkers to segment or integrate their home and work lives. As discussed by Derks et al. (2016) and Piszczek (2017), the concepts of segmenters and integrators was relevant to the current research to examine how teleworkers maintain personal boundaries in a hyperconnected society.

Segmentation was displayed as a trial and error process, featuring simple steps such as adjusting settings or putting devices in a separate bag. Many participants noted their awareness of the need to create separation and some stated that they were still in a process of learning how to set their boundaries. Integration of technology also increases the chance of teleworkers presenting higher levels of availability.

The purpose of this research was not to prescribe either of these approaches, but it was able to detect that either approach can be successful depending on the match to the teleworker's personality, their home situation and their organization. For instance, teleworkers who preferred integrating and who had supportive families and a fast-paced organization reported high levels of well-being. However, some teleworkers preferred to segment their home and work lives, but pressures from the organization forced integration, which in turn created home pressures. These are just two examples, but many more mix and match scenarios were presented with varying effects upon well-being. Further quantitative research would be able to firm up or amend these hunches.

It is suggested that further application of integrating and segmenting to teleworker well-being is researched, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic will have brought about much enforced integration.

### 8.5 Effects of Imbalanced Triangular Psychological Contracts on Well-Being

As Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro (2010) suggested when trying to make sense of psychological contract breach, 'everyday breaches' can be a triggering event and a starting point for breach. The researcher adds soft, compound and hard conflicts as trigger points to

psychological contract breach. Deepening the understanding of how breach occurs could lead to development of techniques to avoid the employee or employer feeling their psychological contract has been violated. For instance, if an employee is aware that their feelings of breach are being triggered by soft conflicts, then this can allow action to be taken before a compound conflict occurs, thus maintaining a higher standard of well-being in the process.

The theory behind triangular psychological contracts dovetails with boundary management and spillover issues. Blurred boundaries allow obligations to work and home to cohabit the same time and spillover equates to the breaching of that permeable boundary (Köffer et al., 2015; Leung, 2011) creating what would be a hard conflict in the current research. Where the triangulation attempts to deepen knowledge of boundary blurring and spillover is by producing a series of connotations between obligation and autonomy that can represent where the individual is on the scale of conflict. If the individual were able to be cognisant of soft conflicts building over time into a compound conflict they could identify coping strategies to redress balance, prevent a hard conflict developing and avoid the degradation of well-being associated with that situation.

## 8.6 Discussion of Research Question Five

Having observed the range of conflicts teleworkers experienced and evaluated their well-being effect, the final answer to the research questions of this thesis approaches how teleworkers coped with the conflicts they experienced and maintained their well-being.

Telework may be seen by some *as* a coping strategy for life (Hartig, Kylin and Johansson, 2007), but the current research shows, for that to be the case, another selection of coping strategies are enacted. Telework research often applies quite general concepts to understand how teleworkers manage their routines. Frequently the behaviour of exerting flexibility refers to the spatial latitude of where to conduct work (Morganson et al., 2010) or temporal latitude of when to work (Di Martino and Wirth (1990). Looking at more specific teleworking coping strategies, Tietze (2002) finds some common ground with the current research by identifying the role of negotiation and the use of segmentation and integration.

The current research views negotiations through a psychological contract lens and proposes evidence of several specific coping strategies.

### 8.6.1 Identifying Specific Coping Strategies

When coping with telework, the teleworker must manage expectations and negotiate with other parties, whilst also being prepared to put in effortful work to make the system succeed in practice. The difficulty of doing so is then tempered or exacerbated by the external parties to the teleworker.

Negotiation and expectation management are two concepts closely related to the psychological contract and were observed to operate in interactions with both the organization and home sharers. Teleworkers were able to better position themselves to cope with the strain of teleworking if their home sharers, managers and colleagues knew their limitations and engaged in trade-offs to lessen burdens, particularly when they arose in the home sphere.

Teleworkers also coped using practical steps. The most prominent of these runs counter to the previous discussion on the negative effects of over availability. Teleworkers often elongated their days to fit in work around home commitments. This was seen by many as necessary availability and productivity, Brauner, Wöhrmann and Michel (2021) would note this as 'legitimate-availability', which has a mild negative well-being effect rather than more intensive 'illegitimate-availability' which has more severe health consequences. Other practical coping techniques help to lessen over-availability, they include changing settings on devices, blocking off time away from work in diaries and prioritising personal needs, these techniques were grouped under the effect of teleworking tenure and, as is suggested, are developed over time. The pressing issue here for future research is to ascertain how this strategy can be applied without having to experience early teleworking career difficulties. One suggestion would be through appropriate training.

In addition, coping strategies that were not specific to teleworkers appeared, normally in the form of taking a holiday or personal aptitudes that naturally allowed some teleworkers to manage difficult scenarios.

Furthermore, and of utmost importance, was the provision of support and understanding from home sharers, line managers and work colleagues. Though the importance of workplace support is not new (Jang, 2009; Warren and Johnson, 1995), simple acts of support affect the felt experience of teleworking. These included allowing flexibility to care for children, easing new teleworkers into routines that enhance their well-being, and fitting hours to align with natural sleeping patterns or other, more irregular, personal commitments. Previous research has shown familial support can be lacking for teleworkers (Standen, Daniels and Lamond, 1999) and the current study did show mixed applications of co-parenting, but in general support from family members was strong and younger teleworkers from the 'junior family member' group were guided into routines and supported with home responsibilities whilst they settled into their teleworking routine, although in households with two or three teleworkers they were demoted to the smallest workspaces.

### 8.6.2 Categorising Coping Strategies

Although research has been undertaken on how to cope when teleworking (Kylin, 2007; Norman et al, 1995; Tietze, 2002). There has been no research (to the best of the researcher's knowledge) that presents a categorisation of the types of coping strategies and how they emanate.

The current research splits coping strategies into those initiated by the teleworker, termed 'internal' - subdivides into moderators derived from psychological contract interaction, practical actions and traditional. External moderators, those initiated by others are classed as external and are bequeathed by the teleworker's family or organization. Section 8.5.1 of the findings include more detail of the coping strategies and table 8.3 displays the categorisations:

Type	Sub-Category	Examples
Internal	Psychological contract moderators	Expectation management; negotiation
Internal	Practical teleworking moderators	Workday elongation; teleworking tenure
Internal	Traditional moderators	Rest and relaxation; personal aptitudes
External	Family support	Being understanding of work obligations whilst at home
External	Organizational support	Being understanding of family needs whilst teleworking

**Table 8.3** Categorisation of teleworker coping strategies

It is now, more than ever, important to bring to the fore the explanation and expansion of how teleworkers cope with complex dual demands. The coping strategies found in the current research are from a relatively small qualitative sample. Further research that continues to identify specific coping strategies enacted by teleworkers would be welcomed by academics and practitioners alike.

## 8.7 Limitations of the Research

The use of narrative literature reviewing can be considered a limitation as it has enhanced chance of researcher bias (Williams et al., 2021). However, as discussed in the methods chapter, by holding a constructionist-interpretivist paradigm the researcher accepts bias as part of the research process and therefore would also be an accepted part of literature reviewing. This is not to suggest that the researcher did not apply quality criteria to the literature review method, they employed aspects of Guba and Lincoln's 1989 and Lincoln and Guba's 1985 trustworthiness doctrine, including 'prolonged engagement in the field' assessing literature continually for the length of the PhD process, 'reflexive triangulation' with supervisors and 'confirmability' by accurately reporting the literature that was reviewed.

Although it has some strengths, in that 42 interviews from 41 participants produced a range of viewpoints and a varied cohort in terms of gender, age, tenure, experience, role, managerial level and sector, the sample size can be seen as a limitation. When the

researcher ascertained the responses had become sufficiently repetitive, they adjudicated the point of data saturation had been reached (Fusch and Ness, 2015). However, one can never be completely certain that increased numbers of participants would have produced further findings of interest. In addition, there was a potential social desirability bias from participants to present themselves as more in control and capable than in reality, which could explain some of the disconnect between the researcher's perceived view of the difficult teleworking experience and the presentation of satisfied teleworkers. Furthermore, the generalisability of the research presents a further limitation, due to the relative geographical similarity of the cohort being generally based in London and the Home Counties. Future research should consider whether the findings generalize to samples from regions that differ from south east England.

The timing of the data collection, although not a limitation in a traditional sense, does create a slight disconnect with the current popular view on teleworking. The data collection period spanned seven months from June 2019 to January 2020 and did not include the paradigm shift in teleworking that was brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. To include the effects of the pandemic on the sample, the researcher approached the cohort in early 2022 to request from them a short written piece or audio recording on how the pandemic altered their teleworking routines and their felt experience during the height of the pandemic and at the current juncture. The key themes that emerged from this vignette piece are available post script in the thesis.

The methodology of the research also put forward limitations. Semi-structured interviewing was chosen due to its strong applicability to teleworking, the psychological contract, and the researcher's previous experience and confidence with the method. Drawbacks included the need for participants to cast their minds back to previous events and interactions, which could be particularly challenging in psychological contract research as many instances that could equate to minor breaches are easily forgotten. This is particularly pertinent to the current research as it set itself away from the stricter promissory format of psychological breach and toward a model based on expectations which are perhaps less easily recalled.

Although the sample featured a range of job roles and sectors, the research was carried out from one viewpoint, that of the employee relating to their experience of teleworking, being managed and of being a home sharer. This limited the psychological contract analysis to

only the teleworker's viewpoint and although the view of managers was also reported, they were not in connection to others within the sample (i.e. the psychological contract between two individuals were not examined from differing perspectives). This was also true for non-work relationships. Had the psychological contract been analysed from multiple viewpoints this could have increased the depth of the research and also negate some self-desirability bias as the experience of the individual could have been assessed against their manager's or home sharer's opinion. Ultimately, gaining the level of access to the teleworker's key contacts proved unattainable during the data collection period.

Participants' recollection of conflict and ability to cope with dual obligations is susceptible to self-inflation of their abilities. To counter this, the researcher thoroughly briefed participants on the robust measures in place to protect their identities via anonymisation and applied techniques from Bergen and 'Labonté's 2020 work on reducing social desirability bias. This hopefully lessened the participants' desire to present a façade of competency for concern their results would get back to their employer. However, the propensity for individuals to recount a more capable version of themselves persists.

By approaching the project favouring the use of expectations and obligations over promises in terms of psychological contract terminology could have presented a disconnect between the seemingly conflictual experience of teleworker and the low reports of breach and violation. When one investigates promises, and the consequences of broken promises, there is a chance that more overtly negative responses are recorded, akin to a critical incidence technique, which was missing in the current study. Furthermore, individuals may have had trouble recalling some conflictual elements as they can easily be amalgamated into daily routines.

The collection of data after the fact also presents the drawback of information being lost to memory. For instance, many of the daily interactions that assemble psychological contract interactions are notably suited to collecting at the time they are being experienced, such as through diary studies (Conway and Briner, 2005).

## 8.7 Implications and Recommendations

This section will elucidate how this thesis can provide implications and recommendations across theoretical, research design and practical bounds. Having covered a wide range of topics across the thesis, some of which demand further timely exploration, such as modern teleworking, it is hoped that the following sections can provide a springboard for enhancement of knowledge and improve the lived working experience.

### 8.7.1 Theoretical Implications and Recommendations

Theme wise, approaching research projects on telework and the psychological contract with autonomy as the core concept behind the research design could enhance or disprove its applicability to understand both fields.

The typology of conflicts has scope for further exploration and testing. Often conflict is treated in a simplistic fashion, for example a psychological contract breach has or has not occurred. To approach conflict from a perspective of small infringements that may escalate or accumulate bigger problems over time is worthy of longitudinal investigation. It is hoped that Table 7.2 will be of use to future researchers wishing to test these findings or as a base to build on and improve the suggested framework.

Further exploration of the role of home sharers would be welcomed. The scope of the current project did not include discussing the telework situation with home sharers, however, its inclusion could deepen the understanding of the home psychological contract. Psychological contracts outside of the work environment are rarely researched, yet theoretically very plausible. The applicability of the psychological contract to the home relationships was clearly demonstrated in the current research, where teleworkers negotiated expectations and obligations with home sharers in similar ways to how we may expect them to have psychological contracts with work colleagues.



## 8.7.2 Research Implications and Recommendations

Alternative methods could be considered. Namely a mixed methodology that could detect minor breaches (or fulfilments) of expectations/obligations that may occur during a working week. A diary entry method supplemented with semi-structured interviews may provide insightful data on such micro infringements, fulfilments and negotiations of teleworking psychological contracts (Conway and Briner, 2002).

The apparent weakness of contracts and policy documents to accurately capture teleworking arrangements for the majority of the sample, particularly in the private sector, shows how much of the structure of teleworking comes down to arrangements between line managers and the individual. Idiosyncratic arrangements such as these have been well researched in a similar vein to the psychological contract (namely, i-deals, see Rousseau, Ho, and Greenberg, 2006; Hornung, Rousseau and Glaser, 2009) and would provide fertile ground to exploring teleworking.

Furthermore, the weakness of much of the contractual and policy stipulations enhances the role of the line manager in controlling the experience of teleworking for the employee. Future research should examine in more depth the role of line managers in interpreting teleworking policies.

The impact of Covid-19 on teleworking offers many avenues for future research. With data collection ceasing in January 2020, this project represents one of the final snapshots of the experience of telework prior to the mass proliferation of teleworking around the world due to Covid-19. Participants from the current study were contacted in early 2022 for an update on their teleworking experience through the pandemic and their reflections are discussed post script.

The categorisation of the cohort into parent, partner and junior family member would benefit from further, larger scale investigation. In the present study, it was difficult to produce a strong assessment of the differences between groups due to the sub-sample sizes.

Triangulating the psychological contract also creates scope to further explore other actors beyond obligation and autonomy to build a more detailed, holistic view of teleworker

psychological contracts. In addition, application of well-being measures to the triangle may affect the outcome of conflict and presents another avenue for future research.

### 8.7.3 Practical Implications and Recommendations

The researcher hopes that as well as furthering theoretical discussion in academia and influencing future research design, the findings of this project could help to advise on teleworking policy at company or governmental level. Currently the ad hoc provision of guidance and training on teleworking presents a serious risk to the mental well-being of a large percentage of the current working population.

Providing training to teleworkers on how to work not only productively, safely (ergonomically) and securely does not cover the full range of issues associated with teleworking. On numerous occasions, the effect of tenure enabled teleworkers to adapt their routines and practices to include safeguarding their well-being, this was normally a trial and error process. However, well informed training practices could speed up this process and eliminate some of the negative experiences (such as overwork, virtual presenteeism) felt by new teleworkers.

With the increase in teleworking following the Covid-19 pandemic, hopefully parts of this research will be able to filter through to advise future teleworking policy. This is particularly pertinent now as there may be many more distressed teleworkers in need of support than there were pre-pandemic.

The typography of conflicting obligations and its application to the triangular psychological contract could become a tool to help prevent well-being issues. The quicker an employee or employer is able to spot well-being issues the better. Dealing with soft and compound conflicts before they develop into hard conflicts or result in well-being issues.

#### 8.7.3.1 Practical Implications and Recommendations for Organizations, Managers and Employees

For organizations, implications rest on how they enact teleworking policy, particularly around expectations of availability and productivity.

Recommendations to implement robust and fair teleworking policies that discourage overworking are made. Career advancement should not be directly related to availability and productivity to the point of jeopardising work-life balance. A supportive organizational culture is also vital and needs to be communicated to teleworkers via their line managers, especially if they spend large period of time working away from the office.

Following on from that, the line manager has unique implications as the 'face' of the organization and enhanced responsibility to manage teleworkers due to their importance in relaying of organizational policy. They are recommended to relay a positive organizational culture, while also feeding back to higher management any unhealthy teleworking behaviours. They must also remember their role in setting the expectations in the teleworker's psychological contract.

Implications for employees revolve around understanding how seemingly slight issues of work-life conflict can build into larger issues and how intrusive technology can potentially erode well-being, despite isolated incidences appearing unremarkable on the surface. The researcher would recommend employees to regularly take stock of their mental condition, recognise and recalibrate their psychological contract to maintain healthy levels of autonomy, boundary management and a good standard of well-being.

## 8.8 Conclusions

This thesis addressed five research questions and contributed knowledge to the topics of the psychological contract and the experience of teleworking. In addition, further avenues of research have been opened for development, such as applying self-determination theory, virtual presenteeism, and always-on culture concepts. Furthermore, practical recommendations have been made to improve employee well-being.

Contributions of the study have been made to the field of teleworking literature and practice. Telework is shown to be a complex arrangement consisting of managing interactions with multiple work and non-work parties to psychological contracts. Each of these psychological contracts were found to be subject to a variety of conflicts in the forms of obligations to one party conflicting with obligations to a second or even third party. Practical support from organizations to new teleworkers was particularly lacking, in that formal teleworking policies were lacking and training was rare. Steps to improve clarity here may help to alleviate some unhealthy working behaviours discovered within the research.

Further contributions of the study are to the field of psychological contract literature. Presented in this thesis is a clear application of the psychological contract to telework via qualitative means – a relatively unexplored combination of framework, cohort and methodology. It also pushes the boundary of psychological contract evaluation toward the role of expectations and away from the more restrictive promissory typology. The research also pushed the psychological contract into the non-work environment to understand relationships at home. This area has been neglected previously in psychological contract research, but its application has been proved enlightening for teleworkers.

Refocusing on the research questions, the autonomy exchange has been applied to answer the first research question – finding autonomy the key psychological contract inducement for teleworkers and displaying their obligations to productivity and availability in return. The research has gone further however, presenting facilitators to the exchange that open the interpretation of how obligations are *felt* in the psychological contract.

The exchange of availability for autonomy is also key to explaining how technology makes exhibiting overworking behaviours central to telework. In addition, the embryonic research

area of virtual presenteeism is widened within this project (which purports to be one of the first studies that identifies the activities of teleworkers as exhibiting virtual presenteeism) and the concept of always-on culture receives more, much needed, scholarly application.

Understanding the level of conflicting obligations in teleworking led to the creation of a new systems of classifying conflict. Breaking conflicting obligations that were felt through psychological contract exchanges into soft, compound and hard conflicts.

Triangulating the psychological contract breaks new ground in research of a theory that has existed in some form for over 70 years. Transposing the conflict categorisations strengthens the psychological contract as a tool for improving employee well-being.

Following on from identifying types of conflict was the effect it had upon well-being.

Understanding the experience of teleworkers now encapsulates a far greater percentage of the world's working population after the Covid-19 pandemic – therefore, representing the effects of teleworking on well-being is no longer a niche endeavour, but of the utmost importance to the global workforce. This project provides a clear insight into well-being of teleworkers and suggests the psychological contract as a framework suitable to exploring how to do so.

Finally, coping strategies were noted, explored and categorised, the first study, to the researcher's knowledge to make such a categorisation.

This PhD thesis has presented a wide range of contributions to several topics and the author hopes it has been enjoyable to read. Teleworking will undoubtedly continue to grow in popularity. It feels fitting to add this body of knowledge at this time, a time when the well-being of teleworkers needs to be protected. It is hoped that by applying the psychological contract, a better understanding of telework has been achieved.