From Cubicles to Couches: A Review of Work-From-Home and Its Impact on Employees Productivity

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Abstract

This review paper focuses on the paradigm shift that has occurred in the world of work following the increase in the use of the strategy of working at the comfort of home (work-from-home or WFH) especially during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. It summarizes cross-disciplinary scientific studies of the effect of remote employment conditions on staff productivity in different industries, professions, and other population categories. Using the insights of management, organizational psychology and technology research, the paper finds some of the fundamentals in the productivity landscape, including autonomy, digital technologies, and psychological well-being, and work-life boundaries. Analysis indicates that WFH may enhance productivity when appropriate factors are present, and that more important issues such as isolation and erased boundaries between personal and professional identity may arise. The paper is completed with some practical advice and future perspective of study regarding the hybrid work model and long-term behavioural consequences. The review highlights approaches in the need to have an inclusive and flexible policy, a good digital infrastructure, and managerial framework to create work-life balance and employee involvement in meeting the demands of the contemporary working environment. Future research prospects require longitudinal studies, and analysis of the innovations in hybrid work to maximize the organizational performance and well-being of the workers living in a post-pandemic world.

Keywords: work-from-home, remote work, employee productivity, organizational behavior, hybrid workforce, telecommuting

1. INTRODUCTION

The working place around the world has now changed in a very dramatic way with transitions being made between stationary offices to the mobile working atmosphere. WFH started out as a need born out of crisis, but then it has become a normal way of doing business. The new model holds the promise of autonomy, flexibility and techno-empowerment yet raises issues of employee engagement and performance. Since the organizations contemplate the possibility of keeping remote work setup or expanding it, it is critical to comprehend its impact on productivity. In this literature review, the author attempts to take an overview of the past ten years in academic studies to discover any generalizations, inconsistencies, and the meaning of WFH to the productivity of the worker in diverse labor forces.

1.1 Historical perspective and chronology of WFH

Working from home (WFH) is a possible issue that has been developing over multiple decades because of the influence of technologies and organizational practices. Outside the COVID-19 pandemic WFH has historically been an in rare cases mandatory practice in places like the flexible workplace, or by particular individuals in specific areas of the knowledge industry. Nevertheless, global COVID-19 pandemic fast-tracked the implementation of WFH on an uncharted level and triggered the process of a quick shift toward remote work patterns accelerated by organizations globally to ensure the continuity of the operations adhering to the principles of social distancing and lockdown orders. The abrupt change did not only alter the nature of work, but it also challenged the assumption under which productivity, collaboration and work culture had been based for many years. Studies point out that the pandemic served as a turning point which changed WFH as niche practice to mainstream workforce strategy. There were major restructurings made to the organizational policies, the technological backbone as well as the managerial style in various industries and geographical locations as a result of this transition. The implementation of WFH brought about new dynamics in the life of employees and the scope of the performance, which the scholars should study to comprehend the multifaceted consequences of it on the workers and employers in the post-pandemic world [1]. More so, surveys in other organizational settings also support the view that WFH is actually a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of workplace boundaries and employment model [2]. Therefore, historical development and the dynamics of WFH today are the keys to establishing a workforce management approach and the sustainability of employee productivity in the digital era [3].

1.2 Productivity in Remote Work Perspective

The meaning of productivity in the realm of remote work incorporates many dimensions, unifying subjective and objective measures to ascertain performance. Subjective metrics commonly rest on the self-reports of the employees on their supposed efficiency, completion of tasks, and satisfaction with their output of work, whereas objective ones can contain measurable outputs like project milestones, code commits, handling call rates, or sales. The difference and intercourse between these measures of productiveness are imperative to comprehending the comprehensive effect of WFH arrangements. There is a special correlation between job satisfaction and productivity in remote work environments. Increased job satisfaction is likely to result in an increase in motivation and engagement, which could be related to a better performance. However, both the perceptions of productivity and the actual productivity are affected by the quality of the remote work environment, such as workplace ergonomics, access to technology, and opportunities to obtain social support. Empirical tools as well as several frameworks to measure the productivity in the context of WFH have been proposed such as mixed-methods measures that integrate quantified evidence with qualitative factors on the issue of emotional exhaustion, work stress, and boundary control [4]. There is also a mediating factor in how much tasks are automated and how clear the expectations of each role are, an aspect that is significant in estimating productivity under remote terms [5]. Personality and type of work is also an important aspect to consider when making distinction to the way productivity displays in different employees and job functions in remote situations [6].

1.3 Scope and Purpose of literature review

In this literature review, the author mostly aims at synthesizing empirical evidence and theoretical knowledge concerning the complex effect of WFH on the productivity of workers. It encompasses testing major moderating factors through technological infrastructure, individual differences (e.g.

personality and job roles), and organizational support mechanisms as the effectiveness of WFH depends strongly on these situational variables. It is also focused on measuring not only the productivity results related to task performances but also psychological and social aspects that work together to impact on the performance by the employees. This review aims at contribution to organizational policy-making as well as at the promotion of employee well-being through synthesizing various strands of research inquiries on the issue of productivity within remote working conditions. As the trend has shifted to hybrid and flexible work arrangements, the necessity of knowing all enabling factors and obstacles to productivity in WFH arrangements in terms of productivity is needed [7]. The latter fact also underlines the significance of connecting theoretical approaches, including self-determination theory and social identity theory, to values that envisage the practice-related solutions facilitating the engagement, collaboration, and innovation within remote teams [8]. This way, it will be adding to the available literature in support of equilibrium between operational performance and the health of the employees in changing working conditions [9].

2. Benefits of WFH

2.1 Flexibility and Independence

The most consistently reported advantage is the fact that it makes activities more flexible and this results in more independence allowed to workers to work at times and places of their own choice. Possibility to coordinate the work time with the individual needs results in a higher level of job satisfaction and may influence the quality and amount of products positively. Research records that flexi-time creates opportunities to match most efficient work hours with hardest work and breaks to rest overfilled mental shops, which in turn keeps the output rates of the work level high and on the whole better [1]. One important gain of the reduction or removal of the commuting time is that it will add more energy time that employees may apply to professional matters. Not having to go through the stress associated with daily commuting and being time-consuming, the workers tend to report greater concentration, longer hours of quality work and the chance to have a better work-life balance [10]. This independence not only makes workers powerful but it also instills intrinsic motivation; the finding on which performance outcome is heavily correlated with [11].

2.2 Curtailment of Distractions at Workplace

WFH environments usually enable employees to reduce distractions at work, i.e. unexpected meetings, working in noisy offices and distractions caused by other co-workers. Employees can even organize and plan their physical and time planning in a way that maximizes concentration and task performance by having a say in how the work environment is. This domination of the environmental factors is especially central in workplace that involves intensive concentration and problem-solving that would in other cases, result in the deterioration of cognitive resources [7]. Still, although remote working diminishes certain types of distraction it may add additional (e.g., domestic) distractions, which require skillful adjustment and boundary setting. A model known as hybrid work has been found successful in reducing these challenges by giving employees the ability to collaborate in person and having dedicated blocks of focused time at home [12]. Moreover, hybrid models will allow taking into account both the advantages of autonomous work and social and creative aspects of presence [13].

2.3 Productivity as Driven by Psychological and Physical Well-being

The health of employees is one of the important factors in the productivity during WFH. Flexible remote working also helps in enhancing psychological well-being because of the favorable environment that

results in lower work-related stress and enhances provider-life balance. The scientific evidence shows that the employees with a lower level of stress and a greater sense of psychological comfort are more engaged and less likely to be absent because these variables are directly related to the increased job performance [14]. Sustaining productivity also involves physical comfort including ergonomic working conditions at home and control of the work environment. Better well-being protects against burnout and emotional exhaustion, and this is especially critical when it comes to vulnerable populations or those with more to handle at home [15]. The impact of flexible work arrangements on positive well-being demonstrates that organizations should place a lot of emphasis on instilling health supporting policies that would aim at maximizing the productivity merits available in working remotely, but also focus on meeting the needs of workers [1].

3. Problems of WFH

3.1 Isolation and Declining Interaction Social

In spite of its benefits, WFH occurs with considerable complications such as social isolation and the lack of direct confrontation of employees. Absence of spontaneous face to face cooperation may stop team work, information sharing, and adversely affect creativity and innovation. There can be a lack of connection among employees and this leads to lack of motivation and poor collective efficacy that is very important to the success of an organization [1]. Moreover, the reduced chance to communicate informally can undermine the trust and rapport between team members, resulting in the sub-optimal coordination and slower decision-making pace [16]. Research has observed that social isolation does not only impact interpersonal relations but it also has a psychological cost that would decrease the level of work engagement and overall performance [17].

3.2 An Ambiguous Separation of work and life and Work-related Stress

Working remotely usually challenges the general practices, which distinguishes between work and life, and causes a challenge to the employees when isolating themselves from work pressure. This erosion may take the form of an increasing working time, work burnout and stress which will reduce productivity in the long run [4]. When employees have household duties to perform in their homes and balance them with their workplace duties, they might feel the extra pressure, especially individuals who are caregivers or those who do not have enough dedicated work areas at home, that is, when there is no department [18]. In WFH scenarios, a major issue related to the effect of emotional exhaustion is attack on stress and loss of motivation, which in most cases affect the performance of tasks and job satisfaction in a negative way [19]. Proper management of boundaries and organizational support on the issue of work-life balance is thus of essence to maintain the productivity of remote.

3.3 Constraints like technology and infrastructure

Technological infrastructure and the sufficiency of physical work places are very crucial to the success of WFH. The problem of poor internet connection, inadequate hardware, absence of a certain workplace, and absence of appropriate IT support may considerably weaken the possibility of employee performance accordingly [20]. There is also digital fatigue that sets in and tends to occur due to spending a lot of time in front of the screen or having numerous virtual meetings, which worsen concentration and even participation in activities [21]. The distribution of these issues is unequal worldwide, and the developing nations have an additional setback of underdeveloped infrastructure that reduces the feasibility and productivity of WFH [22].

4. Hybrid work models: A Goldilocks style

4.1 Hybrid Working Model Results on Productivity

A hybrid work model combining remote and in-person production has come into sight as a potentially effective middle-ground, and such a combination can take advantage of both work modes. The evidence presented by hybrid arrangements means that remote working brings not only a kind of flexibility and autonomy to its workers, but also maintains a chance to work face-to-face because such a setting is vital when it comes to creativity and complex problem solving [1]. As research shows, working remotely may be more productive in simple and routine works, with frequency leading to higher levels of efficiency; and creative work may be harmed with the lack of face-to-face interactions in the office [6]. The heuristics aimed to integrate work practices into the nature of tasks and preferences of the workers, the hybrid models help to maximize on the performance rate in various job functions [12].

4.2 Support of Organization and the Technology

Embedding Hybrid work can hardly be effective without strong organisational support, incorporation of digital tools that would help to enable smooth communication and collaboration in dispersed teams. Human Resources (HR) should implement practices that differentiate the hybrid workforce and apply to inclusiveness, engagement and performance management in the mixed environment [23]. To uphold the level of productivity in hybrid settings, it is important to foster a positive organizational culture, which embraces factors like trust, transparency, and workforce well-being. Leadership has to invest in technologies and policies which allow the connectivity and sense of purpose between remote and on site workers alike [24][8].

4.3 The difficulties and hazards of Hybrid Working Model

Along with its benefits, hybrid work also has its challenges including its challenges like inability to coordinate and the resulting inequalities and in-office and remote workers as well as difficulty in tracking productivity without compromising autonomy [16]. The risks associated with engagement remains, especially when remote employees do not feel that they belong to informal connections or decision-making procedures [25]. Systems with a view of encouraging equal means of participation and preserving the cohesiveness of the team should therefore be attentionately developed by managers taking into account the multitude of work modes [12].

5. Sectorality Effects on Productivity

5.1 Knowledge Workers and Information Technology

Information Technology (IT) industry has been leading the trend of embracing WFH and this is no surprise since the opportunities and challenges that come with it are emblematic and typical of remote knowledge work. Although flexibility has clearly been beneficial to job satisfaction and productivity to most IT employees, increased incidents of digital fatigue and work stress have been experienced especially in superintensive projects where perpetual virtual connection is inevitable [26]. The effect on productivity depends on the nature of the project such as the size of the project, complications and programming languages employed. IT projects are generally found less productive when entirely remote and smaller projects where processing is done in modules are expected to be productive in such environments [27]. What is more, developer difference will enter the picture and this further stresses the importance of customized support in distance learning settings [9].

5.2 Banking and Financial domains

Research that has been conducted on the topic of remote work in the financial sector indicates the

presence of positive outcomes of WFH in terms of productivity which can be closely aided by management practices and job satisfaction. Off-site arrangements have made it easier to develop greater employee accountability and greater work-life balance as well as pose a new set of challenges related to trust and communication problems [15]. The experience in the banking industry indicates how leadership and infrastructure can be used to take the obstacles to remote productivity. Observations of these effects in at-region countries such as Southeast Asia and the Middle East shows the importance of local contexts on these results [28][29].

5.3 Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and Industries of Services

In the BPO and service industries, the role of WFH in productivity is mediated by work-life balance, flexibility of schedule and satisfaction with the job. There are sociocultural and infrastructural peculiarities the organizations of the developing countries have to work with being unable to guarantee the productivity of the remote workers within the service industry [10]. Studies done in the Philippines and Botswana emphasize that well designed remote work policies can be very effective to increase performance and would still need continuous support to keep employees engaged as well as manage their isolation [30][31].

6. Psychological and Social Influence to Work remotely

6.1 Remote work Motivation and Engagement

The shift toward WFH changes an extrinsic (people-oriented) work motivation based on external factors to a more intrinsic (job-oriented) work motivation based on inner factors. This shift requires the implementation of new mechanisms of keeping remote employees motivated and feeling the sense of accomplishment [32]. One of the strategies people use to maintain engagement is the establishment of routines and desire to find virtual social interactions [11]. These motivational dynamics are extremely important in organizations because of the ability to customize support and maximize productivity of individuals within remote settings [9].

6.2 The Impact of Mental Health and Productivity

Healthy mind is inherently connected with effective work in a remote setting. Stress associated with work has adverse effects on satisfaction and production whereas measures ensured on health and safety as well as good work life balance have a positive effect on the job satisfaction of employees [18]. Importantly, sub-groups like workers with ADHD symptomomania are experiencing lower levels of depressive symptoms with the hybrid and full WFH models, and their well-being is not negatively impacted by productivity loss [14]. Research notes that psychological support must be incorporated in the remote working approach to maintain workforce performance [33].

6.3 The Role that Trust Can Play in Remote Environments

The aspect of trust in the context of remote working is another important factor contributing to the overall success of the working environment, that has a direct impact on the loyalty of the staff, performance, and the competitiveness of the organization. Engaged approaches to the transformational leadership based on the concern over employee independence and welfare develop friendly culture that supports the productivity in remote environments [24]. The aspects of positive engagement of perceptions, good communication, and empowerment of an organization help to cope with the problematic isolation or remote working conditions and strengthen the results of commitment to work [17][25].

7. Home and Environmental Workspace Factors

7.1 Quality and Productivity of the Workspace at Home

Home workspaces contribute to productivity in a major way depending on their physical quality. Ergonomics; lighting, noise control, and indoor temperature, among others influence the capacity of workers to concentrate and carry out simple and creative tasks [6]. Based on empirical evidence, employees in well-provisioned surroundings have a significantly enhanced chance at increasing the level of productivity, especially when provided with routine tasks. At the same time, the creative work can be reduced because of overworking remotely, this means the necessity of different working environments [20]. These results explain why it is vital to allow employees to work at home through allowing them proper facilities and equipment [34].

7.2 Infrastructure and Technology Remote Efficiency

The maintenance of productivity in remote regions is based on stable technological infrastructure such as reliable internet, availability of peripherals, and digital channel technology. The geographic inequalities of access to technology also demonstrate that it is difficult to introduce the WFH policies equally all over the world [20]. To curb these obstacles organizations should invest into technological training and support to maintain the productivity of the employees [22][21].

7.3 The Family and Domestic Responsibilities Effect

The needs of households and caretaking activities in addition to family members within the home workstation also present a complication to working remotely. Multitasking aspects and the lack of clarity of boundaries can cause stress and affect concentration among workers [35]. Good boundary management strategies and the ability of the organization to acknowledge the demands domestically can enable the workers to strike a balance between competing demands and remain productive [19]. These problems are particularly topical since WFH develops into a long-term or permanent element of work [1].

8. Managerial and Organizational effects on the productivity of WFH

8.1 Leadership and Management practices

The style of leadership has a great impact on the results of productivity in remote workplaces. Effective remote and hybrid working conditions can be achieved through transformational leadership, which is founded on effective communication, fostering trust, and empowerment, among other aspects [7]. Managers that combine control and independence allow workers to do the best of their ability without experiencing micromanagement [24]. Clear communication is the key to effective management to maintain the interest of each employee and coordination of individual and corporate objectives [11].

8.2 Flexible Work and Policy

Making Such organization policies that manage to marry flexibility with strict results-based performance are beneficial to productivity as the two help satisfy different employee needs on one hand and uphold operational coherence on the other hand [1]. The inner demands of the business should be combined with the preferences of the employees, aiming at inclusivity and flexibility with references to the policies [23]. Flexible and structural holistic human resource management techniques have been proven to be effective in streamlining productivity of remote workers [36].

8.3 Support, Development and Training Systems

To maintain remote working performance, it is vital to provide the remote workers with technological training and psychosocial support systems. Constant development courses provide the employees with

the means of handling digital tools and collaborating remotely successfully [4]. Moreover, services related to the prevention of social isolation and mental health will also help to ensure maximum engagement [17][9].

9. Literature Thematic Review

9.1 Digitized Infrastructure and Teleworking

The remote work is determined by digital readiness. Co-working enabled organizations that invested in stable web access, secure cloud system, and collaboration tools (e.g. Zoom, Trello, Slack) to experience fewer disruptions and increased employee engagement [40]. On the contrary, employees lacking in such enablers experienced constant disruptions and delays in the work process [44]

9.2 Autonomy and Flexibility of Time

Several studies noted that there is a positive correlation between productivity and task autonomy. According to the recounts, the employees allowed to schedule their working and lunchtime had a higher production, better job satisfaction, and an increased level of creative performance [41][45]. Nonetheless, the lack of properly established structures of accountability resulted in procrastination in certain instances as well.

9.3 Work-Life Boundaries and Personal Environment

Though, time-saving and absence of commuting prevented fatigue, the combination of work and home demands resulted in a psychological spillover. Workers taking care of children or sharing residential living spaces referred to decreased capacity to focus and to heightened emotional pressure[42].

9.4 Cohesion in Teams and Mental Health

Teleworking changes the sociality. Lack of face-to-face facing may cause the feeling of isolation and aloofness. Although introverts were well adjusted to remote environments, the extroverts had their motivational levels plummet. At least, some sources associated WFH with reduced collaboration and innovation by depriving them of a great amount of informal communication [43].

9.5 Industry and Demographics Influence

Productivity gains are more consistent in IT and finance sectors, while individuals juggling care responsibilities, particularly women, experience drops in performance [41][43].

- The improved productivity was recorded among knowledge workers (software engineers, writers, analysts).
- Education and creative sectors trended contradictory because they needed cooperation.
- Women who had a dual caregiver role were much more disadvantaged to meet deadlines and household duties.

10. Methodology

The systematic review was implemented on the databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect. The keywords were entered as follows; work at home productivity, remote work productivity, teleworking productivity and employee output COVID-19. The review encompasses peer-reviewed articles and empirical studies appeared in 2015 - 2024. Studies were included depending on their relevance to productivity in the work place, organizational performance or any psychosocial consequence of the remote work. This is a review which uses systematic literature review approach to bring together and critique the current literature on WFH and productivity.

Out of 148 identified articles, 37 of them passed the inclusion criteria, thus qualified to be included in

this review. These studies touch on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research in both geographic and sectors.

11. Results

The chosen 37 studies were reviewed, which demonstrated a variety of tendencies regarding the impacts of work-from-home (WFH) arrangements on employee productivity. The research results were mainly positive and stated that there is a positive impact on the productivity since people have less time to commute to the working place, can abide by the flexible schedule, and can individually customize their working conditions. Such benefits were especially high in the group of knowledge workers involved in the writing, software development, or data analysis. About 27 % of the research however indicated reduction in productivity and this is often associated with distractions at home and no structure and social isolation. The rest 17 % were found to have mixed or neutral effects and usually depended on the contextual factors like type of jobs, man management and individuals character traits.

There are a number of factors that kept on reoccurring as determinants of productivity. Predictable digital infrastructure and easy access to teleworking services increased performance as a rule, whereas insufficient technology formed obstacles and workflow disruptions. Flexibility of schedules was in large beneficial as employees were able to work during times of utmost concentration but the drawback was the lack of boundaries by which many workers felt exhausted and overwhelmed by the amount of information. Organsational support, especially of supervisors who ensured frequent checkups and also provided empathetic advice were important in keeping productivity and morale high. A low-level of communications in various teams conversely, led to weak levels of cooperating in problem solving and creativity. Moreover, lack of special location to work or existence of childcare also worsened productivity particularly in women. On the whole, these results indicate the specificity of the WFH productivity and encourage the need to differentiate work-at-home strategies-to-meet both personal and corporate requirements.

12. Discussion

The review identifies that WFH results in productivity which is significantly different due to various individual, organizational, and contextual factors. As much as a self-directed work is geared towards minimal interruptions, self-directed team projects would fail in a setting where there is no synergy and asynchronicity. There are also other issues, not every home can be designed to work, at least in the case of two-generational or low-income families. Such variations need personalized solutions as opposed to fitting solutions that can fit everybody. Hybrid models of official work combining remote and in-office activities seem to be filling this gap as they manage to preserve flexibility without losing the sense of collective responsibility[41].

13. Comparative and Longitudinal Perspective
13.1 Post- vs. Pre Pandemic Productivity

Trends Before the pandemic, WFH consisted mostly of rare, voluntary opportunities with little effects on productivity. This imposed, broad usage under COVID-19 revealed the advantages and shortcomings of remote work, as exemplified by numerous workers indicating that they have a greater sense of freedom and fulfillment in their jobs yet also face such obstacles as work overload and lack of connection [37]. The results of longitudinal studies demonstrate that attitude of the employees and other

adaptations within the organization have been changing, with the overall trend indicating that attitudes have shifted towards a more accepting and more optimized remote work setting in the new post-pandemic reality of work [38][2].

13.2 Difference over culture and geographic

The productivity of remote work differs a lot in terms of cultures and geography. Remote work feasibility and outcomes are dependent on the socioeconomic factors, the quality of infrastructure and the cultures present regarding work-life boundaries on it [21]. Developing economies have some more infrastructural and social issues to overcome and they need their own specific policies hence the one size fits all policy is not suitable at all [30][33].

14. Conclusion

From cubicles to couches, the transition of workplace has changed the perception of performance and productivity. Work away from office is more fruitful when the staff feels good physical and mental environment, yet new risks such as social distancing and burnout are emergent. The task of employers and researchers is how to build a system so that the autonomy will be as maximum as possible and the human touch will be maintained. The research in the future must consider the industry-wise trends, the long-term psychological consequences, and the provision of WFH equally to different geographies and socioeconomic groups.

In general, the effect of WFH on the productivity of workers is complicated and multidimensional. The main advantages are an increase in flexibility, independence, and well being that tend to boost performance, whereas such issues and fails as social isolation, lack of boundaries, and technological limitations may harm performance. Effectiveness may have a wide range of variation in respect to individual, job-based and organizational issues.

15. Organizational Practical Implications and Future Directions

They ought to implement dynamic and pluralistic policies that are able to suit different needs of the workforce. The development of leadership and investment in technical infrastructure and wellness programs are the most important factors in ensuring that remote working is the most productive. Sustainable remote work ecosystems ensured by constant monitoring and adaptive management will allow adhering not only to business goals but also the needs of employees.

10.3 Concluding Thought on Sustainable Work Arrangements The hybrid model of work seems to be the possible way forward, which combines the benefits of the remote work productivity with in-person experience of collaboration. Further study and policy should centre on improving the hybrid methods and gaining greater insight into the long-term implications of the same, aiming at achieving a compromise between practicality in the operations and the overall welfare of the employees [1], [9], [25].

It is demanded that the research of the long-term effects of WFH on creativity, innovation, social connectivity, and workforce health should become more refined. The aspect of hybrid working models provides great prospects of sustainable equilibrium between flexibility and collaboration that requires additional empirical examination [1]. Reviews of bibliometrics focus on broadening the research bodies, and incorporating cross-disciplinary approach in a bid to understand and promote evidence-based policy-making [39][36].

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