CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WORK-FROM-HOME DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, demand for remote working from home significantly increased in 2020/21. Remote Work or work from home is when employees or professionals work outside of regular office environments, not necessary from a particular location. Several countries were subjected to lockdowns, which had a substantial impact on the economy. The organizations have given employees more flexibility to work from home and set their own schedules. This unforeseen situation has forced individuals and organizations to quickly train employees and adopt the use of on-line working styles, seeking to uphold the same level of efficiency as working from the office. The paper describes a survey conducted among people working from home to identify the challenges and opportunities that this change in working style presents. At the onset of the pandemic, many employees struggled to adjust to using online tools and to combine working hours with daily routines and family commitments. Gradually, the working class acclimated to the environment of the Covid-19 pandemic and tried their best to deliver the respective results to achieve the goals of an organization that balancing their requirements. However, the results show that in a short time respondents were able to develop the experience and knowledge desirable for digital work using tools such as collaboration platforms and video conferencing. When working remotely from home, a substantial percentage of respondents recognized the benefit of reducing travel time, which has a favorable influence on the environment and CO_2 emissions. However, some drawbacks were also recognized, such as the absence of face-to-face deliberations and informal meetings during working days.

Key words: Remote working, Pandemic, Challenges and Opportunities

I. INTRODUCTION

At the end of March 2020, governments around the world had decided to take measures to limit the movement of their population to reduce the spread of Covid-19 and maintain or reduce the R number below 1, where R is the number average of people to which an infected person will transmit the virus. Millions of individuals worldwide were compelled to work from home as a result of these lockdowns, which forced non-essential enterprises to close temporarily. In many countries, schools, kindergartens, universities, business organizations dental clinics and social places, including restaurants and cafes, have been closed (Pan, Cui, and Qian, 2020). Because of the lockdown, millions of people have been forced to

use remote working whenever feasible, making working from home an obligation rather than a choice.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Carroll and Conboy (2020), emphasized that COVID-19 has compelled organizations to adopt online work from home practices quickly and unexpectedly; they are based on normalization process theory (NPT) and its fundamental components, which can be used to comprehend the dynamics of implementing, incorporating, and integrating new technologies and practises in the business world.

Matli (2020), reported the findings of a survey, which show that, despite the benefits of remote working using internet technology, there are numerous disadvantages and risks associated with working from home, such as unbalanced work overload and the stress of meeting deadlines, all of which can have an impact on individual health and well-beingowing to stress-related concerns.

Richter (2020) examined the research and practical implications of lockdown on digital work tools, demonstrating how lockdown has facilitated online work. He also mentioned how the lockdown significantly influenced lifestyles and work habits. Many employees, however, have struggled for a variety of reasons, including time management and the necessity to meet childcare obligations (when schools are closed). Other considerations, such as the need to share computer and Internet access with other family members at home and increased stress from increased daily video conferencing, all play a part. The Covid-19 pandemic, according to Scheiber (2021) has dramatically increased the flexibility of working hours while badly affecting everyday working routines.

Covid-19, according to Cho (2020) has had a tremendous impact on the workforce and professions around the world, influencing professional behavior and productivity outcomes. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, research on work from home found similar issues. Working from home, for example, has several drawbacks and can be disruptive, according to Park, Fritz, and Jex (2011), especially for people who prefer to work in an office setting and have family commitments and responsibilities.

Spurka and Straubb (2020) examined the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on work and careers in flexible working relationships, laying out the potential effects of the pandemic on those employees' careers and looking at how the pandemic might contribute to the ramification of flexible working relationships. According to Davison (2020), the lockdown forced most employees to completely embrace remote online working and digital work tools, such as collaboration platforms and video conferencing capabilities, to work 100% remotely in inventive new and innovative ways.

According to some recent studies, the lockdown was discovered to reduce traffic and pollution levels, perhaps having a favourable impact on global warming and climate change. The lockdown, according to Richter (2020), has allowed many employees to connect and meet in new ways, as well as operate more flexibly by forming new types of independent management and working styles. As a result, many employers adopt internet tools to acquire resources and data to develop their organisational and data management systems. During the Covid-19 lockdown, the demand for data security protection has increased considerably.

The wide availability of the Internet infrastructure and software has helped organizations adapt to new styles of work, something that would have been much more difficult in previous decades (Ritcher, et al, 2020) Modern software, employee ICT awareness and current organizational practices have demonstrated intrinsic flexibility and openness, allowing for a wide range of work activities to be supported without the need for technological customization. However, as work from home becomes more common, it has been suggested that firms would require more complex software and organisational strategies to recreate the in-office experience as closely as feasible.

The Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on various technologies and societal elements have also been the subject of recent writings. Brem et al. (2021) explored the effects of the Covid-19 pandemics on innovation, including thoughts on e-learning, 3D printing, flexible manufacturing, big data analytics, healthcare technology, cashless payments, and e- commerce. George et al. (2020) discussed the Covid-19 pandemic on the technology and innovation management research plan and concluded that the pandemic had changed the way we live and work.

Lee and Trimi (2021) discussed innovation and the digital age in the Covid-19 pandemic. They concluded that organizations must rely on their innovation capabilities to survive, as sustainable innovation has become an essential strategy for all organizations. Gione et al. (2020) examined how businesses responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. It described the factors that must be considered at an individual and organisational level to develop resilience. As the crisis management framework evolves, the study also emphasises the need for emotional support for entrepreneurs during the pandemic and after that Brem et al. (2021). As the world continues to rely on traditional public health measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic, Ting et al. (2020), highlighted the importance of innovation in the medical sector, as a wide range of digital technologies can now be used to improve the public health sector and reduce risks to patients and medical staff, now and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of this research is to look into how telecommuting professionals worked during the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific objectives were derived from the research questions to optimise the overall goal of the research:

i. To determine the level of satisfaction of people working remotely

ii. To examine the difficulties of telecommuting.

iii. To study the perceived productivity of working from home (WFH).

IV. METHODOLOGY

The survey was exploratory, intending to learn more about respondents' adoption and familiarity with remote working methods. The study captured a snapshot of a specific group of people at a given point in time (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The study gathered both primary and secondary data and information. Secondary data and information were gathered through a review of past research studies published in peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings, as well as books, media, and websites. As part of the study's objectives, primary data and information on occupations, hours telecommuted, types of work done, and so on were collected. For this research, a series of semi-structured (both closed-ended and open-ended) Google Forms questionnaires have been distributed online to collect primary data and insights. At the outset of the Covid-19 lockdown, an online survey was prepared and shared via LinkedIn, Reddit community forums, and direct email. Moreover, the sample has consisted of 150 professionals as respondents (n=150) working from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bhubaneswar city, the capital of Odisha state.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, primary data and information for this study were acquired from 150 professionals working remotely in various industries. The online survey created in Google Forms was distributed to the participants accordingly, and their responses were returned. It's also worth noting that most of the questions have multiple-choice options. One respondent answered both "attend online sessions" and "attend online team meetings " when asked about teleworking activities. Microsoft Excel was used for data analysis, which included computing percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The information was provided by the target group of respondents was highlighted in the following subsections.

Table-1: Sample of Occupations

Profession	Percentage
Researcher	33.0
Banking personnel	12.0
HR personnel	10.0
University faculty	10.0
Advertisement agency personnel	06.0
Marketing/sales professional	06.0
Data collector	04.0
Engineer	03.0
Business owner	02.0
Others*	14.0

*' Others' category consisted of development sector official, auditor, communicationspersonnel and more

Source: Online Survey

5.1 Telecommuting Patterns

The respondents worked from home for an average of 7.51 hours per day, with a standard deviation of 1.43 hours per day, as shown in Table 2. It can be assumed that there are five working days a week. It amounts to nearly 38 hours of remote work per week. As a result, if a month has four weeks, this equates to 152 hours of remote labour every month.

Table 2: Working Hours of Telecommuters

Duration of work (per day)	Percentage (%)	$\bar{x}$ (Mean)	Σ (SD)
< 6 hours	11.0		
6 hours	21.0		
7 hours	07.0	7.51	1.43
8 hours	24.0		
> 8 hours	37.0		

(Mean and Standard Deviation have been calculated for all 150 respondents)

Source: Online Survey

Table 3 shows various types of activities that have been engaged by teleworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most highlighted tasks are having team meetings over the internet (82%) through Skype, Zoom, etc., and attending training or executive sessions online (57%). These are followed by Microsoft Excel tasks (55%), such as database management and other calculations.

Table 3: Activities Involved in Telecommuting

Telecommuting tasks	No. of Responses*	Percentage (%)
Team meetings over the internet	123	82.00
Attending sessions online	85	57.00
Microsoft Excel tasks	82	55.00
Teaching or training over the internet	60	40.00
Making presentations	57	38.00

(*Multiple responses were present)

Source: Online Survey

The findings are in contrast to those of several other secondary sources. According to Owl Labs (2019), 20% of remote employees in the United States believe they are overworked. It shows that they work more than 40 hours a week from home. In addition, 14% of remote workers had attended more than ten weekly online sessions. Furthermore, according to Buffer (2019), telecommuters worldwide work more than four days every week. Furthermore, according to research conducted in the United States and the European Union, Skype and WebEx are popular collaboration tools (Picu and Dinu, 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that the study's target population is following teleworking tendencies that are similar to those in other nations.

5.2 Job Satisfaction Levels of Telecommuters

40% of the interviewees said they are 'fairly satisfied' with their current work-from-home situation. In comparison, only 24% are 'delighted.' This suggests that the target group's overall satisfaction with working from home (WFH) is relatively high. Table 4 shows the factors that contribute to the stated levels of satisfaction. The most important element (81%) was flexible work schedules, followed by a better work-life balance (45%).

Table 4: Factors Contributing to the Satisfaction Level of Telecommuters

Factors promoting satisfaction levels	No. of Responses*	Percentage (%)
Flexibility in work schedules	121	81.00
Better work-life balance	67	45.00
Not having to commute	61	41.00
Less on-site interruption	28	19.00
Autonomy	28	19.00

(*Multiple responses were present)

Source: Online Survey

Data consistency has been discovered in earlier studies. According to Werber (2020), 25% of participants say that the most challenging aspect of working from home is social isolation. Children at home have also been a source of disturbance for 13% of the participants. Furthermore, Owl Labs (2019) discovered that 59 per cent of participants had experienced interruptions during online meetings with co-workers owing to IT issues. During official online conferences, these concerns include varying levels of internet speed, audio, and video quality. The boundary theory has aided in determining the difficulties faced by telecommuters. To keep their lives in order, humans adhere to certain restrictions. However, in this case, telecommuters face the mixing of work and non-work boundaries, which leads to multiple interferences in both spheres of life. Other studies have also confirmed this phenomenon. One study has shown that the obscuring of work-family borders causes remote workers to relate their homes with their work roles as work commitments repeatedly disturb family time (Eddleston and Mulki, 2015). Family responsibilities can bleed into working hours as well. According to Mustafa and Gold (2013), female teleworkers figure their working boundaries around their children's requirements.

5.3 Perceived Level of Productivity

In terms of work efficiency, most of the participants (45%) believe they are 'fairly productive,' followed by 22% who believe they are 'very productive.' This suggests that the target group's perceived level of production is relatively high. Table 6 shows that 67 per cent of the participants, including researchers and HR employees, believe they are getting more work done remotely. In comparison, 33% of banking and legal professionals claimed to get more work done at the workplace. As a result, the study can conclude that most of the sample has a high degree of teleworking productivity.

Table 6: Getting More Work Done at Home vs. the Office

	Percentage (%)	Professions
Getting more work done at home	66.00	Researchers, University faculty, HR personnel, Communications personnel,etc.
Getting more workdone at the office	34.00	Banking personnel, Development sector officials, Advertisement agency personnel, etc.

Source: Online Survey

The findings are consistent with those of several other sources. According to Owl Labs (2019), 79 per cent of teleworkers in the United States believe that telecommuting has enhanced productivity. Furthermore, Gajendran et al. (2015) discovered that teleworkers typically go above and beyond to demonstrate their organisational dedication, such as responding to emails outside of business hours. Although it is strongly discouraged, improving productivity should be done during working hours. The concept of self-efficacy allows for an examination of telecommuter productivity. It claims that professionals with high motivation and task ownership have better job performance and productivity. The target group in this study had a high level of total self-efficacy. Even though working during a pandemic is loaded with anxiety (Table 5), they are determined to overcome adversity. Other researchers have also adopted this concept. In a study of teleworkers in Indonesia, Soenantoet al. (2016) found no link between self-efficacy and labour productivity. Furthermore, Naotunna and Zhou (2018) discovered that in Sri Lanka, creative self-efficacy supported the influence of autonomy on telecommuters' job creativity.

VI. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Organizations must recognise that working from home (WFH) is effective and thatemployees get more work done because commuting is no longer an issue. To maximise theseadvantages, organizations should formally train their employees to use technology remotely. HR policymakers must also note and develop explicit standards for working from home(WFH) to protect employees from being overworked. In this investigation, it was shown thatmany professionals (38 per cent) have teleworked for more than 8 hours. As a result, formal telecommuting hours and other rules should be established, emulating typical workingconditions.

Employees should appreciate that their employers have permitted them to work from home during such a challenging period. It indicates that their employers are interested in their well- being and are willing to benefit employees who do well. Telecommuting will help them develop in the long run. This study's results are also a wake-up call for internet service providers (ISPs) since more than half of the respondents have conveyed internet connectivity issues (52%). As a result, ISPs should strengthen their services by providing uninterrupted & high-speed internet connectivity and ensuring a steady foundation for remote workers everywhere.

VII. CONCLUSION

Working from home (WFH) is becoming a reality in our technologically advanced society. Telecommuting allows employees to work together while ensuring that business operations are not disrupted during a crisis like the COVID-19 outbreak. Businesses are now better equipped to withstand any adversity because of the latest technological advances.

Overall, this research attempted to present teleworkers' current situation amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary findings revealed that most of them are reasonably satisfied with theircurrent working from home (WFH) situation. Furthermore, issues like general anxiety about the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation from co-workers have been emphasized. Furthermore, most people believe that working from home (WFH) is more productive than working in an office. It is one of the few studies on the

concept of working from home (WFH) during a pandemic like COVID-19. Working professionals, organizations, and HR policymakers should take note of the findings.

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