

Factors affecting Work from Office and Work from Anywhere for Employees: A Study

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Abstract- Many organizations and industries of the world were transformed when the Coronavirus (COVID-19) struck the world in 2020. In order to stop the virus from spreading, a major percentage of the workforce was unable to commute to work. This led both employers and employees to seek new ways of working. Organizations started offering work from home (WFH) as an alternative to working from the office to their employees. This research paper is a study to determine the factors that influence an employee to either work from the office or work from anywhere. The results of this study reveal several meta-factors and sub-factors that impact an employee's decision to opt for remote working or working onsite.

Index Terms- Job satisfaction, remote work, telework, work from anywhere, work from home, work-life balance, work stress

I. INTRODUCTION

When the coronavirus pandemic hit the world in late 2019 and early 2020, many employees had just one question: Can I work from anywhere or I have to be present in the office premises to deliver my work and prove my productivity to my employer? As much as the concept of telework or mobile work [1] was known to exist earlier, a worldwide experiment of shifting the workforce to a work from home or work from anywhere model could only be conducted successfully on its own because of quarantines, lockdowns and self-isolations. More than a year into the pandemic, both employers and employees know the benefits and limitations of remote work. The virus managed to break all cultural, technological and gender barriers which in turn led to a structural shift in the working model of today. Nonetheless, tasks and activities, not jobs, determine the potential for remote work [2]. Therefore, it becomes important to understand that the potential of remote work depends on tasks and

activities such as the extent of communicating with others on the job, processing data, use of fixed

machinery or lab equipment, and, whether a worker has to be physically present on the site to fulfil his or her work duties or the same can be carried out successfully in a remote or hybrid working model.

Although the work has been carried out remotely in some sectors, employers believe that the tasks and activities pertaining to those jobs are better performed in person. As per the analysis given in [2], the finance, management, IT and professional services sector have the highest potential for remote work whereas sectors such as manufacturing, construction and agriculture have the lowest potential for remote work and the job activities are most effectively performed only when carried out in-person or by being physically present at the work location.

Hence, to capitalize on the potential gains in productivity from remote work, organizations around the world will need to change their practices. This research paper entails an empirical study carried out to determine the factors that influence an employee's decision to work in the office premises or work from anywhere.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The report [1] considers the impact of telework/ ICT-mobile work (T/ICTM) on the world of work, where ICT is information and communications technologies. It suggests that country-specific gender roles and models of work and family life play a role in shaping T/ICTM and also the employee-side (reduction in commuting time, greater working time autonomy, better overall work-life balance, and higher productivity) and employer-side benefits (increased motivation, reduced turnover as well as enhanced productivity and efficiency) of working from

anywhere. In contrast to this, [1] also listed a few factors restraining the adoption of the work-from-home model like the issues of trust, control and power over employees by the employer. Most of the employees want the future of work to be hybrid, as per [3]. With the right resources, people can be productive in any environment. The research carried out in [3] found the employees to have four types of mindsets towards the future of work: 42% being thriving, 12% ambivalent, 15% apathetic and 31% disgruntled. This report mentioned five important factors that drive employees to work onsite: technology, colleagues, routine, non-traditional space and visibility. In addition to these, five factors that drive employees to work remotely are safety, quality of life, freedom, technology and sufficient work-from-home space. An important insight from [3] was that the people who are productive by working from anywhere have significantly greater organizational and personal resources than those who cannot be productive everywhere. The research carried out in [4] demonstrated that working from home increases employees' enjoyment, job satisfaction and motivation. Also, job satisfaction is an important determinant of job performance. The internet business should be offered incentives, as it is a primary necessity in the context of the work-from-home (WFH) or work-from-anywhere (WFA) model.

Working from home has been linked to enhanced job performance, increased job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, and lower stress levels, according to empirical studies [5], which also suggests that work from home is affected by factors like job satisfaction, work-life balance and work stress. Additionally, social isolation leads to employees being disconnected from their working environment and triggers work stress. In [5], the authors assessed the measurement of the research model by using three measures, namely, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability.

According to [6], while some of the factors have a good or a negative impact on employee productivity, the impact of others is dependent on their characteristics and attitudes, as well as the circumstances. Working from home makes it possible for people living in isolated areas to be employed. The authors in [6] used thematic analysis in order to compare determining factors of the employees' productivity when they work from home and how these factors have changed over time. It was discovered that the stress of managing job and household responsibilities reduces productivity indirectly by decreasing life satisfaction. The factors affecting the productivity of employees were

categorized into organizational, employee-related, home-related and others. [7] is an exploratory study conducted in Hong Kong to determine the impact of working from home during COVID-19 on several work and life domains. A SWOT analysis of the work-from-home and work-from-office situation of Hong Kong is conducted. Better government guidelines and policies are required to effectively regulate and make WFH viable. As per [8], physical presence is not a measure of performance. It is argued that employees can be more productive if they work away from the office because they can work when they are most productive, they are not distracted by workplace socializing and co-workers, and they have less commuting time. Digital orientation and digital capability are the individual factors regarded as being important in affecting employee productivity in the case of WFH. As a result, the greater a person's digital orientation, the more open that person is to using digital technologies [8]. Work environment and privacy while working were also identified as essential factors. In [9], several factors affecting the business model of work-from-home were identified and analyzed using ABCD analysis. The elements that promote the advantages and benefits of this model were determined to be more effective than the limitations and drawbacks, indicating that working from home may grow more popular in the future from the perspective of employers and employees in the business.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the use of both primary and secondary research methods to scrutinize the factors impacting the employees' choice to opt for a remote work or a work-from-office model. For the secondary research, past literature as aforementioned, along with various articles and blogs were referred in order to create major categories of factors on which the choice of the employee to work from office or anywhere depends. The major factors were scrutinized further for their validity by a set of questions which were adopted from [5]. Also, the responses of the participants were gathered using a 5-point Likert scale, which is one of the most often used psychometric methods in the social sciences. So, these questions served as a short psychometric test that was undertaken by the respondents. The data was collected via a questionnaire which was distributed to the working employees who have some experience of working-from-home during the pandemic. All the respondents were Indian nationals. The analysis discussed further in the paper is based on the data collected from nearly 100 respondents.



Figure 1: A glimpse of the data collected

Figure 1 shows a glimpse of the data collected from the questionnaire that was distributed to the respondents. The data could be easily visualized and interpreted using the tool used, in the form of pie charts and bar graphs.

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This empirical study is based on a qualitative method of analysis to evaluate the relationship between the variables measured using the research instruments post the second wave of COVID-19 in India (productivity while remote working, work stress, work life balance, and job satisfaction). It makes use of both primary and secondary data (academic articles, publications, and other resources) for collecting demographic data and information on variables via an online questionnaire that was distributed to the respondents. We achieved a perfect gender parity (male : female :: 1 : 1); Majority of our respondents fall within the age range of 20-30 years (61.7% were within 20-25 and 30% belong to 25-30 age group); The larger part of respondents have an educational qualification of Masters & above (65%) and rest (35%) have completed their Bachelors; The greater number of respondents belong to the young-age workforce having a professional experience between 0-5 years (88.3%); The respondents were spread across various sectors such as private, government, business & social work and among them, the majority belong to private sector (76.7%).

Sub-factors (such as Quality of work, Productivity, Technical Knowledge, Work Autonomy, Target Achievements, Adequate Resources, Technical Assistance, Distractions in the remote environment) were identified under the 'Productivity while working' Meta-factor, which showed a positive impact on the Productivity of the employees i.e., the respondents have responded in favor of these sub-factors,

indicating that they have improved on these domains while working at a remote workplace, hence it is inferred that these subfactors have a positive impact on productivity while remote working. On the other hand, there were two sub-factors under the same meta-factor, namely Motivation, and Organization's concern over employee's mental well-being, which has shown a negative impact on employee productivity. This indicates that these two factors pose a threat to the increase in productivity while working from anywhere. Therefore, we can establish that working from home has a considerable and favorable influence on employee productivity based on our analysis. This condition is the result of people working in a remote environment for over a year, during this time. Thus, they have grown into the system of new normal, and have adapted it successfully.

It was observed that there was a significant and negative impact on the Work-Life Balance of the respondents. This resulted due to the fact that the personal and professional space of individuals coincides when they start working from anywhere. Within the meta factor of Work-Life balance we had identified eight sub-factors, out of which three (Negative Impact on Personal Life, Negative Impact on Personal Time, Negative Impact on Personal Need) had shown a stark negative impact on the work-life balance of the respondents. It is ideal to state that India requires some more time in terms of adapting completely to the work-from-home scenario. With the right strategies in this digital work environment, innovation might be enhanced. Although the negative repercussions may have an impact on personal well-being, the chance for productivity and creativity remains open, given that India is a collective society where a good pace of teamwork in the digital domain may open up innovative ideas. One Sub-factor (Negative impact on work) showed positive results, from which it was inferred that it did not have a negative impact on productivity. There were two sub-factors (Segregation of Personal & Professional Work, Negative impact on Personal interest) which showed a neutral result, which indicates that working from anywhere did not pose an impact on compartmentalizing personal and professional work and personal interests of the respondents. It was also observed that the majority of the respondents (60%) had a normal sleep cycle, where they rested for 6-8 hours on a working day, which is recommended.

For the third Meta-Factor, i.e. 'Work Stress'. Working from home has a major and detrimental impact on workplace stress. Employees are being forced to do extra work, including working overtime, as a result of the current pandemic, in order to fulfil the job they

were hired to do. Employees get detached from their work environment as a result of social isolation, which causes work stress. It has been observed that working from anywhere has significantly and positively impacted work stress. The employees working remotely encounter more work stress. We identified five sub factors under Work Stress, out of which three (Stress being beyond one's control, being overwhelmed by work, unable to complete work on time) showed a polarized response, where the respondents had faced these problems to a great extent.

For one sub-factor, i.e. Quitting of Job, the respondents have responded unfavorably, by which it was inferred that although the respondents faced severe work stress, they did not support quitting their current job. This can be caused due to the unfavorable scenario in the Indian job market after the COVID-19 hit. Thus, it was inferred that although the people had substantial work stress, yet, they did not want to quit their current job due to an innate fear that they will not get job opportunities elsewhere, and they would be rendered unemployed.

The fourth Meta Factor that we identified was 'Job Satisfaction'. Job satisfaction is influenced by work-life balance in a favorable and meaningful way. Employees who have the flexibility and liberty to balance their professional and personal lives are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. It was observed that overall, the respondents were satisfied with their current job. We worked on four sub factors under this meta factor, among which three (Satisfied with current job, Satisfied with current co-workers, Satisfied with superiors) showed a significant and favorable result towards job satisfaction. One sub-factor (Satisfied with current salary) showed a negative result, where the majority of the respondents felt that they were not appropriately compensated for their job.

V. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

The online questionnaires were distributed through personal networks that were able to reach respondents from different places in India, a majority of the respondents operated in urban areas, thus the scenario in rural India was untapped. In addition to this, a quantitative method of analysis can be used to make the study more robust. Also, future research shall reach to a larger and varied number of respondents and entail the possible interventions that can be taken by organizations to address the factors that affect employees negatively while working remotely. It should also emphasize and build upon the factors which aid working from anywhere.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research began with the aim of determining the factors that affect work from home and work from anywhere for employees in India's post-second wave of COVID19 era, where the clear direction of working from home is highly regulated. In the remote workplace scenario, the issue of work-life balance is frequently explored. In this study, it was observed that when the employees became closer to their family, the concept of work-life balance was viewed as a positive indication, which might boost their job satisfaction in some areas, while work stress must be addressed on the other hand. The authors identified four meta-factors affecting employees working from anywhere, namely, Productivity while remote working, Work Life Balance, Work Stress, Job Satisfaction. It was analyzed that remote working had a significant and positive impact on the productivity of the employees. It was seen that a healthy work-life balance was threatened in the remote workplace, and that the employees faced significant Job Stress. Overall, the employees showed a positive Job Satisfaction after a year working remotely.

Work stress can affect job satisfaction in a typical work setting; however, work stress had a negative impact on job satisfaction in this case, when respondents were compelled to work from home. This study shows that, despite the fact that remote working was not prevalent among Indian workers in the pre-COVID era, there are still opportunities for increased productivity if the correct policies and governance procedures are in place. Organizational leaders must pay attention to their employees' job satisfaction as they work from home. Working from home is undeniably disruptive to employees' work-life balance and stress levels. Our research showed that although employees were under job stress, overall, they were satisfied with their jobs. We know that remote working comes with its own set of challenges such as lack of adequate IT resources and right technical support which poses a threat to the work productivity of the employees. Our research showed a contra-view, where the respondents majorly were satisfied with these factors, and what hindered their productivity was job motivation, and organization's concern over employee's mental well-being.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors have the following recommendations from an HR perspective towards the issues identified in the WFH and WFA scenario:

Productivity while remote working: The factors which negatively affected productivity were employee motivation and organization's concern over mental-wellbeing. To address this, the right form of employee engagement interventions should be adopted to boost the morale of the workforce. Organizational policies for employee's mental wellbeing should be implemented, along with sensitivity training of managers to sensitize them towards mental well-being.

Work-Life Balance: It was observed in this study that there was a severe inequity in the work-life balance of employees. The jobs went remote by compulsion which was posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the employees were expected to have same or similar deliverables as they had when they were working from office, hence, this might not be fair or plausible while working remotely. This can be addressed by a workload-restructuring for the job roles, in order to synchronize with the remote working model.

Work Stress: It was observed that the employees were under severe work stress while working remotely, yet they were reluctant to leave their current jobs. The reason for the same was identified to be the bad job market scenario, but in recent times, the job market has opened up and it is expected to get better in the upcoming times. If the work stress in employees is not managed by the organizations by then, it will pose a threat to employee retention. This too can be addressed by a proper workload-restructuring.

Job Satisfaction: It was seen that, on the whole, employees were satisfied with their jobs, but what posed a threat was the perception that they receive an inappropriate compensation for the jobs that they perform. This can be addressed by leveraging both an external and internal benchmarking of compensations for the job roles, and then implementing an equitable rewards and compensation structure for the job roles throughout the organization.

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