Covid-19 Pandemic: Work From Home an Alternative to Traditional Work Culture

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Abstract

Global pandemic COVID-19 has left many workers being unable to travel to work in order to limit the transmission of the virus. In fast-paced urban areas, both companies and workers are looking for alternate work options. Most, if not all, employees were forced to operate from home due to the epidemic. As a result, Work from home (WFH) has become a strategic concern for most firms. Companies and employees should be considered WFH while formulating plans. Even though working from home is now available, the current situation provides a unique look at how well the arrangement works. This information might be useful for future legislation that alter the present arrangement of working hours. Examining the problems that businesses and employees in India face requires the use of a SWOT analysis and an exploratory approach. Determining if this employment arrangement is temporary or permanent will also be considered.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Pandemic, Work from Home, Work Arrangement, Work Culture*

Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic, people have had to rethink a variety of behaviours, from trade to pleasure to basic travel and daily activities. In terms of economics, this has affected not only people but also entire countries, halting a wide range of economic activities. Despite numerous predictions and warnings, including those from public health specialists, the situation remained a significant change that required planning, training, and facilitation on the part of all involved. Despite this, the breadth and solution remained unfathomable and a massive undertaking. COVID-19 began to circulate among people in December of 2019. Due

to the fact that respiratory droplets are the primary mode of infection, it is presently believed that this virus is disseminated through direct contact with other persons. Masks, social distance, and good hand washing are now the only measures available to combat viral transmission. (Centre for Health Protection [CHP] 2020a). At the end of January 2020, "the WHO designated COVID-19 an international public health emergency (World Health Organisation 2020). Since then, the virus has swiftly spread throughout the country".

Too far, more than 60 million verified cases and more than one million confirmed fatalities have been documented (World Health Organisation 2020). Several governments have imposed and reinstituted strict lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 epidemic, including the closure of non-essential businesses and the restriction of non-essential gatherings. Numerous countries urge their citizens to stay home whenever feasible in order to avoid face-to-face contact with one another.

There were a lot of questions and misunderstandings about how to balance work and life before the epidemic. In response to COVID-19, a large number of firms have opted to experiment with WFH. As of the end of May 2020, 35.2 percent of the U.S. workforce will be working from home, up from 8.2 per cent in May 2018. According to WFH, 71.7% of the employees it assessed could do their duties effectively (Bick, Blandin, and Mertens 2020). To limit the spread of WFH, certain governments have set restrictions for government workers, while private firms have received warning notifications.

Before the pandemic, many people wanted WFH, but it was considered unfeasible in India's heavily populated cities. Compact dwellings might be a problem for home workers who need a quiet, dedicated space to accomplish their jobs. Each individual in metro areas has an average living space of about 161 square feet, which is around 25 per cent less than Tokyo and 60 per cent less than Singapore (Ng 2018). Years have passed since city workers began to believe that they are required to be physically present at work in order to do their responsibilities properly. In response to the epidemic, many WFH employees are now working remotely, and it's doing well. In a city with such a high population density, the possibility that WFH may serve as one of many future models is of great relevance In this first-of-its-kind study, three criteria will be evaluated. For starters, WFH will be better understood via this study.

COVID-19 pandemic and work from home in Hong Kong

To deal with and defend themselves against the COVID-19 epidemic, several places have

adopted diverse methods, and India is no exception. COVID-19 was first detected in India on 27 January 2020. India has been infected multiple times so far. Current circumstances are causing a second wave. While its neighbours have dealt with the outbreak differently, India has not. It has also instituted restrictions on public gatherings, closed schools, and unique work arrangements that include WFH and remote working for urban employees in addition to the lockdown. In the beginning, India appeared to have been able to limit the disease's transmission and keep infection rates low. Rural residents were largely healthy until the second wave of illnesses. Eventually, after a high rate of infection, educational institutions reopened and social distance was relaxed. When it comes to controlling the spread of COVID-19, India was lauded as a success storey. Some have credited the government's fast response to the COVID-19 situation. After a few months, again widespread of COVID-19 bring the second wave in India which force several states to the government to force strict implementation of COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions. As a result of government rules, such as the suspension of dine-in dining services, there was a great deal of debate, especially among those who could not attend WFH owing to the nature of their employment, who complained about the inconvenience and lack of places to eat. Just one day after the new regulation went into effect, the government decided to restore daytime dine-in services. Towards the end of July, certain anti-epidemic efforts were relaxed, including a major vaccination push.

When asked about the worldwide employment trend for 2018, 85% of employees in large cities reported that they were expected to work within traditional office hours, with no flexible working choices given (Randstad Hong Kong, n.d.). Before the pandemic, WFH was only available to a small number of people. In a paper issued in the early 2000s, the government predicted that Indians would not readily embrace teleworking in the short to medium term (Planning Department 2002). Coronavirus has impacted the lives of many people. Publicly funded university staff and civil servants (excluding those providing emergency and critical public services) were the first employees in India to be authorised to engage in the WFH programme as a tactic to assist minimise viral transmission in the country. There were a few private companies that allowed their employees to join in the WFH.

After the epidemic, companies may want to pay more attention to the working alternative they choose. WFH looks to be the internet platform of choice for several different multinational corporations. In India, a second wave of the epidemic prompted a separate study, which

revealed that most employees surveyed had experienced WFH for at least one day each week and that they anticipated continuing to endure WFH for at least one or two days per week following the pandemic. When working in a large metropolis, it is possible for a substantial part of the population to do so, which has led to renewed discussion over the feasibility of such work practices. Work-life balance (WLB) has been questioned by some, while others have argued that WFH not only improves employee productivity but also gives greater flexibility in working arrangements. Indians are assimilating WFH, which was launched in reaction to the epidemic, with ease, because of the high level of technological sophistication they enjoy.

Work from home: an overview

COVID-19 infection can be minimised by using WFH, a COVID-19 infection prevention option. Many schools of thought have been made aware of WFH for many years, but it's not a new concept by any means. Nilles (1988) first suggested the notion of WFH in 1973, calling it "telecommuting" or "telework". A variety of names have been used to describe WFH over the past four decades, including remote work and flexible workplaces. Employers who can work in flexible environments, especially from home, by utilising technology to perform job tasks, are considered flexible workers. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) In particular, noted that telecommuting involves performing activities outside of the employee's primary or core offices for at least a portion of their workday utilising electronic media to connect with people inside and outside the business.

The COVID-19 pandemic may affect 37 percent of U.S. occupations, including economic activity, corporate management, and professional and scientific services, according to a recent research by Dingel & Neiman (2020). There are certain jobs that cannot be performed at home. These include those in the health care, agricultural, and hospitality industries. Whilst WFH is gaining in popularity across the world, experts are divided on its advantages and disadvantages Both employers and employees benefit from WFH. A few examples of the benefits include decreased time spent travelling, avoidance of office politics and the use of less office area. Other benefits include greater enthusiasm, greater gender diversity (women and careers) and healthy workforces with lower absenteeism and turnover numbers. Caulfield (2015) Employees discovered ways to save commute time and the value of travel time. Research has shown that telework may reduce turnover while boosting employee productivity, workplace participation, and employee commitment, among other things. The same is true for e-working.

It may increase productivity, adaptability, professional advancement, and work-life balance, as well as cut travel time. As a further benefit, Purwanto et al. (2020) claimed that WFH may give employees more flexibility in their work schedules and allow them to save money on their commutes to and from work.

While WFH does have its advantages, it also has its downsides. According to Purwanto et al. (2020), there are certain downsides to working from home, such as the fact that employees are responsible for their energy and internet bills. In their study, Collins and Moschler (2009) found that working from home separated workers from their peers and that managers were worried about productivity losses. Deterioration of colleague relationships might also result (Gajendran and Harrison 2007). As a result of the blurring lines between work and family life (Baruch 2000; Kazekami 2020), employees may become overworked (Grant et al. 2019). In a similar vein, Eddleston and Mulki (2017) found that WFH is related to remote employees' difficulty to disconnect from work.

Working from home has been found to increase WLB. E-working would enhance WLB, and e-workers found it easy to merge work and non-work lives. E–workers found that e–working increased their productivity. Working from home increases workplace satisfaction. A favourable relationship exists between WFH and the contentment with one's family life.

Most countries have made WFH a policy priority in order to combat the epidemic. Employers and employees will both be influenced by these rules in some manner.

Work from home: a framework of investigation

Based on current research on WFH, telecommute, e-working, and flexible workplace practises (including remote work), the current study's programme has been proposed. As soon as the COVID-19 pandemic breaks out, the WFH study will be led by a framework that evaluates whether or not the WFH setup will be temporary or permanent According to the suggested paradigm, WFH is influenced by two factors: organisational and personal. To find out how these characteristics impacted WFH, the authors set out to investigate. As illustrated in Figure 1, the next section provides detailed explanations of the framework's parts.

Figure 1. Analytical Framework
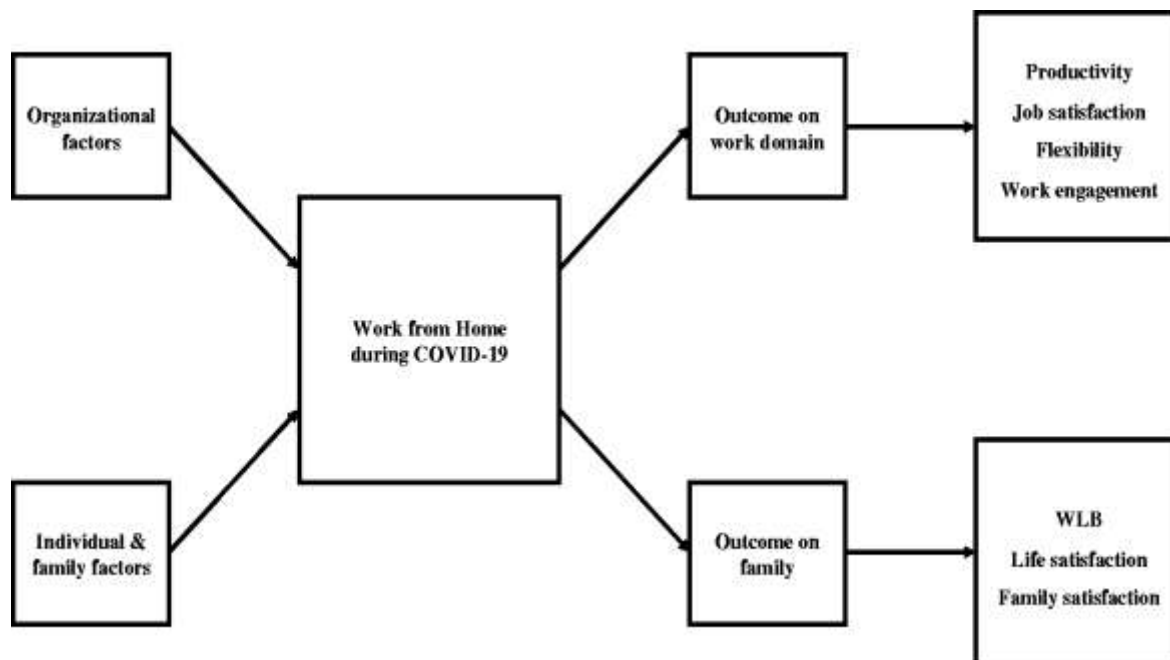
As a result of working from home, workers must consider two primary considerations. Employees' work would first be affected by "organisational variables." The importance of organisational variables in WFH setups has been explored in many studies (e.g. Baker, Avery, and Crawford 2007; Grant et al. 2019). Employees' desires to work from home are only a few examples. There is also assistance for staff well-being and IT from the corporation, among other things (Baker, Avery, and Crawford 2007). Other organisational characteristics include the level of trust inside the organisation and the level of trust held by management. WFH is associated with organisational trust and management trust, as established in prior studies A culture of trust in an organization—trust among colleagues and managers—is required for teleworking or electronic working, according to Baruch's study from 2000 and Grant's study from 2019 as well as Baker, Avery, and Crawford's study from 2007. WFH and these variables are tightly linked, according to prior research.

SWOT analysis

Considering the availability of technology, India has the potential to make WFH considerably more prevalent. It is regarded to be one of the most technologically sophisticated cities, with 92 per cent of its people using the internet (The World Bank Group 2020). Most urban residents already have the requisite technology, i.e. a stable internet connection, to participate in WFH. The majority of people, on the other hand, appear to have a hard time

carving out a distinct workstation in their modest houses. Given that Hong Kong has just recently adopted WFH, it is important to evaluate the potential and drawbacks of WFH through the use of an analytical framework such as a SWOT analysis. WFH's strengths, limitations, opportunities, and dangers were analysed, and the results are given in a self-explanatory report. Figure 2.

	SWOT analysis of the situation of Hong Kong	
	Work-from-Office	**Work-from-Home**
STRENGTHS	Networking opportunities/face-to-face interaction Opportunities for collaboration Prevent miscommunication/effective supervision Separation of work and personal life Greater sense of belonging Better onboarding for new employees A focused environment Greater access to technology No risk of information leaks	Flexible arrangement No office distractions (e.g. no office noise) Autonomy/freedom Cozy/Familiar environment (reduced stressed) Time saving / No commuting Money saving (e.g. spend less on renting office spaces) Work-life balance Reduce absenteeism
WEAKNESSES	Lack of flexibility Sedentary lifestyle Workplace conflict (e.g. office politics) Noisy workplace (e.g. loud conversations) Time wasted in unnecessary meetings Irrelevant side conversations Commuting expenses Higher operating costs (e.g. utility bills)	Distractions (e.g. family members, household duties) Uncomfortable environment (e.g. living in a small space) Lack of supervision Communication barriers Missing social interactions/loneliness Lack of hardware support Blurred lines between work and personal life Unhealthy lifestyle (e.g. lying on the sofa all day) Not favored by all employees Injustice
OPPORTUNITIES	Maintain a professional appearance (e.g. build lasting relationships with clients)	Hybrid models New talents from around the world
THREATS	Less workforce diversity (e.g. married women, & elderly) Traffic-related air pollution	Cybersecurity (e.g. data theft) Privacy (e.g. loss of corporate/employee/customer data) No WFH policies and regulations Extra expenses associated with home work High competition (e.g. job may be outsourced to cheap overseas labour)

Discussion

People all around the world, especially in metropolitan areas where dual-family workers are on the rise, now have the opportunity to experience WFH with COVID-19. Having to take care of elderly parents and/or small children in addition to working in a difficult workplace has put

the WLB of the workforce under scrutiny. WFH appears to have been well received by companies and employees in India, according to preliminary studies. A further study reveals that the present WFH framework is riddled with holes. As a result, there is more discontent with the absence of regulations for doing the successful home working.

WFH must take into account the opinions of the people it serves in addition to the efficiency of its operations. Early on, an overwhelming majority of comments were favourable. More than 80 per cent of workers, according to a survey done in April 2020, said they desired at least partial WFH measures to be in place, with percentages ranging as to how many days of the week that should be. Seventy-two per cent of respondents strongly agreed that they had more time to rest, and sixty-eight per cent strongly agreed that work-related stress had lessened (60.7 per cent strongly agree). In addition, 45 per cent of respondents said that companies give enough assistance for implementing a WFH plan (Wong and Cheung 2020). This was the most common opinion, but not the majority, indicating that there was still space for improvement, even in the early days. In the same research, the majority of respondents agreed with all of the problems mentioned, including a lack of equipment, family disturbance, and poor communication with coworkers. In another research, almost 80 percent of workers reported feeling psychologically calm while working from home. 73 per cent of workers favour and support WFH initiatives, while 83 per cent support flextime and 77 per cent approve shortened working hours (Sun Life 2020).

Even while employees in Hong Kong first appeared to be in favour of WFH practices, it is obvious that several difficulties must be solved. Dissatisfaction with the core resources, such as restricted or no access to resources such as office papers, is highlighted in research (FastLane 2020). Considering that this is a novel work practice, both employers and employees are likely to be unprepared for this circumstance. A lack of flexibility and tolerance by companies have resulted from employees producing irregular or delayed work. The fact that just 32 per cent of businesses have invested in new kinds of communication technology, and even fewer have done so in other areas, suggests that employers have been making some attempts (FastLane 2020). The peculiar working environment in Hong Kong, according to another study, makes WFH less advantageous for workers, who lack the separation between personal and professional areas. In addition to living in multigenerational households, people in this region have less space than their western counterparts, which leads to multiple

distractions and an imbalance between work and home life, according to the poll. According to the same poll, 68 percent of workers said they missed going to work, as well as the personal connection, professional atmosphere, and face-to-face interaction for better cooperation (JLL 2020).

Conclusion

Many studies have shown that the WFH, which was formerly greatly sought, is not the best choice for most workers. WFH remains popular, although not in its present form. To regulate and make WFH possible, there need be stronger government regulations and laws in place. In terms of policy, planning and execution are needed in order to successfully adapt to online work performed from a distance. The judgement did not specify how to end meetings and resume work in person. Because workers don't know what WFH is, they don't have access to software, formal papers or appropriate workspace. Unless this technique becomes the new standard, it must be properly trained. After the epidemic, when WFH is no longer a mandate, but a flexible choice, the working balance may become apparent

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