

Attitudes of international non-governmental employees towards working from home in Jordan

Khleef A. Alkhaldeh and Ala'a Al-Oran

Khleef A. Alkhaldeh is an Associate Professor in the Department of Business Administration at the Princess Sumaya University for Technology (PSUT) in Amman, Jordan.

Ala'a Al-Oran is a Master's Student in Business Analytics at Princess Sumaya University for Technology (PSUT) in Amman, Jordan.

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to identify the perceptions of employees working in international non-governmental organisations in Jordan regarding working from home and the support they need from their organisations and management in order to be productive while working from home. It also examined the relationship between their perceptions of working from home and productivity. Employee perceptions were measured by distributing a questionnaire based on self-reported measures of perceptions. The results indicate a positive, statistically significant relationship between working from home and productivity. Organisations are encouraged to seriously consider switching to working from home, not only in times of crisis, disaster and disease, but on a permanent, gradual and possibly partial basis.

KEY WORDS

work from home, productivity, international non-governmental organisations, Jordan

Introduction

Working from home (WFH) has been increasing for years and is likely to become a characteristic feature of 21st-century workplaces. These trends are linked to the presence of the internet and computers in homes, the need for both parents to work

and the contribution that WFH can make to providing flexibility in working hours and improved work–life balance (Gibbs, Mengel & Siemroth, 2021). In 2019, a complete curfew was imposed in many countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and many organisations in the world were forced to switch from working from the office (WFO) to WFH. For many employees, this was the first time they had worked from home; even so, for many of them it was successful (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020) and they were able to work effectively (Bick, Blanding & Mertens, 2020).

Among the organisations affected by the pandemic were international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). INGOs are organisations that are independent of governments (Coppola, 2020) that provide aid in emergencies to communities affected by disasters or wars and engage in development work. The large INGOs typically have headquarters in Europe or North America in addition to regional and national offices around the world (Reis & Bernath, 2017). In Jordan, there are 64 INGOs and UN agencies (UNHRC, 2021), representing a significant proportion of employment. Accordingly, the pandemic greatly affected the working mechanisms of these organisations, and, as a result, remote work is no longer just an option; it has become imperative for INGOs to look for ways to continue operating in such circumstances.

This research aimed to identify the perceptions of employees working in INGOs in Jordan regarding WFH. Additionally, the research sought to explore how organisations can support employees to improve their productivity while working from home. These research findings can be useful for organisations operating in or seeking to operate in conflict areas, as well as for organisations trying to promote diversity and inclusion policies, giving them a broader relevance.

Literature review

Several recent studies have looked at the impacts of WFH on productivity and working time. For example, Gibbs, Mengel and Siemroth (2021) studied the productivity of work in offices and compared it with work in homes using data from more than 10,000 professional respondents. They found that, on average, total monthly working hours increased by about 30% and overtime working hours increased by 18%. While productivity decreased by about 20%, no significant change was observed in the average completion of assigned tasks.

Some researchers have mentioned concerns about the productivity of WFH employees (Gorlick, 2020), while others have said that WFH increases their productivity (Baker, Avery & Crawford, 2007), offers high flexibility in work, and promotes better work–life balance (Dizaho, Salleh & Abdullah, 2017). Additionally, Purwanto, Asbari, Fahlevi, Mufid, Agistiawati, Cahyono and Suryani (2020) concluded from their study that WFH could benefit employees in other ways, such as saving money for commuting to work. Some studies looked at the productivity effects on supervisors (Lazear, Shaw & Stanton, 2015) or peers (Song, Tucker, Murrell & Vinson, 2018). Gibbs, Mengel and Siemroth. (2021) found that WFH was associated with weak interaction among the organisation's employees.

A few researchers have examined how the work environment affects productivity. Gubler, Larkin and Pierce (2018) found that increased physical activity, attention to diet, and other lifestyle changes have a positive effect on productivity among

home-based workers. Such changes may become relevant to the long-term effects of WFH (Gibbs, Mengel & Siemroth, 2021).

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of articles were published forecasting the future of WFH. Dingel and Neiman (2020), for example, analysed which jobs were most likely to shift from WFO to WFH, and concluded that 'Computer and Mathematical Occupations' were most amenable for WFH.

Rebolledo, Vega and Belmar (2021) found positive effects of WFH on employee productivity and in relation to several other dimensions of work, such as promoting digital skills development, improving creativity and productivity, increasing job satisfaction, improving work-life balance, improving business management and increasing societal benefits.

A household longitudinal survey conducted in the UK found that employees who work from home believed that there was no change in the level of their productivity whether they worked in an office or in the home (Etheridge, Wang & Tang, 2020). Bellmann & Hübler (2020) found that working remotely might have no long-term effect on work-life balance and that WFH increased job satisfaction temporarily.

Rebolledo, Vega and Belmar (2021) and Barrero, Bloom and Davis (2020) highlighted the importance of a quiet workplace environment and the availability of material aspects (separate rooms, internet, electronics, etc.) in addition to the individual competencies and skills (time management, discipline, self-motivation, self-orientation, etc.) as factors affecting the productivity of employees and their ability to WFH.

Rubin, Nikolaeva, Nello-Deakin and Brommelstroet (2020) point out that WFH saves commuting time, especially for those who use cars. Additionally, WFH employees spend less time communicating with workmates and on coffee breaks, allowing more time for work, increasing the number of working hours and thus productivity. Counterbalancing this, however, during WFH employees spend more time in meetings and video calls leaving them less time to work uninterruptedly (Gibbs, Mengel & Siemroth, 2021).

Family and childcare responsibilities may affect the productivity of working parents compared to childless workers. Andrew et al. (2020) showed that parents' working time decreased by 3.5 hours per day when WFH, which negatively affected work productivity. Another study by Arntz, Sarra and Berlingieri (2019) showed that with WFH, employees without children worked overtime for at least an hour per week.

Moreover, some studies have drawn attention to other working features and characteristics that affect productivity. Etheridge, Wang and Tang (2020) found that WFH had different impacts on productivity depending on the type of job. For workers in jobs that are fit for a home office, WFH increases productivity, while it reduces productivity for low-paid workers. A variety of aspects could account for this, including the nature of the work, the availability of resources and the level of support provided by the organisation. Moreover, Etheridge, Wang and Tang (2020) highlighted some potential negative impacts of WFH on low-paid workers' well-being, which raised important questions about the equity and fairness of WFH policies. Furthermore, Dutcher (2012) found that the employees performing creative tasks showed an increase in productivity during WFH, whereas WFH had a negative impact on the productivity of employees dealing with dull and routine tasks.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines productivity as 'a ratio of a volume measure of output to a volume measure of input use' (OECD, 2001). However, the concept of productivity and its measurement is not straightforward. A closer examination of the productivity literature highlights the lack of clarity on how these outputs and inputs should be defined or measured and how they relate to the goals of the organisation. Palvia (1991), similarly, described productivity as the relation of inputs to the outputs which can be measured by dividing the quantity of outputs (products, services) by the quantity of inputs (labour, capital). Others have adopted a different approach. Dunnette and Hough (1991), for example, defined productivity as 'how well a system uses its resources to achieve a goal'. Such definitions do not always work for all sectors. In the not-for-profit sector, the most important purpose of the organisation is not to make money but to generate impact. However, and based on lessons learned from working in this sector, in order to evaluate productivity, charities, for instance, need to spend time defining how they measure their impact. INGO measures of productivity are likely to look very different from those of many for-profit businesses. In addition, the influence of the pandemic and its impact on changing working practices, as observed in this study, will probably require charities to rethink and redefine their measurable impact and productivity measures compared with how they have done so in the past.

In general, previous studies have shown that WFH has an effect on employee productivity in different business firms (Rebolledo, Vega & Belmar, 2021; Gibbs, Mengel & Siemroth, 2021; Gorlick, 2020). However, there have been no studies on employees in INGOs, and how their productivity can be improved while working from home. This study focused on INGOs and aimed to identify factors that may be related to employees' productivity while working from home, and to identify the support they need.

Methodology

As mentioned in the above section, the research design was based on an extensive review of previous studies. The aspects related to WFH that emerged as important from this review were workplace environment, individual competences and skills, time management and family responsibilities. The specific aspects of work related to productivity were the management of time during the day to complete tasks and the quality of the tasks performed.

A survey questionnaire was developed based on the survey instruments used in previous studies. The study sample was randomly selected and consisted of 44 participants, employees from both managerial and non-managerial levels drawn from 54 INGOs operating in Jordan (Jordan Humanitarian Partners Directory, 2022). The questionnaire consisted of two parts; the first part captured the demographic profile of the respondents while the second part focused on the employees' perceptions. A four-point Likert Scale was used: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire was reviewed by specialists to ensure its validity and modified based on their comments and feedback. The reliability was tested and it was found that Cronbach's Alpha = 0.79, which means that the reliability is acceptable.

Table 1: Details of respondents (%)

Gender	Female	56.8
	Male	43.2
Marital status	Single	61.4
	Married	29.5
	Widowed/Divorced	9.10
Family responsibilities	No responsibilities	52.3
	Child care	27.3
	Elderly care	9.10
	Child care and Elderly care	11.4
Job role	Managerial employee	29.5
	Non-managerial employee	70.5
Working conditions	Office/Desk work	54.5
	Hybrid work (desk and field work)	45.5
Task characteristics	Most of the work is dull and routine tasks	61.4
	Most of the work is creative (non-routine) tasks	38.6

Results

Details of respondents are shown in Table 1. There were more female respondents than male respondents. More than half of the respondents were without family responsibilities. About 30% of respondents were in managerial-level positions. The percentage of respondents engaged in desk/office work was higher than that for mixed work (desk and field work). Most of the work of about two-thirds of the respondents was regarded as routine, while the work of one-third of the respondents was creative (non-routine).

The distribution of respondents according to their work department is shown in Table 2. The highest percentage of respondents (38.6%) was from programme/project implementation departments, followed by 25% from information/monitoring and evaluation departments and then 13.6% from advocacy/communication departments.

All respondents mentioned that they worked from home during the curfew due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 54.5% of them reported working from home at the time of the study, 40.9% said sometimes (2–3 days a week), and 4.5% all the time.

Respondents' perceptions of working from home are shown in Table 3. The majority of responses (over 60%) were positive. Positively evaluated aspects related to working from home were: spending less time on coffee breaks, smoking and side conversations; saving a lot of commuting time (driving to work, transportation, etc.); quiet workplace; availability of tools and materials (e.g. headphones, internet, desk, printer, etc.); and taking care of the family. However, more than 40% of the responses were negative. These negative aspects of working from their homes in Jordan were: spending too much time in meetings and video calls to understand and complete tasks, experiencing a lack of creativity and having difficulty solving problems.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to work department

Work department		Frequency	Per cent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Administration/Finance	2	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Advocacy/ Communications	6	13.6	13.6	18.2
	Donor Relations/Grants Management	1	2.3	2.3	20.5
	Human Resources	4	9.1	9.1	29.5
	Information Management/Monitoring and Evaluation	11	25.0	25.0	54.5
	Logistics/Procurement	1	2.3	2.3	56.8
	Programme/Project Implementation Management	17	38.6	38.6	95.5
	Programme/Project Development (Technical/Advisor)	2	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Respondents' perceptions of working from home (%)

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I had a quiet workplace to get the tasks required done efficiently.	4.5	13.6	63.6	18.2
I had the tools and materials which enabled me to work effectively, such as: headphones, internet, desk, printer, etc.	2.3	18.2	45.5	34.1
I had difficulties in solving some problems that affected my ability to finish some tasks.	0	40.9	43.2	15.9
I become more creative in my work.	9.1	36.4	36.4	18.2
I saved a lot of commuting time (driving to work, transportation, etc.) which enabled me to start working immediately without delays.	0	11.4	13.6	75.0
I spent less time on coffee breaks, smoking, and side conversations, etc., which increased my productivity.	0	11.4	27.3	61.4
I spent more time in meetings and video calls to understand and complete my tasks.	29.5	43.2	27.3	0
I was able to work and take care of my family at the same time.	0	34.1	31.8	34.1

Respondents' perceptions of the productivity of working from home are shown in Table 4. Over 97% of responses were positive about being able to get things done well, while over 86% of responses were positive about managing time well and so finishing tasks on time.

Table 4: Respondents' perceptions of the productivity of working from home

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I managed my time well so that I finish tasks on time	0	13.6	52.3	34.1
I was able to get the tasks done well	0	2.3	59.1	38.6

Based on respondents' opinions, the top four forms of support that employees need are:

- Around 80% of respondents mentioned the importance of ensuring that team communication between employees is transparent, frequent and consistent.
- About 73% of respondents mentioned celebrating employee success and making individual employees feel appreciated for their hard work.
- More than 71% of respondents stressed the need to listen to the needs of employees and make extra efforts to understand the challenges and fears they may face.
- Over 64% of respondents emphasised supporting the professional and personal development of employees.

About 75% of respondents expressed the view that working from home would be beneficial for organisations working in conflict areas. One of them stated that

It creates a safer environment for the employee to stay at home rather than travelling to work whilst living in a conflict area. Also, it will bring peace of mind to the employee staying with his family during these difficult times.

Around 80% of respondents mentioned that increasing weekend days to two and a half days would have a positive impact on productivity, as one put it

because it will give employees more time to disconnect from work and rest. Also, it will impact mental health greatly as there will be extra time to do whatever they want to relax and come back to work rested and energised.

Another respondent stated, 'The more you take care of your employees, the more they are productive'. However, someone who objected to the idea of an extended weekend stated, 'The amount of work couldn't be done in 4.5 days, we usually work after working hours to complete the work requested'.

The descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of work-from-home and productivity are shown in Table 5 of the Appendix. As shown, the averages of work-from-home and productivity are very close to the 'agree' point on the measurement scale.

Outputs of one sample t-test are shown in Table 6 of the Appendix. As shown in Table 6, responses related to working from home and productivity were not significantly different from the 'agree' point on the scale.

Results of the correlation test are shown in Table 7 of the Appendix. The results indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between working from home and productivity.

Results of regression tests are shown in Tables 8, 9 and 10 of the Appendix. The results indicate that more than 56% of the change in responses to the productivity variable can be explained by the change in responses to the work-from-home variable. The results also indicate that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between working from home and productivity.

The results are consistent with previous studies by Rebolledo, Vega and Belmar (2021) and Barrero, Bloom and Davis (2020) who found that the employee needs a calm environment and the right tools to perform work from home, in addition to having certain skills that would affect productivity while working from home in terms of his/her ability to plan well, think creatively and complete tasks with high quality. Moreover, working from home saves time commuting to work, time spent on breaks and talking with colleagues about non-work issues, as well as time spent in online discussions, trying to understand and do work as required. Additionally, employees in the organisations said they are able to work and care for their family members (children and/or the elderly) at the same time.

Discussion

Handy (1995) argued that the traditional mindset of management is that employees need to be constantly monitored and supervised. This would hinder the development of working from home, as this mindset can limit the trust and autonomy afforded to employees, which is essential to a remote working culture. However, as mentioned earlier, working from home has been imposed on organisations and employees around the world due to the coronavirus pandemic regardless of managers' inclinations. Many companies have claimed that this will negatively affect business performance, productivity and profitability (Bai, Brynjolfsson, Jin & Wan, 2021).

Nevertheless, as the pandemic continued, institutions and companies began to create new methods and systems to help employees get their work done remotely. The companies insisted that their employees attend online courses related to or focusing on the essentials of working from home, remote working, and staying motivated while working remotely, through various platforms such as Kaya, Udemy, Alison and others. These courses were designed to provide employees with the skills and knowledge necessary to enhance their job performance and productivity while working remotely. Furthermore, new policies were put in place to ensure productivity and employee well-being (Wilson, 2021). Companies also increased the use of ICT systems and applications (such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, Webex, WhatsApp, etc.) for messaging and meetings, to keep in touch with their employees and improve efficiency (Rachmawati et al., 2021).

For this reason, despite the fact that many countries now have successful vaccination programmes, and that vaccinations are available for many employees, organisations cannot force their employees to take the vaccine and return to work in offices and companies. They have to give employees the option of working from home partially or completely in some cases, such as for health reasons or pregnancy (Riva, Paladino, Paleari & Belingheri, 2022).

Working remotely was not new to the INGO sector, since they work worldwide in different regions. Moreover, international NGOs have employees working in dangerous

places and war zones; with the increase in the effectiveness of technology to support remote work, fewer employees are needed in the field and organisations can increasingly provide their services without risking the lives of their employees. Not only that, INGOs can now reach a greater number of beneficiaries by recruiting staff already living in a hazardous area while ensuring that services are well delivered using the tools and methods of communication recently gained from the WFH epidemiological experience.

From a financial point of view, organisations may save a lot of operating expenses and costs, such as labour and material costs, or office expenses by using WFH (Lister & Harnish, 2011). This is very important for non-profit organisations, as many of these expenses usually go towards salaries and incentives, such as transportation, living allowance, office rent, and expenses. The larger the office, the greater the need for office supplies.

Abu Nar and Schaefer (2022) reported that during an interview with a manager of a Norwegian INGO, the manager expressed the belief that effective management should be given priority and the manager further stated that.

It is quite difficult and inhibiting, many times some individuals or some churches and companies give us money, however, they want to make sure that not too much money is spent on the administrative part. This is not the case when the donations come from the government.

This was confirmed by an expert former project manager in one of the organisations operating in Jordan, who mentioned that saving on these expenses will make charities more attractive to donors who are more likely to provide donations (funds) for organisations whose administrative costs are low because they believe that more money will go to projects and beneficiaries. This will be very useful for organisations that have difficulty obtaining funding.

Moreover, private companies that provide financial, management, information technology (IT), software development and consulting services such as EY (Ernst & Young, 2020) have realised that working from home is the way forward and started to implement it. For example, they may hire workers or consultants from different countries at low salaries, offering fewer incentives, and without supplying a place to work or office supplies, especially when projects need a large number of employees and the minimum wage is high and it can be expensive to hire them all from one country. On the other hand, WFH has opened a bridge whereby companies can now hire specialists and professionals in a particular field from their home countries to work for certain hours or under a short-term contract, or just to accomplish a specific task.

Information security and confidentiality have been major concerns when it comes to working from home (Sturgeon, 1996). However, the pandemic has forced companies to improve their IT systems. This is very expensive, but has opened up new opportunities and allows for new trends, such as 'bring your own device' (BYOD) (Laudon & Laudon, 2013), which calls for allowing workers to use the personal devices they already own for work purposes. This can enable companies and organisations to

reduce their expenditure on hardware, especially items with high specifications (such as desktop computers, laptops, tablets, monitors, accessories, etc.).

Employees can also use their mobile devices to access work emails and other job-related applications that allow employees to solve urgent problems anytime, anywhere, carry out tasks or even attend meetings on the way. Therefore, even if improving information security costs a lot now, it creates many opportunities and has great potential in the future.

Likewise, for the worker, working from home partially or completely will affect the daily expenses of the individual, as working from home will save the costs of daily transportation and ordering of food (Lister & Harnish, 2011), which might be equal to the salary of a low-income individual. Although remote work may result in extra expenses for employees, particularly with regard to home office setup and utilities, the overall cost difference may not be considerable, especially for those who do not live alone. Furthermore, the savings from remote work might enable employees to meet their financial obligations and achieve their future aspirations, even with the added expenses.

On the other hand, working from home will likely reduce micromanagement, which may reduce psychological pressure on employees, enabling them to achieve better performance and productivity, increase their self-confidence, and leave them room for self-reliance to solve problems and complete tasks creatively. In addition, working from home will save commuting time, as employees are usually stuck in stifling city traffic, requiring them to leave early as well as come home late in the evening after work. Alternatively, this time might be used for other important activities, such as relaxing, spending time with family, taking up hobbies, learning new skills, studying, as well as having enough time to do part-time work such as consulting, private tutoring or working on research.

However, to ensure the success of working from home, organisations must hire people who have the ability to work remotely or from home in different circumstances. In the foreseeable future, it is likely that remote work proficiency could be deemed as a prerequisite for employment, considering the growing trend towards remote work arrangements and the benefits they offer for both employers and employees. In addition, organisations should have clear protocols to cover working remotely or from home. They should provide training on 'how to work from home effectively', which has spread widely during recent years, and choose ICT systems and software that suits the work environment, in addition to providing the employee with work performance necessities such as laptops, internet and headphones. Since the work is carried out in the form of a team, it is important from time to time to conduct employee meetings and recreational activities to get to know each other and reduce the level of stress.

Conclusion and implications

It can be concluded, based on the results of this research, that employees who work from home and have excellent individual competencies and skills (e.g. time management, creativity and problem-solving skills) can be productive. Furthermore, working from home can enhance the productivity of employees with family responsibilities (e.g. childcare and/or elderly care) if they provide the opportunity to

work and take care of their dependents at the same time. Other factors increasing the productivity of employees working from home include saving on commuting time (driving to work, transportation, etc.) and reducing time spent on coffee breaks, smoking and side conversations. However, productivity was negatively impacted by spending more time in meetings and video calls. In addition, the study showed that the enhancements to productivity could only be achieved by having a quiet workplace and physical materials, such as headphones, internet, desk, printer, etc. in the home.

Furthermore, the research found that there is a need for management to recognise home-based employees and celebrate their successes. Here, our results confirm those of Deeprouse (1994) who highlighted the importance of recognising and rewarding employees for increasing their performance, maintaining talented employees and growing the organisation's profits (mentioning 150 ways to do so, such as offering privileges, gifts and awards and organising special events). There is also a need for management to ensure that team communication between employees is transparent and consistent.

A limitation of this study is that it relied on the perceptions of 44 employees working for INGOs in Jordan. The relatively small sample size may affect the generalisability of the sample results to larger populations.

Even though this is a small study, it could pave the way for further studies aimed at further investigation about switching to working from home, not only in times of crisis, disaster and disease, but on a permanent, gradual or possibly partial basis. It is important to provide the necessary requirements for the success of working from home and achieving goals as if employees were working from the office. Working from home has positive repercussions at the national level in terms of reducing expenses, easing traffic congestion, and protecting the environment. There are jobs and tasks that do not need to be completed in the office, especially those that do not require face-to-face communication with others.

Accordingly, it is suggested that organisations analyse their work and functions and categorise them into those that can be done from home and those that require presence in offices. Organisations should study the feasibility and possibility of working part-time from home for a number of days and the rest of the days in the office (hybrid working). Organisations can use modern technical means that allow remote communication and direct meetings through various and multiple platforms to facilitate working from home and holding virtual meetings when necessary. Ensuring the success of this transformation requires the availability of its components, including equipment, capabilities, intelligent monitoring and control tools.

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APPENDIX

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics (work from home)

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Work from home	44	3.0028	0.43174
Productivity	44	3.0568	0.51957
Valid N (listwise)	44		

Table 6: Outputs of one sample t-test (work from home)

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
Work from home	0.044	43	0.965	0.00284	-0.1284	0.1341
Productivity	0.725	43	0.472	0.05682	-0.1011	0.2148

Table 7: Results of the Correlation Test

Correlations			
		work from home	Productivity
Work from home	Pearson Correlation	1	0.751**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	44	44
Productivity	Pearson Correlation	0.751**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	44	44

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 8: Results of Regression – model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Std. error of the estimate
1	0.751 ^a	0.564	0.553	0.34720

a. Predictors: (Constant), work from home

Table 9: Results of Regression – ANOVA

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.545	1	6.545	54.293	0.000 ^b
	Residual	5.063	42	0.121		
	Total	11.608	43			

a. Dependent Variable: Productivity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Work From Home

Table 10: Results of regression – coefficients

Coefficients ^a						
Model B		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.
		Std. error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	0.343	0.372		0.923	0.361
	Work From Home	0.904	0.123	0.751	7.368	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Productivity