POWER DYNAMICS AND WELL-BEING PROTECTION IN REMOTE WORK: A PERSPECTIVE BASED ON FOUCAULT'S POWER/KNOWLEDGE THEORY

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Abstract - This paper analyses the shifting power relations and employees' involvement in working remotely based on Foucault's power-knowledge framework. The COVID-19 pandemic has been instrumental in increasing the number of remote workplaces worldwide, disturbing conventional power structures and monitoring. This systematic review examines how various digital surveillance technologies and knowledge management tools develop novel power relations in telework environments. Organisational control and autonomy are two interconnected processes where technology plays a crucial role in increasing productivity control while simultaneously providing employees with the choice of work. The evidence also reveals that while adopting remote work results in work-life balance enhancement and decreased stress from commuting, there are also negative aspects, such as digital surveillance risks and social isolation leading to mental health disorders among workers. Based on the analysis of such cases as GitLab and Microsoft, the paper will outline effective strategies for organisational management to reconsider work pressure's role and achieve the right level of control. Overall, the study implies that successful implementation of remote work requires clear monitoring policies and procedures, effective support for employees' mental health, and a set of ethical concerns regarding the use of technology. Thus, this research contributes to exploring power relations in autonomous working environments and their impact on employee satisfaction and organisational performance.

Keywords - Remote Work, Power Dynamics, Employee Well-Being, Foucault's Power/Knowledge Theory, Digital Surveillance.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the digitalisation of work, organisations have witnessed a radical shift in how they carry out their operations and workforce management. Although there were instances of remote working in the pre-2020 world, the COVID-19 outbreak drove a massive change in work arrangements worldwide by emphasising remote working practices irrespective of profession and geographical location. Brynjolfsson et al. [1] showed that about 35.2% of the employees in the United States shifted to work from home due to COVID-19, and similar trends have been noticed in other countries. In Spain, a cross-sectional study involving de Andres-Sancheh et al. [2] noted that there was generally perceived satisfaction of active populace of homework teleworking, while Radziukiewicz [3] pointed out an increase in teleworking workers in Poland, 89.2% higher than pre-COVID-19 period. The shift has not only expanded the possibility of new and more flexible approaches to organising work. Still, it has also altered the fundamental dynamics of organisations by challenging the hierarchal ideas of power distance.

The dynamics of power relations at the workplace due to working remotely have advantages and disadvantages in managing organisations and employees' health. Using innovative online monitoring tools, time-tracking applications, and collaborative working platforms, managers have received incredible opportunities to observe and assess the productivity of subordinates in real-time. Nevertheless, these monitoring capabilities have been seen to potentially improve productivity, but at the same time, they have attracted various concerns regarding the workers' morale, privacy, and overall satisfaction [4]. These intricate power relations and their effects on the health and productivity of the workers have become vital in shaping remote working policies and administration methodologies.

Foucault's power-knowledge system enables a better understanding of how power operates within society regarding the distribution and usage of knowledge [5]. This means that, in the modern world, power is not only located within frameworks of upper management but also infiltrates every single interaction and/or relationship. The theoretical framework is useful when analysing remote working models since technology is central to shaping new power dynamics and knowledge management forms. Looking at power relations in the context of telework, one can better understand how organisations resort to technological tools in capturing and measuring their employees and how the latter adapts to the change, staying productive, creative, and on track in career progression.

Thus, the purpose of the study is to provide an extensive literature review of Foucault's theory in the contemporary context of remote work and to understand the theoretical support for the management of remote workers, improving their satisfaction levels, and the co-transformation of

organisations and employees. In this paper, Foucault's theories and arguments, along with examples, will be used to elicit evidence and show how power/knowledge theory can be practically applied to the subject of remote work.

II. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

2.1. Foucault's Power/Knowledge Theory

Known as Paul-Michel, Foucault, a French philosopher, historian, and social theorist, delineated a systematic study of power and knowledge in the 1970s. In "L'Archéologie du Savoir," published in 1969, he started outlining his archaeological approach to knowledge, an analytical method of discursive practices that can be used to show how knowledge is constructed in specific historical contexts [6]. Afterwards, in the second book, Discipline and Punish, published in 1975, Foucault discussed the history of prison and the techniques of power, especially how knowledge and language exercise power over people [7]. These works explore power and knowledge as forms of disciplining and regulating subjects while also representing the transition from Foucault's archaeological method to his genealogical method.

Foucault established that power and knowledge are reciprocal, that power shapes and utilises knowledge, and simultaneously, knowledge emerges and circulates in power. The theory discusses power as a structural web woven through various social networks [8]. Given the power knowledge of modern disciplinary society, Foucault also examined how subjectivity is produced within power relations. In Discipline and Punish, he expanded on how the prison system influences the behaviour and attitudes of prisoners through an established set of norms and constant supervision [5]. The above can be attributed to the fact that power takes time to shape the cognition and actions of people through micro-processes. Foucault's research also indicates that power is not a one-way, domineering machinery but is constantly reinforced and generated through various societal dynamics and processes of producing knowledge.

2.2. Theory of Remote Work

Remote work represents a fundamental shift in how work is organised and executed, characterised by three essential elements: geographical decentralisation, the management of work processes through annotated checklists, and the use of technology-enabled communication. This has shifted from an organisational add-on to a staple of organisations today, mainly due to technological advancement and employee preferences. Recent data from Forbes revealed that by 2024, 12.7% of full-time employees will work remotely, and 28.2% will have a flexible workplace where they usually work remotely [9]. The high usage is attributed to organisations' changes to embrace new working models and employee preferences for workplace flexibility.

Education level	Full-time remote	Part-time remote
Less than high school	32%	21%
High school/some college	29%	19%
Associate's	31%	19%
Bachelor's	40%	26%
Advanced degree	45%	31%

Table 1: Remote Workers by Education Level
Data Source: McKinsey & Company

Therefore, the implications of remote work are not only functional but also social and organisational across a wide range of objectives relevant to society. Flexibility can decrease geographical restrictions on employment opportunities, utilise resources from commuting, and improve work and personal life balance. However, these benefits have to come with a price, as the organisation has to deal with the issues of organisational culture, communication, and performance in virtual teams. These trade-offs are not easily reducible into simplistic binaries, which suggests a need for an intermediary conceptual apparatus when discussing remote work power relations.

2.3. Application of Power/Knowledge Theory in Remote Work

Applying Foucault's power/knowledge theory to the conditions of contemporary telework, it is possible to gain insights into how technology transforms power relations. For instance, organisations can monitor their workers in real time by enforcing telework policies and applying monitoring technology. These technological means reinforce the managers' control and significantly influence the degree of autonomy and the private sphere in employees' lives [10]. According to Foucault, knowledge preserves and perpetuates power relations in every society. Applying this theory in the context of remote work, it is possible to analyse the constantly shifting power relations between managers and subordinates and consider how adequate organisational measures can maintain the proper degree of control and freedom to enhance the workers' quality of life and their satisfaction with their jobs [5].

III. POWER DYNAMICS IN REMOTE WORK

3.1. Changes in Power Structures

Regarding power relations, the emergence of telework has challenged centralised top-down power relations and tends to be flatter and more networked. The workplace power relations in conventional office

work are primarily top-down, expressed through subordinate supervision and direct interpersonal communication. However, the advancement in technology generally and the development of the mobile workforce upset this model and consequently altered power relations dramatically. Since remote work utilises information communication and technology (ICT) tools, they alter processes, routines, and power dynamics [11].

Thus, managers supervise employees using technical tools in remote work and assess their performance. For instance, with time trackers, project management applications, and teleconferencing tools, managers can observe individuals' productivity and output during the working day. These technologies enable managers to monitor their subordinates even if they are not physically present while at the same time enhancing employee accountability and visibility. While this new monitoring form enhances work output and quality, it harms employees' rights to privacy and decision-maker status.
The change is reflected in terms of the technical level and the exercise of power. Control is not obtained by outright authority but through comprehensive surveillance facilitated by technology. Such monitoring forms decentralised power and renders it less coercive, yet the penetration is more profound. They seem to work under some etiquette they cannot violate because they are constantly monitored even if they are not in the office, and their every move is considered. The monitoring impacts the behaviour of the employees, their well-being, and their levels of satisfaction in their place of work. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, highly productive employees have a positive attitude toward telework. Yet, the pressure and privacy issues arising from monitoring give rise to a certain degree of negative feelings. The interplay of emotions shows the subtle power dynamics at work, especially in remote working, thereby confirming Foucault's theory.

Advancements in technology have made it possible to monitor employees at their workplace, especially when working from home. For instance, global demand for employee monitoring software was up 108% in April and 70% in May 2020 compared to the demand levels in 2019. Global internet searches for how to monitor employees working from home were 1,705% higher in April 2020 and 652% higher in May 2020 compared to the searches made during the previous year [12]. Additionally, a survey by Digital.com reveals that 60% of companies with teleworking employees utilise tracking software. The online survey, conducted in January 2022, targeted 1250 American employers regarding their utilisation of surveillance technologies [13]. Furthermore, 88% of employers fired employees after introducing the spying software. The survey also sheds light on the particular kinds of tracking functions these employers are deploying: 76% use tools to monitor Internet connection and applications, 60% take screenshots occasionally, 54% filter specific URLs, and 44% monitor for typed keys [13]. This is a perfect example of Foucault's notion of power whereby technology strengthens 'panopticism' in contemporary workplaces.

A study conducted by Microsoft that engaged about 31,000 employees across 31 countries revealed that 85% of leaders said that hybrid/remote work makes it difficult to feel sure that the employees are doing their best, while 87% of employees report that they are productive at work [14]. As Foucault described, this "productivity paranoia" shows power dynamics, where surveillance is a default reaction to insecurity.

3.2. Knowledge as Power

Knowledge creation, dissemination, and control have become significant sources of organisational power within modern remote work, fundamentally revamping managerial conceptions. Therefore, the Foucauldian discourse on power-knowledge relations offers a useful lens for analysing information flow and access to digital assets to determine power relations in telework [5]. Through this digital transformation of work, whereas information has become more accessible, new forms of knowledge regulation and monitoring have also emerged.

On the one hand, remote work disrupts top-down hierarchy and monopoly on knowledge, as employees can use the Internet and other online resources, platforms, and communities to obtain the information and skills they need for their work. It also fosters the acquisition of knowledge and its dissemination, promoting employees' freedom and creativity [5]. These officers are not wholly dependent on their bosses to tell them what to do and how to do it but are rather able to learn how to solve a problem and perform a task on their own or with the help of fellow participants. The democratisation of knowledge gives employees more freedom and independence in their activities at work, which enhances satisfaction and productivity rates.

Conversely, it is also important to note that the ability to regulate and direct access to knowledge is yet another manifestation of power. This is because managers assume the responsibility of controlling the flow of information at the workplace, thereby having the ability to affect employees' work processes and decisions. For instance, by setting access permissions and frequencies of information exchanges and moderating knowledge contributions, managers effectively manage employee adherence to the flow of knowledge. While this form of knowledge control appears to be more subtle than the command-and-control norm, its effects remain significant [5]. In remote work, employees must adhere to various

restricted information rules, infringing on their rights and enhancing their workload.

Nonetheless, Foucault's power/knowledge theory can partially decipher power relations in the modern remote work context. It is seen that the use of technology and the control of knowledge offer new forms of control for managers and new chances and threats for employees [5]. Hence, these are some important issues regarding remote work management that should be addressed in the future: Reasonable management strategies in balancing the degree of control and employee self-organisation enhance employees' well-being and job satisfaction.

IV. DIALECTICAL CONSIDERATION OF EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

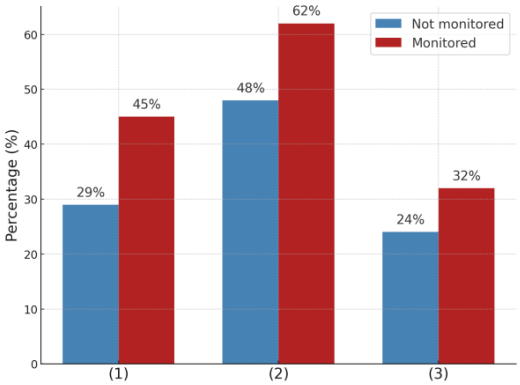
In the current world of remote employees and workers, their comfort and health have emerged as key issues of concern. Thus, despite the obvious benefits that remote work models provide employees regarding choice, freedom, and self-organisation, many matters concerning mental health, satisfaction with work, and the balance between work and personal life are underlined. Through the power/knowledge theory proposed by Foucault, one can look at these challenges with a new lens and comprehend how power and knowledge intersect in the management of employees. The subsequent parts of this paper will discuss the multifaceted effects of remote work on employee well-being in greater depth and consider the power relations and processes of knowledge management that contribute to these dynamics.

4.1. Mental Health

Working from home was not a common practice before the COVID-19 crisis, but the situation quickly changed, and the results can be seen in the employees' mental health. Hence, Foucault's power/knowledge theory can be used to analyse the effects of such powers. On the one hand, remote work provides the employee with flexibility, less time spent commuting to work and associated costs, and a better work-life balance [15]. However, it is important to remember that power in the Foucauldian sense is reproduced through knowledge and surveillance, and this is especially identifiable in the context of remote work.

Some research has suggested that remote work is likely to cause the staff to feel lonely as they will not be interacting with their colleagues directly and will not be receiving direct supervision and encouragement. A cross-sectional study by Galanti [16] further showed that while engaging in telework during the pandemic worsened social isolation and work stress levels, it could result in depression and anxiety. Additionally, remote work overlaps work and family roles, where employees cannot switch off and recuperate from work-related stress, thereby increasing psychological stress [17]. The monitoring and this feeling of being watched are indeed part of what Foucault described as micro-powers, which act through individuals' minds and behaviours.

According to Foucault, analysing the correlation between remote work and employees' mental health, one can witness a conflict between autonomy and surveillance as the key power relations characteristic of modern institutions. Research published recently has presented strong evidence of this link, and available works report substantial associations between electronic monitoring and mental health consequences. Lerner [18] observed that 32% of electronically monitored workers had poor or fair mental health as compared to 24% of the workers who were not monitored at all. It also shows that 45% of monitored employees felt a decline in their well-being due to being watched, while only 29% of workers who were not monitored expressed the same feeling (see Fig.1 for details).



(1) Agree that their work has a negative impact on their mental health
(2) Agree employer thinks workplace environment is a lot mentally healthier than it actually is
(3) Mental health poor or fair (as opposed to good or excellent)

Fig.1. Percentage of workers reporting certain mental health concerns

Data Source: American Psychological Association

Some consequences of remote work surveillance involve acute stress reactions and restructuring behaviours and psychological states. Xiao et al. [19] noted that while working remotely, 73.6% of the employees newly developed mental health concerns that stemmed from isolation and constant pressure to perform. This accords with the Foucaldian portrayal of normalised surveillance in which citizens adjust their conduct due to self-observation even without external vigilance. The pressure of being on camera alongside overlapping work and home front, especially in remote working, hampers mental health while simultaneously demanding productivity from the employee and the organisation.

4.2. Job Satisfaction

There are many factors related to the question of whether remote work increases or decreases job satisfaction. Foucault and his theories enable us to comprehend this interconnection. Foucault also stated that power is not only repressive but also constructing and may increase individuals' well-being by providing them with more freedom [5]. Certain researchers have demonstrated that remote work leads to higher levels of job satisfaction [20]. The self-management allows the employees to balance work and family responsibilities, enhancing job satisfaction.

Nevertheless, other works suggest that telecommuting might result in diminished job satisfaction, especially when there is inadequate organisational support and communication [21]. As per Foucault, to sum up, where there is a shortage of adequate knowledge and support, there is negligence of power that influences people's well-being and satisfaction. Studies reveal that people who work from home and do not receive sufficient technical equipment or social contacts may experience isolation and a low job satisfaction level. The above implies that when organisations adopt work-from-home policies, they should ensure that the employees have access to adequate technical support and social relations to bolster their job satisfaction.

4.3. Work-Life Balance

Remote work presents a way of enhancing the work-life balance since it has numerous benefits in this aspect. According to Gibbs et al.'s [22] study, several advantages of working from home over working from the office are found, including less traffic congestion time required, an opportunity for flexible working hours, better job satisfaction, and a good work-life balance. It not only reduces work-related stress but also enhances the well-being of those employees who are experiencing burnout. Here, Foucault's theory offers a theoretical frame for analysing how such improvements are effected through the reorganisation of power.

However, working from home or a distance also poses other issues. Research has highlighted how remote work can inevitably cause shifts towards working longer hours since individuals cannot draw a clear dividing line between their work and leisure time [23]. The blurring of work and personal life may result in burnout for employees in the organisation. Hence, work-from-home policies should include practices allowing employees to establish proper work and rest schedules during other times. In particular, Foucault stated that knowledge and normsare instruments for exercising power, as they allowfor controlling and modulating behaviour [5].

4.4. Data Support

Lack of social interactions seemed to be seen as the most significant obstacle for employees who worked remotely, as noted by Buffer in their 2023 State of Remote Work(see Fig.2 for details), where 23% of employees complained that they lacked social interactions at work, while 22% stated that they had challenges balancing between work and personal life issues as they are unable to unplug [24]. These data imply that while teleworking positively impacts employees' quality of life in some aspects, there are new issues that the enterprise and the employee should address in tandem. Thus, employing Foucault's contribution, we can explore the role of power and knowledge in these challenges.

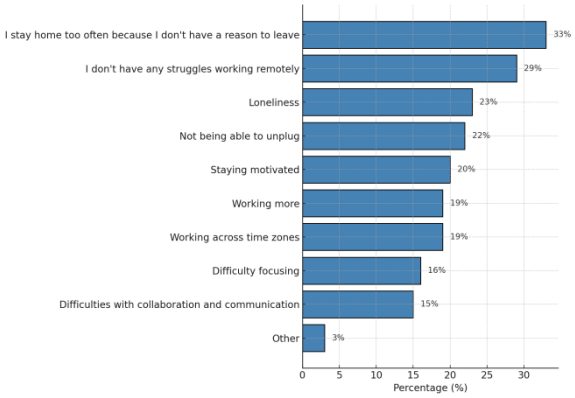


Fig.2. Remote worker's struggles
Data Source: Buffer

Moreover, Costin et al. [25] pointed out that remote workers could become less satisfied in their jobs and potentially have poorer psychological well-being if they do not receive the support they need. Altogether, organisations are advised to offer support measures to their teleworkers, including technical support, counselling, and social contact to enable the employees to thrive in their jobs. This is consistent with Foucault's power model, where power is meant to be exercised through encouraging knowledge and power for the.

4.5. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Remote Work Power Dynamics

The practices of remote work monitoring and power relationships are culturally distinct. Biron et al. [26] established that trait optimism positively correlates with work-from-home adjustment based on an analysis of data collected from 388 employees across five countries. This relationship is partly explained by situational perceptions about the 'health/financial benefits' of working from home due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Also, trait optimism correlates more with work-from-home adjustment in countries with high cultural optimism than in countries with low cultural optimism. The above discoveries depict how cultural factors shape the expression and recognition of authoritative relations in RWM, which agrees with an ideology from Foucault stating that power relations are contextual.

V. RETHINKING MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

5.1. Practical Applications

By examining the power/knowledge relations defined by Foucault, organisations are better poised to develop enhanced remote work policies. The following are specific strategies aimed at balancing power, improving employee well-being, and organisational efficiency:

5.1.1. Implement transparent monitoring policies

The use of the monitoring tools should be defined and explained well, and a full disclosure process should be followed regarding employees. For example, Asana, Trello, and similar tools help manage project-related work effectively while easing employees' worries about privacy breaches by making tasks' allocation and progress more transparent [27]. Communication and feedback also enable the managers to see the employees' emotional responses and needs, thus altering the approach to monitoring.

5.1.2. Use data analytics to optimise workflows

Big data and artificial intelligence can help companies understand employees' work patterns and performance metrics to enhance productivity. For example, it is possible to use Power BI or Tableau to visualise the Big Data of employees' work, find problematic areas, and suggest changes [28]. The data-driven management approach enhances the scientific and precise manner in which the decisions are made.

5.1.3. Provide mental health support platforms

Create applications like Headspace or Calm to allow people to practice meditation relaxation training and receive consultations from mental health professionals. Research findings have indicated that frequent mental health check-ups can help enhance employees' mental health and minimise stress related to working from home [29]. Furthermore, to address mental health concerns, there must also be online lectures and workshops to educate employees on how to cope with stress and anxiety.

5.1.4. Promote knowledge management and collaboration platforms

Organisations have implemented knowledge management by creating knowledge-sharing tools such as Confluence or SharePoint. Leaders should encourage participants to present their experiences and skills to the knowledge repository and foster team knowledge sharing through communication forums and group discussions [30]. It not only helps to increase global team effectiveness but also helps to increase the employees' feelings of identification and involvement.

5.2. Case Studies of Successful Power Balance Implementation

5.2.1. GitLab’s Transparent Remote Work Model

A real-life example is GitLab, a fully remote company with over 1300 employees in more than 60 countries. They practice what GitLab calls 'radical transparency' regarding remote working [31]. Their approach encompasses writing all work processes' documentation, engaging in synchronous communication by default, emphasising output over input, and conducting employee wellness check-ups regularly.

Based on the findings of the GitLab Annual Remote Work Report in 2020, which looked into the advantages of remote working, most employees mentioned that they can now look after their families without compromising their jobs. 34% cited family care as a plus of working remotely. Next, 53% said they enjoy the flexibility of schedules, while 38% identified a lack of commute. It was also noted that 43% could spend more time with family instead of commuting, and 55% of the respondents had children under 18 years old. Further, 14% of remote workers have a disability or a chronic disease, and 83% could work due to remote work [32].

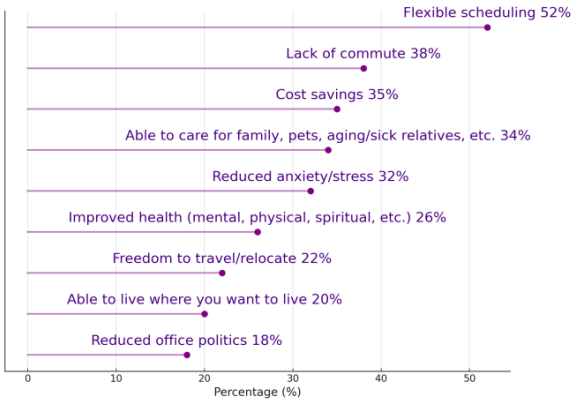


Fig.3. Benefits of working remotely

Source: GitLab

5.2.2. Microsoft's Hybrid Work Research

According to Microsoft's 2022 Work Trend Index, there is a notable difference between what the employees and the management think about hybrid work productivity. While 80% of employees stated they were more productive than before since working remotely or in a hybrid model, 54% of leaders are concerned that their productivity has decreased due to remote and hybrid working. This remains evident in the level of trust in the leadership, where 54% of the managers claimed that the company's leadership is unresponsive to employee expectations [35]. The transition to hybrid work has also drastically influenced employees' health, as 53% are now more likely to prioritise their health and well-being than work after the pandemic [35].

5.3. Ethical Considerations

Managing remote workers through Foucault's perspective requires careful thought regarding its

ethical implications, particularly in finding a balance between control and autonomy:

5.3.1. Transparency and accountability of power
Foucault underlined that power is hidden [5], and managers must be clear about their authority and responsibility. For instance, practices such as issuing company monitoring policies and data usage reports enable the employees to appreciate the legal and logical aspects of monitoring data.

5.3.2. Protecting employee autonomy
In remote work, autonomy is essential for enhancing workers' satisfaction and engagement [33]. Managers should also offer practical working options, including working hours and locations, as well as work objectives and achievements, where employees must be able to uphold work quality despite working independently.

5.3.3. Fair performance evaluations
Power and knowledge should not be the monopoly of the organisation's management and should be equally distributed. Foucault did note, however, that power and knowledge are never equal and are often associated with unfairness and injustice. Companies should ensure that their performance evaluation is transparent and fairly done through tangible performance measures and promotional criteria to ensure that each employee's productivity is properly rewarded.

5.3.4. Ethical norms for technology use
While adopting monitoring and data analytics technology, the organisation should maintain high ethical standards to prevent interference with employees' rights and freedom of choice [34]. For example, they can develop and disseminate company policies on acceptable use of technology, limitations on the data that might be gathered and how it will be utilised, and employees' freedoms regarding their data.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the influence of teleworking on employee satisfaction is ambivalent. While it imposes flexibility and freedom that, in some cases, leads to better work-life balance, autonomy, and elimination of bureaucracy, it also triggers various issues such as feelings of loneliness, psychological coercion, and job dissatisfaction. Applying the findings to the power/knowledge theory advanced by Foucault, it is possible to conceptualise the discussed impacts and describe how power shapes knowledge and surveils employees to affect their well-being. To enhance the well-being of the workers, the organisations should implement support programs that entail giving technical support, promoting social integration among the workers, demarcating work and personal time, and providing mental health services. By adopting these measures, organisations can address all the challenges of remote work, improving all employees' general well-being and satisfaction.

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