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4th International Conference on Challenges in Emerging Economies

Business Agility and Adaptability in the VUCA Environment

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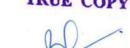
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A study on the impact of Work from Home on IT and ITEs in Mumbai City consequent to the Lockdown Imposed to curb the spread of the Corona Virus in Mumbai City

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Keywords: Work from Home, Pandemic, new normal

Abstract

In December 2019, almost all the countries saw the spread of the coronavirus from Wuhan, China which had a catastrophic effect on the health of the people coupled with fatalities. The virus spread like a wildfire within three months, affecting over 52 million people, causing 3.37 million deaths in 216 countries and territories (WHO). This globally emerged as a Pandemic (Bavel, et al). Owing to this pandemic, the Government of India, on March 25, 2020, announced a nationwide lockdown.

Globally, people have made an unexpected transformation in their work culture to work from home, which helped in restricting their movements and hence, curbing the spread of the virus. While the virus has to be blamed for everything, but it has also become the reason where everyone, ie. Companies or individuals have been forced to rethink the way they work and has in fact challenged the basic concept of work and how it can be accomplished seamlessly without the physical presence in offices. Following months of operations by various companies with WFH, have not contained them with the question that whether this arrangement can work or not, rather how this can be sustained in the future. Work From Home (WFH) has huge implications in the economy. As we are trying to move towards an economy that is sustainable - energy efficient, low carbon emissions, the phenomena of WFH with less travel and physical movement, proves to be a serendipitous gift of this crisis to humankind.

Current study focuses on throwing light on the various aspects of the new-normal, WFH adaptations by employees of the IT and ITEs sector. This study also looks to review research papers on pandemic, WFH, employee perceptions on the problems faced while WFH, employee perceptions on the benefits of WFH, disadvantages they face when it is a WFH Situation, assess employers' view on the effect of productivity, assess the perceptions of employees who have got adapted to the WFH to get back to work it and finally, suggest TRUE COPY

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feasible measures to employers to work out on a plan which will help them reduce the stress of switching back to work from workplace.

1. Introduction

How is the WFH shaping the future of work? This is the key question that is surrounding all employers. Corporate houses have been forced to embrace WFH for their employees, which became an overnight new normal for everyone. Work streams, supply chains, and communicating technologies have been reworked to fit this situation. How this phenomenon is going to pan out in future is a big question. Organizations were concerned about retaining employee productivity (Giurge and Bohns (2020)). Whether employees are going to react positively or negatively or whether it is enhancing or retarding employee productivity, is another question.

In this context, the researchers have attempted to study the employee reactions to the WFH situation, especially in the Information Technology (IT) / Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) sector, about their experiences and how companies can better manage such situations to decrease costs as well as increase employee productivity.

There have been some studies, undertaken both in the academic as well as commercial front a few months, specifying that employees are missing offices for their social setup and interactions with teams, but still, it saves a lot of time for commuting to and fro office. Also, as WFH is here to stay, few studies have also highlighted how to modify the way of working for employees to attain better productivity.

As the phenomena of WFH is fast evolving considering that it is relatively new (since Mar-2020), the accumulated experiences of the employees as well as employers over the past few months, offer constant need to update such findings and fulfill gaps before such practices stabilize. This brings out the necessity to build on past studies, to identify the evolving gaps that may not have been expressed in previous studies.

This study shall help employers (companies, corporates or business houses) to update their understanding about the way of working of employees in the WFH model. This study shall supplement employers, as a step forward, to chalk out appropriate interventions or adopting policies that shall help to improve employee morale and productivity and thereby improve business outcomes.

The purpose of this study was to examine the pros and cons of WFH for employees and chalk out a fine-tune model for employers to maximize their employee productivity using the WFH options. This study also helps to corroborate the finding of previous studies that were

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conducted earlier with an opportunity to fine -tune the findings that have come in this regard. The study represents responses from both male and female employees working in the IT / ITES sector in Mumbai.

2. Review of Literature

The concept of WFH, has gained popularity across sectors, which is otherwise a way of reorganizing the tasks to be performed by employees of an organization from their home, and do not need to come to workplace, to perform these tasks, largely aided by the technological advancements, even before the pandemic situation was in place (Nilles, 1997; Perez et al., 2003).

Manoochehri and Pinkerton (2003) referred to the flexibility regarding the location and working hours with gains related to decreased commute costs, with additional positive societal and environmental impact, increased productivity when the work schedule is adapted to periods staff can perform better, avoidance of inevitable distractions at work, and self-control of work-life balance. On the side of challenges, the authors above emphasized the necessity to consider technological, organizational, legal and interpersonal issues of the company and its teleworkers. Organizations must determine the suitability of WFH for their operations and culture (e.g., reliance on frequent and intense interactions amongst employees, sense of loss of control over the employees), the types of jobs that are appropriate for telecommuting, selection of employees who can perform while working from home (e.g., higher performance under supervision, the satisfaction of social needs at work), the cost of providing necessary technological infrastructure (e.g., communication links, compatibility of software used at home with company systems), and legal considerations such as the ones linked to health & safety and privacy issues. Manoochehri and Pinkerton (2003) concluded that organizations must develop a clear and transparent telecommuting policy by considering the various parameters above. In one of the studies, the social responses captured by Tripathi (2020) through the analysis of

In one of the studies, the social responses captured by Tripathi (2020) through the analysis of 100,000 tweets revealed that more than 73% people had a positive sentiment towards WFH while almost 27% people had a negative perception towards this experience. Also, more than 60% of the people tweeted with emotions of trust, anticipation and joy for WFH culture while a few reported fear, sadness, anger and disgust.

According to Hope (2020) one should set boundaries while working from home which could prove to be a successful aspect. Karnika (2020) suggested that one should dress in formals even while working from home and dress occasionally in informal wear, while catching up with colleagues, even if online.

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3. Research Methodology

The concept of WFH, has gained popularity across sectors, which is otherwise a way of reorganizing the tasks to be performed by employees of an organization from their home, and do not need to come to workplace, to perform these tasks, largely aided by the technological advancements, (Nilles, 1997; Perez et al., 2003).

After, a thorough review of related research papers on pandemic, work from home, employee perceptions on the problems faced while WFH, employee perceptions on the benefits of WFH, disadvantages they face when it is a WFH Situation and employers' view on the effect of productivity and to finally, assess the perceptions of employees, who have got adapted to the WFH to get back to work in office and suggest possible measures to employers to work out on a plan which will help them reduce the stress of switching back to work from workplace.

Data was collected by personally conducting a focused group in two phases. Twenty two respondents who are employed in IT, ITEs (who travelled for a minimum of 27 to 92 minutes, on a daily basis, during normal days, before the WFH, was adopted) with the help of a structured interview schedule coupled with observation method of their household scenario. The samples, by adopting purposive sampling technique were all in the middle level management. Also, substantiate the findings so sought by the data from primary sources, secondary data from authentic published sources will be used.

The proposition adopted "Be More Productive at Work with the least possible or no commuting to workplace"

Model adopted is teams working on several tasks remotely, while being together virtually...

- The study was objected from the following perspectives
- To identify the pros and cons of WFH adaptation as a new normal, as expressed by the employees
- To evaluate the employee productivity
- To identify issues faced by employees while working from home
- To find out the reactions of employees getting back to physical workplace
- To suggest measures to IT and ITES to chalk out on a feasible plan of working while,
 working from home and when they physically clock back to work at the office

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4. Limitations of the Study

Findings of the study may be suitable to employees of IT and ITE sector only and may not apply to employees of any other sectors or those who aren't working from home, as the nature of the job would be different.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

Age & gender profile 100% respondent spread in % 100% 80% 67% 59% 60% 41% 36% 40% 23% 10% 20% **FEMALE** MALE ALL Gender profile ■30-40 ■40-50 ■ ALL

Figure 1 Age and Gender Profile of Respondents

(Source: Based on the data collected from primary sources)

Majority of the respondents (51 %) were female respondents of the age group 30-40.

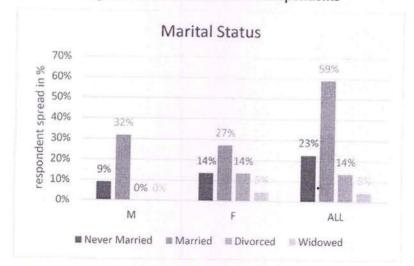


Figure 2 Marital Status of the respondents

(Source: Based on the data collected from primary sources)

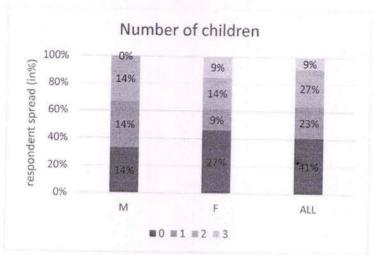
Most of the respondents (over 30 %) were married of the age group 30-40.

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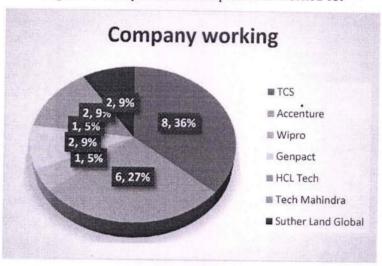
Figure 3 Number of Children



(Source: Based on the data collected from primary sources)

The above figure 3 shows the gender-wise segregation of number children the respondents had.

Figure 4 Companies the Respondents worked for



(Source: Based on the data collected from primary sources)

The above chart shows the companies the respondents work for. Majority (thirty-six per cent of them work for TCS) followed by Accenture, for which twenty seven percent of the respondents work).

The sample had equitable representation of male and female respondents in the age group of 30-40. Most of the respondents have children. The respondents work with 7 different companies giving a fair representation of the IT Industry at large, although around half of the respondents work for TCS and Accenture,

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Advantages of WFH

• All of the respondents unanimously mentioned that it is an advantage that they can be anywhere and work efficiently, provided they are in touch with their core team and are able to complete their tasks, as per the schedule, which indicates a live and work anywhere, they also said that many of their colleagues are working from their hometown. They all unanimously opined that as long as you have a good wi-fi connection, "remote working", or working from anywhere is possible.

Working from home gave them flexible working hours, which proved to be better than the nine to five or eight to four etc., a better model. The employees, at times even started work late and finished late, they worked whenever they felt energetic and productive.

Women respondents, especially with children, were very much happy as they did not go through the stressful time of dropping their children at day care or health or attending children's parent- teachers meet, which enabled them to meet their requirements at the home end, parallelly.

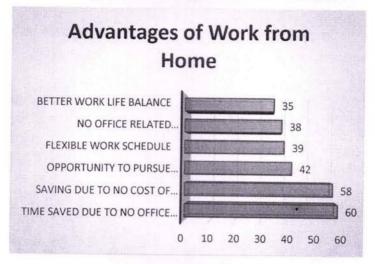
- Almost all the respondents asserted that they saved time on commuting which took them
 from 1 to 1 ½ hours on a daily basis to commute to the workplace. Studies conducted earlier
 have proved that long travel to the workplace makes it very stressful for employees, their
 families and also the employers.
- Employees with special needs are able to take care of themselves, while working from home. Like, one of them said that there an employee in the office has a cripple and hence brings his wheelchair and crutches, to the office. WFH has made it easy for him to take care of his needs, although he was used to it.
- Most of these findings are in line with the findings of another study, conducted on work from home in India, where majority of the employees working in IT/ITeS sector stated that they missed their office environment due to COVID-19 pandemic as of August 2020. However, about 60 percent of the employees felt that they saved time by not traveling to the office every day.

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Figure 5 Advantages of Work from Home



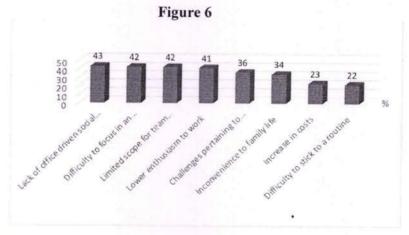
(Source: Data collected from secondary sources published by Statista Research Department

Statista Research Department, Dec 10, 2020)

Disadvantages of WFH

No Fixed timing of work – Employees' working hours got extended beyond their routine work time, leaving them with no time for break, or even at times for breakfast, lunch etc, which were at, times at odd hours, this led to their mixing up of working hours with family/ private hours. It took a long time for some employees to even unfasten at the end of a long working day. In most cases, employees had to completely reschedule their personal/ family time and their routine. Also work life balance for women became a challenge.

These findings largely confirm other studies, (Conlin, 2006) where lack of office driven social life, segregation of time between work and home, and health issues have been highlighted.



(Source: Data collected from secondary sources published by Statista Research Department

Statista Research Department, Dec 10, 2020)

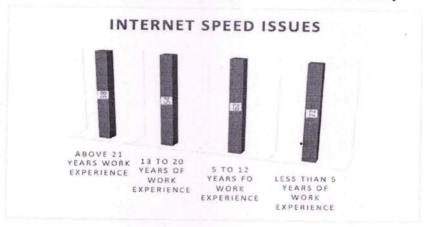
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- Health issues A majority of the respondents also said that it affected their both mental and physical health. Many of them developed spondylitis, were mentally stressed, picked up frequent headaches frequently, and developed acidity problems. This is finding is in line with other studies where physical isolation among employees, will make them feel irritated, frustrated and they develop a sense of lack belongingness and the social interactions, that they used to have before at workplace with their colleagues (Shepherd-Banigan et al., 2016)
- Screen time and Call time These affected the employees mentally and also their eye
 sights, at times became distractive causing mental fatigue to the employees. Respondents
 also said they have put on weight due to lack of mobility causing an increased cognitive
 load. A recent study conducted by the Stanford university also had its findings in this line.
- Infrastructure issues Most employees have faced physical and IT infrastructure issues like furniture, technical glitches like connectivity issues, internet speed, improper IT setup by companies (like servers issues, software issues etc.)

Figure 7 Issues faced by employees, with respect to internet connectivity



(Source: Data collected from secondary sources published by Statista Research Department

Statista Research Department, Dec 10, 2020)

Figure above shows the internet speed issues as opined by the respondents, based on their number of years of experience

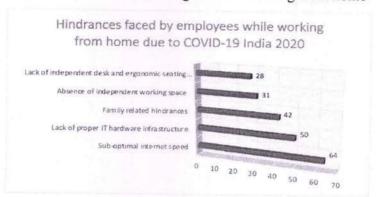
 These findings corroborate previous studies, which has found infrastructure as a chief lacuna with the employees.

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Figure 8 Issues and challenges while working from home



(Source: Data collected from secondary sources published by Statista Research Department

Statista Research Department, Dec 10, 2020)

- Performance assessment Many employees felt that their performance was not getting reflected while working from home vis-à-vis while working from the office.
- As per one of the studies, improvement of the productivity and performance could not be established decisively due to WFH.

Impact on employee productivity and performance while WFH due to COVID-19 India 2020

Significantly deteriorated ## No charge ## Significantly improved ## Significantly improved ## Significantly improved ## Significantly improved

Figure 9 Employee productivity

(Source: Data collected from secondary sources published by Statista Research Department

Statista Research Department, Dec 10, 2020)

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

Though the respondents had adapted themselves to "the new-normal of WFH", many of the respondents stated that they missed their office environment not working from their office, due to COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the convenience of working from home, a large number of respondents felt that the lack of office driven social life was a major disadvantage of working from home. Majority of the employers also did not see a decline in productivity. But, to make the WFH less stressful and more productive, certain measures, as stated below, can be recommended ...

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- 1. A fixed schedule to work, with frequent breaks—setting a fixed schedule and work sticking on to it
- 2. Companies should provide the employees with adequate IT Support, so that they are able to communicate and also carry out their assigned tasks, without hindrances.
- 3. Encourage employees to maintain to use encrypted Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) which are subscribed for by the company or hot spots, instead of public Wi-Fi, this will ensure security of data/ information.
- 4. Internal communication like, newsletters, slack updates etc must be on a continual basis to stay in touch with fellow colleagues.
- 5. Also continue the perks, recognitions etc., as done while working from the office.

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