

## Opportunities and challenges of work from home during covid-19

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### Abstract

Work from home or working from home (WFH) indicates that an employee is working from their home or place of residence instead of their workplace/office. Various companies and industries have opted for the work from home policy for their employees to ensure flexibility and efficient working at their convenience.

Offices consist of diverse workforces with flexible working policies in place according to the organizations' requirements. Working from home has its benefits and drawbacks. While work from home may reduce costs for the organization and save commute time and money for the employees, it can result in hindrances in communication and collaboration. Remote working may improve employee productivity and work-life balance. Employees often use smart-phones, tablets, desktop computers, laptops, etc. to work remotely and stay connected to each other and the organization through the services of teleconferencing available on the internet.

Soon after corona virus was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization, companies across the world switched to working remotely as an essential step to ensure the provision of flexible working conditions to maintain the efficiency and the productivity of the employees towards their work with the aid of digital technologies. Several IT businesses, academic institutions, and other sectors have gone entirely online and workers are now expected to operate from home with a different set of rules and regulations that would be suitable for the organizations. According to Clutch. co, 44% of employees in the United States of America shifted to remote working during the pandemic compared to 17% before it.

**KEYWORDS:** communication, collaboration, remote, employee, companies, teleconferencing etc.

### Introduction:

The effect of COVID-19 on wellbeing, economies, and markets has over overwhelmed with tremendous complexities in different measurements. The observable effect is knowledgeable about the associations and the idea of working environments. The organizations are striving maximum to run their shows in spite of lockdown restrictions. Many organizations went a step ahead to help their employees in handling stress by setting up virtual counseling sessions for employee wellbeing and motivation. There has been a significant change in the nature of performing the job, so called "Work from Home" (WFH). Work from home indicates that an employee is working from their home or place of residence instead of their workplace/office. Various companies and industries have opted for the work from home policy for their employees to ensure flexibility and efficient working at their convenience.

HR plays a crucial role in evolving, emphasizing and changing the culture of an organization. They are an integral part of an organization that has the prime responsibility of safeguarding and uplifting the employee-centric needs in parallel to the management expectations. They ensure smooth workflow and see to it that everyone in the organization stays updated with the organization's policies and requirements. The sudden shift in the paradigm of work culture at present has its own implications on employee health and wellbeing through stress anxiety and various other mental issues. The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 has brought all these issues upfront which really need to be addressed and overcome. Organizations need to zero in on building and fortifying correspondence, trust and straightforwardness related to the COVID pandemic to reestablish profitability and convey on representative experience. In the real office environment, there was a possibility to understand the pulse and sensitivity of the issues to tackle immediately, but now employees going remote have led to various complexities in the organizational system.<sup>1</sup>

### **Opportunities of work from home:**

Some five years before COVID-19, Nicholas Bloom co-authored a paper estimating the benefits of working from home (WFH), in which the employee lives within commuting distance of the office. He identified productivity-enhancing mechanisms such as reduced commute time, fewer work breaks, sick days, and the benefits of a quieter work environment. Based on a randomized control trial on 1,000 employees of Ctrip, a NASDAQ-listed Chinese travel agency, the experiment revealed that working from home for nine months led to a 13 percent increase in performance. The experiment was so successful that Ctrip rolled out the option to WFH to the whole firm. The overall impact of the WFH was striking, as the firm improved total factor productivity by between 20% to 30% and saved about \$2,000 a year per employee WFH.<sup>2</sup>

#### **1. Flexibility and agility:**

Home working enables more agility and flexibility in working arrangements. With employees no longer tied to an office, they may be better placed and more willing to work flexible hours such as earlier or later in the day or even at weekends. This may help you meet certain business needs e.g. if you are trading with customers residing in a different time zone.

#### **2. Improved employee retention:**

Home working can help retain employees as the flexibility of home working can help them meet childcare needs, reduce their commute and enable them to fit their work around their personal life. Being allowed to work from home, staff will also feel increased levels of trust from their employer, which can contribute greatly to staff loyalty.

#### **3. Increased productivity:**

Due to fewer interruptions, which would normally occur in an office environment? By contrast, working from home allows for a quieter environment that can facilitate more focused work. You may also find that employees will work longer hours as they can also use their time saved from commuting to start work earlier, later or both.

#### **4. Increased staff motivation:**

By working from home staff will feel more trusted by their employer as the working relationship isn't as closely monitored and employees are allowed a degree of autonomy to get on with their work. Staff will also be happier developing a home working routine that suits them better and this can contribute towards them feeling more motivated to give their best.

### **5. Improved staff health and wellbeing:**

Working from home eliminates the need for a commute to work that can be stressful to your employees. Time savings such as this also enables staff to get extra health benefits such as additional sleep, spending more time with family, exercising or preparing healthier meals.

### **6. Better work/life balance:**

Working from home can help employees improve their work-life balance e.g. staff that would have had to commute will now be able to use that time for themselves giving the basis for a better work-life balance. Staff is also able to fit in household chores around their working day giving them more free time in the evenings e.g. loading or unloading the dishwasher or preparing dinner on their lunch break.

### **7. Technology makes it easier:**

The internet has made it possible for staff to be continually connected to the office. Tools such as Skype have made communication between colleagues and teams much easier and at times can lead to more efficient and effective meetings.

### **8. Less sickness absences:**

Staff is more likely to feel happier and more energized working from home and therefore less chance of their immune system being negatively impacted by burnout. Also the fact that employees are working in isolation there is less chance of infections spreading as would be the case within an office environment.

### **9. Less need for regular holidays:**

Working from home can feel like a break from the office even though staff is still working. Working from home staff will feel more energized and will be able to spend more time with their family and therefore will not feel the need to take as much leave. However it is your duty as an employer to ensure staff takes their holidays.<sup>3</sup>

### **Challenges of work from home:**

The COVID-19 epidemic has made everyone's life worse. It has made business survival extremely difficult as the economy is declining day by day. People get very insecure about jobs. There is no suitable place to work with a spirit of cooperation, and leadership. Employees face negative working conditions and cling to low-paying wages. They strive to achieve goals either at a personal level or at a professional level. There is a need to understand the expectations of employees and their performance. The aspect of employee relations involves listening, influencing, communicating, problem-solving, counseling people when they are most threatened to maintain a healthy work ethic during this difficult time. People face challenges in many areas whether it be personal or professional positions, the employer should fix and advise and resolve their various issues and be sensitive when they need them most.<sup>4</sup>

### **1. Lack of community and teamwork**

Man cannot live alone, or work alone efficiently and effectively. While some employees are quite excited about the idea of working alone without the distractions of the workplace, some might find it difficult. Spending long hours and collaborating with only a computer screen and no face-to-face interaction and communication with team members can be challenging. There are various platforms like Zoom, Skype, etc., where employees can connect through video calls and conferences. It might not be as efficient as sitting together and brainstorming ideas to work effectively.

## **2. Lack of Motivation**

Motivation drives people to power on and achieves their goals. It can be effortless to lose motivation quickly when one is put in the wrong place and time. It further risks achieving the desired business outcomes.

Working at an office with fellow employees with a common goal and purpose, or having a pep talk with a senior at work, can be great sources of external motivation. Whereas working from home lacks that kind of environment.

Lack of motivation can make an employee's life difficult and can adversely affect their productivity. Though self-motivation works to a certain extent, it is not always enough to keep a man going. That's where the use of external motivation comes into play.

## **3. Unmonitored performance and those frequent breaks**

Working alone can be a tough job. The role requires employees to keep a check on their performance at work themselves. Self-regulation is a tough job, and work rests on the discretion of the employees.

Employees might often laze around and take frequent breaks, resulting in longer and less work time when the breaks and work go unmonitored. Whereas, in the workplace, one is constantly reminded to be on the right track and perform efficiently and effectively, which is impossible with remote work.

## **4. Lack of Office Equipment and Security Concerns**

Setting up a home office with a high-end laptop/desktop, a high-speed internet connection, and other equipment, like printers/fax machines, can be costly. And that is not very convenient for everyone. Furthermore, working over the internet might be a problem to access sensitive company documents, which otherwise are easily accessible in the workplace.

Moreover, sharing those documents might raise security issues. Again, various steps need to be taken, such as using Virtual Private Networks or secure cloud access.

## **5. Distractions and lack of a good working environment**

Remote work brings along with it the benefit of a good work-life balance. Employees feel that working from home avails them more time for their family and other life events. But there is more to the picture.

A survey released by Glassdoor, where nearly 1,000 American employees were asked about their top concerns when working from home between March 11 and March 13, 2020, reported that roughly 32% of employees say watching TV is a top distraction when working remotely, followed by 27% who say child care is a huge distraction.

Employees need to focus and concentrate while working, to produce expected results. It proves to be highly difficult with the distractions of family wanting attention or other household noises. Not every household can provide good working conditions as an office space does.

## 6. Burnout

Flexible working hours are one of the benefits of remote work. It lets employees structure their days according to their convenience. But, this can turn into a disadvantage for some employees. Some may forget to clock out and differentiate between work-life and home-life. This might lead to working longer than one should, thus; resulting in employee burn-out and added stress. Whereas working in an office helps to draw the line between professional and private life.

## 7. Risk to productivity

It is claimed that working remotely attracts increased productivity. . But, with all the tempting distractions of:

- mid-day naps,
- the web series that was left on a cliffhanger,
- spending time with family, etc.

Makes it difficult to concentrate and be interested in work for a long. Furthermore, working remotely can make one **feel isolated** and not motivated enough to work productively. So, it can be said that all of the **various disadvantages** discussed above can lead to a loss in productivity when working from home.<sup>5</sup>

## Is working from home a boon or a bane?

No system in this world is perfect. Everything has its own benefits and drawbacks, and we have to make the best out of everything. Some employees are comfortable working from home, and some are waiting to go back to their workplace, sit on their beloved office chair and meet their co-workers.

The disadvantages that have been pointed out, are reasons why some organizations are still not on-board with the idea of remote work, and the concern is real. But, there are various ways of employee engagement, which can help organizations get past these disadvantages.

A shift towards home working doesn't mean employees have to work only at home. Often **splitting time between home and the workplace** is the most productive solution and you may want the home worker to attend meetings to keep them fully involved and informed.

## Conclusion:

Offices consist of diverse workforces with flexible working policies in place according to the organizations' requirements. Working from home has its benefits and drawbacks. While work from home may reduce costs for the organization and save commute time and money for the employees, it can result in hindrances in communication and collaboration. Remote working may improve employee productivity and work-life balance. Employees often use smart-phones, tablets, desktop computers, laptops, etc. to work remotely and stay connected to each other and the organization through the services of teleconferencing available on the internet.

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In contrast to other fiasco, the infection doesn't hit once and disappear, yet has left with vulnerabilities and basic speculation towards what's to come. The associations and workers have been authorized to change their operational schedules basically in the blink of an eye bringing about remarkable requests on administrators to settle on choices in extremely unsure conditions. In spite of the fact that the drawn out ramifications of COVID-19 are at present obscure and flighty, however the danger of future wellbeing emergency of this broad nature is practically ensured. Subsequently, our concentration and activity should reexamine past limits, continue by adding to our methodology and executing the correct strides to guarantee the endurance of the association, representative change and prosperity over the long haul. This emergency won't end at any point in the near future, there's nothing left but to change and adjust the way we live and the manner in which the association proceeds.

A study directed with 800 worldwide HR heads in March 2020 discovered that 88% of associations had either urged or expected representatives to WFH during the COVID19 emergency. This process of WFH possibly would have created a drastic impact on the lifestyle of the people leading to increased working hours and also work continue over a lengthy period, and also increased work-life conflict especially for women employees. COVID-19 disaster has relocated collaborative work into the virtual domain.

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