

REMOTE WORKING: EXAMINING BENEFITS, CHALLENGES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

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Abstract:

In 2020, during COVID-19 pandemic, to maintain the smooth flow of work and reduce the chance of getting infected and transmitting the virus, businesses had no choice but to shut down the offices and adapt remote working. The development of information and communication technologies has made it possible for workers to work remotely without much difficulty. Like everything, working from home has upsides and downsides of its own. Thus, the objective of this study was to describe the benefits of remote working along with the challenges that comes with it. With the help of existing literature, the study also identified organizational practices that will improve the experience of remote working for employees. The research finds that setting clear goals, use of appropriate communication tools, establish clear remote work policies and norms, flexibility, timely performance assessment and feedback, and mental health assistance enhances the successful implementation and employee's experience in remote working.

Keywords: remote working, work from home, benefits, challenges, organizational practices

INTRODUCTION

The notion of remote work has emerged due to the progress of digital technology and the swift growth of information and communication technology (ICT) (Olson & Olson, 2000). When an employee uses digital technology to arrange to work from a location other than their regular workspace, it may be considered remote work. The concept of remote work with digital technology has gained popularity not only because of the rapid development of ICT and digital technology, but also because of the lockdown measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Mariani & Castaldo, 2020). According to reports, 77% of executives believe that the trend of remote work will continue even after the COVID-19 pandemic (Accenture Report, 2021; Report, 2021). Zoom, Google Meet, and other platforms are being used by numerous universities across the globe for online instruction, workshops, webinars, and conferences (Azar, Khan, & Van Eerde, 2018). When employees find it difficult to commute to their offices, the remote work system gives an organization the ability to continue operating. Companies in finance and technology have already popularized the work-from-home trend (Hodgson & Wigglesworth, 2020). Especially IT companies, which are well-known for offering telecommuting options and flexible schedules. This makes sense, since the majority of tech companies are web-based and technology is the most useful tool for working from home. Through the use of video chats, conference calls, VPN networks, and wireless Internet, we are able to maintain constant connectivity. Working from home can boost productivity and reduce stress for the right individual. Additionally, studies indicate that businesses that promote and facilitate a work-from-home policy end up saving money over time, which is a benefit for employers. Although some people are unfamiliar with the idea, others have used it before, there is a persistent misconception that working from home reduces productivity. But, you can find the gaps and streamline remote work if you implement the appropriate productivity metrics.

Lastly, while remote working has advantages, there are drawbacks as well. In order to prevent losses from occurring as a result of decreased productivity, organizations need to take all necessary steps to guarantee that employees' productivity stays on level with their offline performance. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify benefits and challenges of remote working. The study will also suggest practices and policies to improve the effectiveness of remote working.

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OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the concept of remote working
2. To identify the benefits and challenges of remote working
3. To outline organizational practices to improve productivity in remote working

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the research, remote working is not a novel idea as it has been used for many years (Stoker et al., 2022). However, as technology advanced, these ideas began to proliferate in workplace culture, based on the type of work (Pennington et al., 2022). Employees of companies that work remotely are thought to have a unique arrangement wherein they are not obliged to commute or travel to a specific work location, such as an office, store, or warehouse. Employees can work from any location at any time thanks to developed digital technology and advanced information and communication technology. This system assists a company in continuing to function normally in any circumstance, such as the lockdowns that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic when workers were compelled to stay at home. In the current situation, the work-from-home culture is not in its infancy; rather, it has significantly increased, and both employers and employees have responded to it with enthusiasm. Flexibility in the place of work has provided numerous benefits to the employees as well as to the companies (Hill et al., 2008). Employers gain from not having to waste money on unnecessary expansion of office space and can save a variety of resources (Morikawa, 2022). whereas workers at the company are becoming more at ease sitting in their own personal spaces and are not having as much trouble getting to work on time (Yang et al., 2023). While the organizations can continue to run their business during the crisis, employees can work from home and take care of their families. According to James (2016), this style of working gives employees flexibility, which can be very advantageous because it enables them to finish their daily tasks as well as any personal ones they may have throughout the day. Because they can work from home, where they can take care of personal matters, it increases worker efficiency. Employers also benefit from the best possible output from their workforce. Additionally, workers satisfaction will also increase (Dickens, 2005). However, it's amazing to see how Covid-19 changed people's lives to a new normal (Xie et al., 2020). The companies also discovered some of the problems related to WFH, including the fact that most workers didn't have the necessary skills to use modern technologies, data security being one of the biggest obstacles, missing meetings with coworkers which resulted in stress, and employer confidence regarding the caliber of work (Timotius, 2023). (Canico 2016) states that working from home can have a negative impact on organizational performance, which can then have an effect on the culture of the entire company. This study also outlines how this style of working may raise tension levels due to a shift in the variety of cultural climates. This means that employees frequently do not adapt well to change unless it is perceived as being advantageous to their needs (CIPD, 2016). Although Covid-19 is currently in its decline phase, new insights gained from the virus will still be applied, particularly in the realm of remote working.

METHODOLOGY

The academic literature search methodology is suggested as most appropriate practice for review. Google scholar, EBSCO and ProQuest were used to find literature for this research. Although, remote working was in existence decades ago but it gained popularity after COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, documents included in the study are from January 2020 to March 2024. The keywords used in the search are: “remote working” OR “work from home” AND “benefits” AND “challenges” AND “strategies” OR “practices”. We also conducted a backward and forward citation search of the previously identified articles in order to gather as many relevant articles as possible.

BENEFITS OF REMOTE WORKING

Being able to manage your work schedule can be very helpful in terms of taking care of your personal needs. As long as their work is finished and produces positive results, employees are free to start and end their days whenever they choose. Being able to choose from a wider variety of job opportunities that are not restricted by geography is one of the many advantages of working from home. Employers can promote diversity and inclusivity through remote work by hiring individuals with a range of perspectives and from diverse social, economic, geographic, and cultural backgrounds. There is a misconception that employees who work remotely are less productive than those who work in person. In actuality, remote workers have demonstrated a high level of productivity even during the pandemic, which has increased worker efficiency and reduced workplace distractions. Remote workers typically have happier and more devoted teams. This is partly because working from home has been demonstrated to reduce stress, increase time for interests and hobbies, and enhance interpersonal relationships, among other benefits. Remote work saves a lot of money for both employers and employees. When people don't have to commute every day, they can cut back on their parking, transportation, and work clothes costs. Reduced overhead expenses for businesses can include maintenance, utilities, and office space rentals. The money saved can be put back into projects aimed at expanding the business, training staff, or enhancing working conditions.

CHALLENGES OF REMOTE WORKING

Technology-mediated communication is frequently used by employees who are working remotely, which can cause miscommunication, delays, and a lack of nonverbal signs and signals that are crucial for understanding messages (Allen et al., 2021). Thus, Organizations must put money in the right means of communication and set up clear communication norms to beat these challenges. The buildup of solid interpersonal relationships among teammates may be hindered by the lack of in-person communication and unofficial interactions (Espinosa et al., 2021). To boost communication and confidence in employees, managers must give priority to team-building exercises. Difference in time zones also acts as a hurdle in remote working as this can convolute scheduling and obstructs communication in real time (Chong et al., 2023). Further, in remote work environments, keeping an eye on worker performance and guaranteeing accountability can be difficult. Managers may find it difficult to evaluate output and give remote workers immediate assistance and input (Choudhury et al., 2021). Anxiety and burnout is also common across remote workers due to factors like loneliness, lack of management support and absence of work-life balance. Lastly, many employees who do work from home feel discontented and unhappy with their position and responsibilities due to lack of insights into overall organization's vision.

ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES TO IMPROVE REMOTE WORKING

1. Use of effective communication tools

The most important aspect of working remotely is communication. Without it, workers who work remotely could experience mental and physical isolation from peers and lose out on important news and developments. Also, Cooperation within a team working remotely requires effective communication, and using the right software and devices for communication can greatly improve team output. To ensure effective and effortless communication, the team's particular requirements and work procedures should guide the selection of communication tools (Liao, 2017).

2. Providing timely feedback and performance assessment

In remote working, ensuring accountability and encouraging ongoing growth require timely feedback and performance reviews. To offer helpful criticism and acknowledge achievements, managers should plan periodic meetings with employees and carry performance evaluation. A constant cycle of feedback has the potential to enhance employee involvement, pin point areas of improvement and foster an atmosphere of lifelong learning and growth.

3. Establish clear remote work policies and norms

To ensure adherence and to lay out expectations and norms for employees working remotely, supervisors must draft a policy on remote work. These guidelines have to be modified for your business, the sector, and the individual roles of each worker. Establishing which policies apply to employees with different schedules compared to those who work remotely is essential if your organization offers a mix of in-office, virtual, and hybrid positions. This way, everyone knows what is expected of them from the very beginning.

4. Clear and realistic expectations

Establishing precise goals and standards is essential to the success of remote employees. In order to ensure that all employees are aware of their duties and results that is expected from them, supervisor must clarify and outline objectives and tasks of all employees. The clear understanding of the goals promotes accountability, improve collaboration and lessen confusion.

5. Providing mental health support

Social contacts have significantly decreased as a result of remote work. Living apart from family can cause loneliness for many people. This has a noticeable impact on worker productivity as well. As a result, managers have a responsibility to promptly assist teammates emotionally, follow up with them, encourage them to take time for mental health, and refer them to counseling if necessary.

6. Flexible approach

Flexibility is very important in remote working. Many workers who work from home do struggle in managing their parents and kids. With flexible working hours, they can better balance their personal and professional lives and work effectively around the schedules of their children. Flexible working will also reduce stress, ultimately leading to better productivity. Changing to a completion-based work model is one way to help your team and business go through this change more smoothly. This model places more emphasis on an individual's achievements than their number of hours worked.

CONCLUSION

The development of remote work has revolutionized how businesses run, lead their employees, and collaborate virtually. This study examined the benefits of remote working, the challenges and difficulties remote workers encounter and organizational practices for improving the experience and productivity of remote workers. Results showed that remote working offer many benefits to employees as well as organizations. Employees get flexibility, work-life balance, reduced stress which leads to improved performance. Likewise, organizations get benefit in terms of diversity in employees, reduction in expenses like office rent, electricity and maintenance. Challenges of remote working mainly include communication barrier, stress and anxiety in employees, monitoring and evaluating employee performance, and ensuring accountability. Lastly, study outlined practices such as use of effective communication tools, timely feedback, clear expectations of objectives, setting standard remote working guidelines, mental health assistance and flexible approach to improve remote working.

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