

WORK FROM HOME SCENARIO – LEVERAGING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC-AN ANALYSIS AMONG IT SECTOR EMPLOYEES IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 Pandemic has created virtual working as a significant concern to the employees. The main purpose of this study is to establish the relationship existing between factors related to Work from Home and Employee Engagement among Information Technology (IT) sector employees of Kerala during the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire through electronic means. The findings reveal that Work from Home (WFH) has a significant positive impact on Employee Engagement (EE). Work from home options can help in leveraging employee engagement and can bring benefits to the organization. Organizations can implement WFH policies for employees, especially during the time of the pandemic, so that organizations, as well as employees, get benefitted.

Keywords – Work from Home, Employee Engagement, Information Technology, COVID-19 Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Workplaces have gone through drastic changes due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Many organizations across the world are forced to shut down their operations as an aftereffect of the pandemic. Organizations and employees are under constant pressure to regain business. Commuting and offline working became

difficult due to travel restrictions and lockdown implemented as part of preventive measures taken by the Government. Hence there are restrictions on employees to have a physical presence at the workplace and have face-to-face interactions. To deal with these circumstances, the online working or Work from home option was adopted by almost all companies. Many organizations have been successfully implementing remote working for years. But now, the pandemic situation made remote working a necessity. As a result, many employees opt for WFH. The total number of employees who work at home has shown an unprecedented increase since the COVID 19 pandemic. Working from home gives the employees several advantages like flexible work options, work-life balance, autonomy in work, etc. These can bring benefits to the employees as well as to the organization. It is argued that this gives the employees an option to be at a location away from the employer and get the benefit of doing work autonomously without having the pressure of close supervision. Many researchers have revealed that WFH has made employees be more flexible and made them free to decide on the work they do (Putnam & Mumby, 2016). The term Work from home is new to several organizations and employees. But as the spread of the virus increased they were adapted to the changes. WFH has been a boon to the IT employees as the commuting time has decreased and flexibility of work has been increased when compared to pre-COVID times. Many researchers have revealed the relation between WFH, productivity, Employee happiness, etc. A very few studies have been done to find out the relationship between remote working and the engagement of employees. For that purpose, a study was undertaken to understand the relationship between factors related to Work from Home and Employee Engagement among Information Technology (IT) sector employees of Kerala during the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term Work from Home was coined by Nilles in his work in the year 1988 (Nilles, 1988). The term generally refers to the mode of an employee working from the house or place of living. The work is mainly done through electronic means (Grant et al., 2019). Work from home has been explained as an arrangement made for employees to work online from a place other than the office and communicate with

colleagues and management through electronic means (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). Business processes depend upon the nature of organizations and the type of business activities undertaken. Organizations in the manufacturing sector, health care sector, etc. cannot opt to work from home fully. The information technology sector is an area where WFH can increase the efficiency and productivity of both the employees as well as the organization. WFH has been massively accepted by most sectors, though it has its advantages and disadvantages. The pros of WFH include less commuting time, better performance, job autonomy, work-life balance, reduced stress, improved employee happiness, etc. (Mello 2007). The studies conducted by several researchers (Verbruggen, 2020; Collins and Moschler, 2009) have revealed that remote working can improve the engagement of employees, effectively increase performance of employees, and can also reduce the turnover rate. WFH can have a significant impact on Job satisfaction Bloom et al. (2015). Remote working can have an impact on the productivity and efficiency of workers as compared to normal office working hours Kazekami (2020). Alexander Bick (2020) has proposed that there is a chance of the workforce being shifted towards WFH effectively even after the outbreak. The relationship between remote work, its factors, and individual and organizational outcomes were studied and analyzed and the results highlight that overall satisfaction and productivity were increased by opting remote working environment (Nakrosiene et al., 2019).

RESEARCH GAP

COVID 19 pandemic has resulted in an overhaul of the working environment in every sector. Implementation of WFH policies has become a necessity for the organization. Many studies have been identified on the concept of employee engagement during time of the pandemic. Very few researchers have analyzed the relationship between WFH and employee engagement. But there is a dearth of studies that identify the relationship between WFH dimensions and Employee engagement in the IT sector, especially in the state of Kerala. Hence IT sector was selected to analyze the impact of WFH on EE.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. To understand the factors related to work from home among IT sector employees selected for the study.
- ii. To find out the relationship between factors of work from home and employee engagement among the select IT sector employees.
- iii. To analyse the relation between select demographic factors and Employee engagement.

HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

In the present situation of the COVID 19 pandemic, it is argued that Employee Engagement should be given prior importance, as remote working is a relatively new experience for many employees. Employee engagement and Work-from-Home constructs have been analyzed and studied by researchers in various fields. A positive work from home interaction can benefit employees and can create better employee engagement (Rothmann et al., 2014). Work-from-Home dimensions can have a significant impact on employee engagement and can create happiness among employees (Prashant Mehta, 2020). Nakrosiene et al. (2019) suggested that remote working can positively improve job engagement and productivity of employees. Job autonomy is the freedom of an employee to take the decision on when, what, and how to do a particular job (Langfred, 2000). Flexibility and autonomy provided by remote working can improve the self-esteem of employees, higher work-life balance, and can lead to better engagement (Kossek et al., 2006). Several studies have identified a significant relationship between job autonomy and Employee engagement (Muecke et al., 2020; Gagné et al., 2011; Malinowska et al., 2018). Job autonomy is one of the factors that can affect employee engagement during the time of the COVID 19 pandemic (Benjamin 2020). Psychological safety is defined as the “freedom from psychological and social risk or harm” (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). It is the belief of an employee not to be harassed when he opens up among his team members in a work environment. Many studies have revealed the impact of Psychological safety on the outcomes of work. During the post-recession time, building Psychological safety among employees had created a positive influence on employee engagement (Tiwari et al., 2016, Dunne et al., 2014). There

is an established relationship between the convenience of working from home and employee engagement. Bloom et al., (2015) in their study highlighted that the convenience of working from home can improve the level of employee engagement. The convenience of WFH can have a positive significant impact on the dimensions of employee engagement (Lamotte, 2015).

Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated :

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between WFH and Employee Engagement

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between WFH Autonomy and Employee Engagement

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between WFH Psychological Safety and Employee Engagement

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between WFH Convenience and Employee Engagement

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between Employee Engagement and Gender

H6: There is a significant positive relationship between Employee Engagement and Age

H7: There is a significant positive relationship between Employee Engagement and Marital Status

H8: There is a significant positive relationship between Employee Engagement and Experience

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data

The survey used a descriptive research method with data collected through electronic means. Data were collected from IT employees working in the State of Kerala. 207 IT employees working in Technopark - Thiruvananthapuram, Infopark-Kochi, and Cyberpark-Kozhikode were included. Judgemental sampling was used to select the respondents. The data were collected between May 2021 and July 2021.

Measures

The data collection was done through the administration of a structured questionnaire. The independent variable work from home was measured using three dimensions WFH- Autonomy, WFH- psychological safety, and WFH- convenience. The scale of WFH-Autonomy was adapted from the Konrad scale of Autonomy, WFH- psychological safety was adapted from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire II and WFH- convenience was adapted from the scale of UTAUT2. Employee engagement was measured

using the adapted version of the Gallups-12 Employee Engagement questionnaire which contains 12 scale items.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Respondent's Profile

The descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics of the respondents are depicted in Table 1.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	106	51.2
Female	101	48.8
Age		
20-30	60	29.0
30-40	91	44.0
40-50	19	9.2
50-60	37	17.9
Marital Status		
Married	114	55.1
Unmarried	93	44.9
Experience		
Above 10	57	27.5
5-10	109	52.7
below 5	47	19.8

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Reliability analysis

Reliability analysis of the survey instrument was done by using the Cronbach alpha value. The scale variables used for the study were WFH and EE. The alpha value for Work From Home is 0.872 and that for Employee Engagement is 0.907. The reliability of the total items of the scale was 0.94 which indicates the high reliability of the instrument.

Employee engagement and demographic variables

For analyzing the significance of gender on EE, the independent sample t-test was used. The p-value was found to be 0.766 and therefore it is revealed that there is no significant difference of gender on employee engagement. To check the significance of other demographic variables including age, marital status, and experience, on EE, one way ANOVA was used. The p-values were found to be 0.806, 0.574, and 0.336 respectively, which indicates that there is no significant mean difference between these demographic variables and Employee engagement.

Correlation analysis

The correlation analysis results of the dependent and independent variables are depicted in Table 2. The results show that Work from Home and the factors of WFH are positively correlated with Employee Engagement (EE) with significance values less than 0.05. The analysis reveals that WFH- Psychological safety has more correlation to EE than the other factors with $r = 0.849$.

Correlations		
		EE
WFHAutonomy	Pearson Correlation	.642**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
WFHPsySafety	Pearson Correlation	.849**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
WFHConvenience	Pearson Correlation	.844**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
WFH	Pearson Correlation	.877**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Correlation analysis

Regression analysis

Multiple regression was conducted to predict the value of one variable based on the value OF other variables. It was done to find whether the variations on the dependent variable are caused by the effect of the independent variable. Table 3 highlights the Model summary with R square values of WFH factors and Employee Engagement. Table 4 depicts the Multiple-regression of WFH and EE with Model summary, ANOVA table, and Coefficients of multiple regression. From table 4 it is revealed that 64.2 % of the variance in EE is predicted by WFH Autonomy ($R^2 = 0.642$; $F=143.936$; $p < .05$), 84.9 % of the variance in EE is predicted by WFH Psychological Safety ($R^2 = 0.849$; $F=529.19$; $p < .05$), 84.4 % of the variance in EE is predicted by WFH Convenience ($R^2 = 0.844$; $F=507.393$; $p < .05$)

Model Summary			
	R	R Square	Sig. F Change
1	.642 ^a	0.412	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), WFHAutonomy b. Dependent variable :EE			
1	.849 ^a	0.721	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), WFHPsySafety b. Dependent variable :EE			

1	.844 ^a	0.712	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), WFHConvenience b. Dependent variable :EE			

Table 3: Regression analysis of factors of WFH and EE

The regression analysis of WFH and EE reveals that 87.7% of the changes in Employee engagement are predicted by Work From Home with R²= 0.877 and R²=0.770. The ANOVA table shows that the relation between WFH and EE is significant with p value <0.05. The beta value for the model is analyzed as 1.211 with 0.000 level of significance.

Model Summary			
Model	R	R Square	Sig. F Change
1	.877 ^a	0.770	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), WFH			
ANOVA ^a			
Model		Df	Sig.
1	Regression	1	.000 ^b
	Residual	205	
	Total	206	
a. Dependent Variable: EE b. Predictors: (Constant), WFH			
Coefficients ^a			
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.390	0.466
	WFH	1.211	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: EE			

Table 4: Regression analysis of WFH and EE

CONCLUSION

The COVID 19 pandemic and lockdown have created tremendous changes in the work environment in almost all sectors. The study highlighted the relationship between WFH and Employee Engagement among IT sector employees. The findings of the study revealed that WFH has a positive impact on the level of engagement of employees. Job autonomy, Job convenience, and psychological safety are the factors that can have a positive impact on Employee engagement. The study concludes that even if the situation becomes a new normal, employees can remain in a high level of engagement through positive WFH practices. The results of the study are in line with the findings of other researchers (Prashant Mehta, 2020, Rothmann et al., 2014, Langfred, 2000, Malinowska et al., 2018, and Benjamin, 2020). The

findings of the study can help organizations to redesign their WFH norms so that employees get motivated and engaged. This will be ultimately beneficial to both employees and organisations.

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