Analyzing the Effects of Social Isolation due to Remote Work on Employee Morale, Teamwork, and Collaboration

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact at the shift to remote work, converting the way paintings is achieved and the way groups have interaction with it. Although remote work operating model has many benefits, which include flexibility and decreased tour time, it additionally causes troubles, mainly isolation. This article goals to investigate the impact of social isolation due to remote or work from home (WFH) model on employee morale, cooperation and collaboration. By reviewing current literature, studies literature, and research literature, this study explores how remote work job impact employees morale, teamwork, and normal productiveness. Research shows that social isolation can affect employee morale, undermine activity performance, and inhibit effective collaboration. Finally, the research suggests remedies for mitigating issues of social isolation and team work and collaboration issues arising due to remote work.

Key words: Remote Work, WFH, Social Isolation, Employee Morale, Teamwork

I. INTRODUCTION

COVID 19 has changes the way today's workplaces are managed, having accelerated the use of remote working in almost all industries. Employees got their benefits for remote working such as more flexibility, less work hours for commutation and cost saving for the employers but along with it got big issues. The problem of social exclusion is considered critical for it has serious consequences on employee motivation, teamwork, and cooperation.

Lack of social interactions and perceiving that one is out of touch with everyone at the workplace results in this and that. Cohort results found that when employees feel alone or their emotional well-being is low, the level of job satisfaction and productivity is reduced. Teaching and non-teaching employees do not get the chance to chat with each other and have quick interactions, which impacts morale and increases tension when people have to work together. While organizations attempt to manage the issues introduced by remote work, it is crucial to understand and mitigate social isolation's impact on workforce well-being.

Cooperation and collaboration are fundamental activities in any organization. Effective teamwork implies that people get to work collaboratively thus avoiding ineffective solo completion of tasks that can be efficiently completed in a group. People work cohesively with other people as they share opinions and the overall process improves as many people are coming up with many different approaches to solve the challenges. A regular office provides direct interactions, group meetings and everyone is physically present and fully aware of other employees and their projects.

However, globalization poses significant issues for the organization of efficient work and collaboration. Closeness is important, as Face-to-face communication makes the team members to feel that they are part of a team thus lose the social cohesion that is important for a team to have. Other types of social interactions such as; casual interactions like, incidental talk and brief conversation are difficult to implement through virtual interfaces. It is often the case that these talks establish beneficial trust, comprehension, and good relations with other employees which play crucial roles in effective collaboration.

Flexible work arrangements do help to provide organizations and employees with more options while at the same time, they have more ways of proving to be counterproductive to teamwork. As near perfect as technology in communication might be, new virtual communication tools do not convey the same feelings and subtleties as face-to-face communications. Probable misunderstandings and misunderstandings are more likely to happen, since vocal and non-verbal communication and contextual details are missing. Scheduled meetings can turn into a series of bureaucratic sessions that do not allow for the exchange of ideas that are the basis for creativity or searching for new solutions to existing problems.

Also, the lack of an office environment destabilizes the team's structure and can hinder the formation of a unitary work culture. Thus, people at the workplace especially in an office setting can easily emulate organizational values and also notice the behaviours being displayed within the workplace. Remote work can weaken these points of reference, thereby challenging the organization's capacity to have a high density of shared organizational culture. This can make employees quite detached from the organization as well as their own work goals, as they are not as committed to the team and their objectives.

II. OBJECTIVES:

1. To Investigate the correlation between remote work and social isolation of employees.
2. To Examine the impact of remote work on team dynamics and collaboration.
3. To underscore key Challenges and Issues pertaining to remote work.
4. To recommend mitigation strategies in dealing with the negative impact remote work models.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Work from home or telecommuting is therefore not a relatively new concept but has been around for the past few decades. First of all, telecommuting was introduced as one of the ways to minimize daily commuting time and increase the quality of life; the pioneers of this model were mostly technicians and representatives of the service sector. Telecommuting was defined for the first time by Jack Nilles in the seventies when he broached the concept in order to solve the problem of transport and energy in large urban centers. **(Nilles, 1975)[1].**

- Since the beginning of the internet in the 1990s, the possibilities for WFH models have drastically changed. Thanks to improvements of the speed of internet connection and development of other communications technologies, distant work became more probable and popular. IBM and AT&T were some of the early adopters of the concept of telecommuting because of the perceived benefits and cost cut backs that were entailed by the process **(Bailey & Kurland, 2002)[2].** Since the early 2000, telework was evolving through advanced practices, and more organisations started implementing more flexible work schedules as a way of increasing employees' productivity as well as employment appeal.

- The implementation of the various WFH models has been significantly facilitated by technological improvements. Technological advancement, particularly in the areas of communication like email, IMs, and video-conference has made it possible to co-ordinate with remote teams. Other sectors that were impacted by cloud computing and, therefore, the advancement of remote work included; Cloud computing also extended the idea of the AS/400 to the revised remote work by allowing staff to conveniently access and share resources and applications across the Internet (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). Through these advances in technology, employees have been able to satisfactorily execute their functions at other places apart from their workplaces.

- The outbreak of COVID-19 in the year 2020 could be considered as the push factor that significantly spread the application of WFH models of work to an extent that was beyond anyone's imagination a year before. When governments of the world's nations sealed off their nations and restricted the movement of human traffic, organizations had no choice but to adopt work from home measures for continuity. This turn of events brought the feasibility and the pains of a work from home culture to the forefront. Research done during the pandemic suggested that despite keeping employees safe and allowing flexibility, working from home raised problems like social isolation, low cohesiveness, and failure to manage between-work hours **(Wang et al. , 2021)[3].**

- Obviously, there are multiple benefits of remote work However, like all good things, it has its flaws as well. Lack of interpersonal communication can be a critical issue due to the fact that employees may have limited interaction with other people in the workplace, including the organizational wall façade. It has been established that absence of inter personel communication for sometime results in reduction of: satisfaction at the workplace, morale and increase of stress levels **(Golden et al. , 2008)[4].** Also, remote working decreases the level of cooperation among employees because face-to-face communication is critical for the formation of trust and interpersonal relationships **(Olson & Olson, 2000)[5].**

- It's believed that the future of WFH models will be the use of the blend of the traditional work from home style and the conventional office environment. Companies are gradually appreciating how they can adopt more of the work from home concept while at the same time embracing opportunities to physically interface. It should be noted that the systems that combine both elements can be the most beneficial; providing all the benefits of the external work model while minimizing the negative sides **(Allen et al. , 2015)[6].** When run efficiently by adopting correct organizational culture for remote working along with partnering right technologies with the employees, it is absolutely possible to work efficiently and effectively even if the employees are located at the different geographical location.

### Social Isolation Due to Work from Home Models

- Thus, social isolation, which has emerged as a major issue with the increased practice of the work from home (WFH) systems, deserves attention. Lack of interaction means social isolation in the context of working from home, not being able to communicate with other employees or be aware of the organization's climate. Such feelings have a profound impact on the state of an employee's health and, in turn, the organizational effectiveness.
- Studies have shown that stranded consequences of social exclusion have negative impacts on employees' deterioration of the mental condition. Various studies depict that employees who have been working from home have no social support, and they even often feel lonely. **Golden, Veiga, and Dino (2008)[7]** establish that professional isolation reduces job

performance and increases the level of turnover intentions. Important to note is that many people working from home have virtually no interaction with their fellow workers, which may lead to those feeling of loneliness; this is due to such factors as the absence of face-to-face communication, shortcuts, and water cooler talk, which are normally fundamental in an office setting.

Effects on Team Dynamics and Collaboration

- The final effect of social isolation is also the detriment of team cohesion and work interaction. One cannot underestimate the fact that when people are separated by technology and are not physically around each other, they do not get the usual casual interactions that one gets in the conventional workplace. These interactions are very important in the establishment of trust, teamwork, and information sharing among the members. Remoteness as a form of virtual work environment presents some problems to the way in which workers can effectively communicate and this tends to work against teamwork in the same way that it would be done physically. Lack of formal and informal communication results in key misunderstandings and even reduction of team morale and cooperation.

- The wave of embracing work from home has its influence on organizational culture as well as employee engagement. However, in remote work configuration, the organizational culture is weak because employees are likely to be out of touch with the company's goals and objectives. In the study done by **Mann and Holdsworth (2003)[8]**, the authors identified that effects of telework includes psychological effects in relations to stress and other emotional related strains which arise from lack of social contact. Such disconnection leads to low levels of satisfaction in their jobs and low morale that can inevitably hinder the aspect of employee turnover and organizational success.

In a comprehensive **Report (2021)[9]** which was prepared with the help of Doist, Remotive, and We Work Remotely, which was based on survey if 2,300 remote workers, highlighted the following;
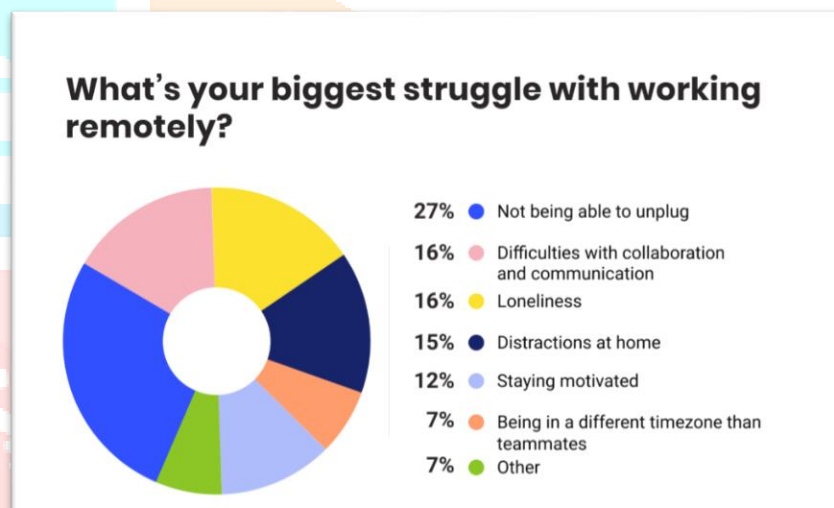
Source: Buffer.com (State of remote work 2021)

The second most alarming areas, concern (16 %) resulted into the work from home model are; majority of the employees are experiencing difficulties in trying to adequately interact and share information with their colleagues. Other findings presented in the research include suggestions that show that there are arising problems that result from the work from home model of operation, whereby employees have a lot of difficulty in dealing with the rest of their team. This deficiency has been listed as the second worst issue, but in cases of working remotely. One of these disadvantages is the fact that the employees of the organizations are physically unable to have chance encounters with one another through which they are able to become more familiar with one another and work cohesively as teams as well as communicate with one another on more of a face-to-face basis. For this reason, although people interact virtually through the assistance of the enhanced communication technologies available in today's society, the interpersonal communication interaction in the sense of facilitating actual face-to-face communication interaction is lost. A gap of such a type leads to misunderstanding of signals and, consequently, collusion as well as evasion regarding tasks and members of the team. As such, there exists a manifest demand for viable communication solutions that need to be adopted by the management.

In the same way, loneliness and isolation, which is one of the considerable outcomes of the given arrangement, stands as the third most concerning area of the work from home model worry list. It creates a deep touch of social relationships that are not easily observed or developed when people are not in the traditional office premise where normal talks that are not business-related are frequent. All these social connections are usually lacking in the home model, and consequently, creates feelings of loneliness and frail sense of togetherness. This lack of social interaction is probably one of the largest concerns with remote work since it is widely understood that complete social isolation has negative repercussions on the health of workers. Employees are deprived of daily interpersonal communication and social interaction within and with their colleagues, thus, organization must ensure and provide means to counteract the arising issue of loneliness and isolation in a shift to remote workplace.

IV. MITIGATING ISSUES OF SOCIAL ISOLATION AND TEAM WORK AND COLLABORATION ISSUES ARISING DUE TO REMOTE WORK.

- **Promote Virtual Social Interactions:** Suggest people to have casual meetings, social breaks, having virtual cocktail hour or online games. In addition, if possible, bring up or engage in non-work-related topics in the work messaging platforms used to mimic the natural, casual office conversations that employees are likely missing.
- **Facilitate Regular Communication:** According to the team members, set down specific rules regarding frequency and kind of interaction. Engage in the use of web conferences in meetings and view other people so as to pick up cues on the level of engagement.
- **Encourage Transparent Communication:** Promote openness and readiness of the team members to present issues and problems affecting their working progress. Schroeder's goal is to have daily meetings and briefing sessions to ensure that people are on the right track and present their problems to be solved immediately.
- **Build Trust and Collaboration:** Make assignments which are best solved by group effort and expect students to engage in cross disciplinary projects. Evidently, apply the utmost level of openness, monitor the project's progress with the help of special instruments, and indicate the roles and duties unambiguously.
- **Invest in Team Training and Development:** It is highly recommended to train the employees on the use of software for virtual collaboration and effective communication in such a working environment. Organize trainings with respect to how to develop trust in the members of virtual teams and how to manage and solve conflicts.
- **Create Opportunities for Mentorship and Coaching:** In order a proper professional relationship and skill development of individuals can be promoted then team members must be paired for mentorship. Ensure to conduct virtual coaching sessions in order to empower the development of all employees and improve the cohesiveness of the team. Celebrate Achievements and Milestones. Reward the efforts of a team with congratulations and thank you messages during online platform collaborated with other teams.
- **Encourage Employee Engagement:** By seeking their feedback on some of the experiences in the remote work and put the attempt into practice. Policies which focus on remote working practices need to be constantly monitored and have to accommodate the strategies made to changes that may occur periodically.

With these remedies in place, organizations can effectively manage this social isolation problem hence improving on teamwork and collaboration in work from home environments so as to ensure the well-being of any employee.

V. CONCLUSION:

The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed a widespread shift towards remote work, bringing with it both benefits and challenges. While remote work enhances flexibility, reduces commute times, and saves costs, it also exacerbates issues of social isolation. This isolation, characterized by diminished social interactions and a sense of disconnect from colleagues, poses significant threats to employee morale and teamwork. The lack of informal exchanges and face-to-face meetings in virtual settings can undermine team cohesion and collaboration, essential for fostering innovation and problem-solving capabilities. As organizations adapt to remote work dynamics, addressing social isolation becomes imperative to sustain a productive and engaged workforce. Effective teamwork and collaboration are fundamental to organizational success, enabling synergy among diverse skills and perspectives. In traditional office environments, spontaneous interactions and shared physical spaces cultivate trust and camaraderie critical for collaborative efforts. However, remote work introduces barriers such as distance and reliance on virtual communication tools, which may hinder the spontaneity and richness of in-person exchanges. These challenges underscore the need for proactive strategies in remote work settings, including leveraging technology for effective communication, nurturing virtual social interactions, and preserving organizational culture. By embracing these strategies, organizations can mitigate the impacts of remote work on teamwork and collaboration, ensuring teams remain cohesive and productive regardless of physical distance.

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