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Q4(b)

How has the idea of Work From Home forced us to redefine the formal and informal organisation of work ?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Works and Economic Life

Works and Economic Life: Social organization of work in different types of society; Formal and informal organization of work; Labour and society.

Core demand of the question

- How is work from home redefining the formal and **informal organisation** of work?
- Keep the discussion within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

Formal organisation is the official chart; **informal organisation** is unwritten practice.

WFH moves **Weber's** office into dashboards and Mayo's group into the household.

Unpaid care and gig ratings intensify informal extraction.

Lockdown split salaried WFH from reverse-migrant informal labour.

The split is relocated, not abolished.

Introduction

Formal organisation is the official chart of offices, hours, and contracts. **Informal organisation** is the living network of favours, care, and unwritten practice. Work from home, densified in COVID-19, pulls paid work into the household and stretches both maps.

Body

The inherited distinction

- **Max Weber's** bureaucracy placed work in an impersonal office, separate from the household.
- **Elton Mayo and later Peter Blau showed informal groups inside the plant:** morale, cliques, and rule-bending.
- **The Indian majority already worked informally:** no written contract, no social security, home as workshop.

How WFH redefines the formal

- Legal-rational control migrates into dashboards, logins, and rated tasks. The iron cage becomes a laptop cage.
- Core salaried staff may keep formal status while the firm sheds office costs. Peripheral staff are pushed to gig-like informality.
- Global supply chains coordinate "home" nodes across time zones, a thin organic solidarity in **Durkheim's** sense.

How WFH redefines the informal

- Unpaid care, which Ann Oakley made visible, collides with paid targets in the same room. The double day becomes a double shift without a commute.
- Neighbourhood networks, WhatsApp groups, and caste-typed job chains organise who hears of a task. **Informal organisation** grows, not shrinks.
- Migrant workers in the **2020 lockdown** had no home office. WFH for professionals coexisted with reverse migration for the informal.

Hybrid and platform types

- **Platform gig work is formally an "app contract" and substantively informal:** no career ladder, piece rates, and rating discipline.
- Supervisors still need informal trust when they cannot see the body in the hall. Surveillance tries to replace that trust and never fully does.

Assessment

- WFH does not abolish the formal-informal split. It relocates it into the household and the platform.
- Gender, class, and housing inequality decide whether WFH is autonomy or intensified informal extraction.

Flow diagram

Work from home -> Formal dashboards contracts
Work from home -> Informal care networks gig
Formal dashboards contracts -> Household as workplace
Informal care networks gig -> Household as workplace
Lockdown -> Salaried Work from home vs reverse migrants

Conclusion

Work from home redefines formal organisation as remote files and metrics, and **informal organisation** as household care plus network hiring. **Weber's** office and Mayo's group both move home. COVID-19 made the split between salaried WFH and walking migrants a public fact.

Facts & figures

Weber's office

Separation of official work from the household; WFH partly reverses that separation.

Informal organisation

Living groups and practices inside or beside the official chart, as in Mayo and Blau.

Platform gig work

App-mediated piece work with ratings; formal appearance, informal security.

2020 lockdown

Professionals at home on screens; millions of informal workers on the road.

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