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Privacy and Security in the Covid-19 Work from Home Context Tensions and Challenges

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Privacy and Security in the Covid-19 Work from Home Context Tensions and Challenges

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The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an astonishing and sudden transition into home working, and is likely to lead to a permanent transformation of the workplace. With an increasing number of employees working from home, and more organizations having to manage their dispersed employees and operations remotely (Waizenegger et al, 2020), privacy and security are not only challenged, but also compromised and overlooked (Naidoo, 2020). This is exacerbated by the deployment of potentially unfamiliar technologies (e.g., Zoom, Slack), often without due diligence checks. Following these, we aim to explore the emerging tensions and risks to privacy and security accompanying the mass transition in the Covid-19 WFH context. Based on a series of qualitative interviews with managers and employees of different organizations, we identified relevant factors that challenge privacy and security within the COVID-19 WFH setting. Tensions and challenges are of technological, organizational and behavioral nature. Our research has found that often difficult balances need to be made. The WFH context that includes co-located families or housemates, shared spaces and caring responsibilities introduces complexities around these conflicting identities, and the ability to keep work-life separate from home-life. This increased blurring of work and home also means privacy is difficult to maintain, with greater opportunities for accidental disclosures in both directions. However, many also failed to appreciate the risks these possible invasions of privacy may introduce. Finally, whilst some workplaces have been able to support heightened security measures while WFH, for many there remains a chasm between best practice and actual behavior afforded by the more relaxed working environment. Overall, our research highlights the support needed for both organizations and their employees to ensure that privacy and security not only continue to be considered, but also revisited in light of the new threat landscape. With both individuals and organizations showing a preference for remote and/or hybrid work further research on privacy and security is clearly necessary.

References

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