

## Challenges of working from home

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### ABSTRACT

*Before the pandemic, working from home was an elusive perk of only a handful of jobs. But in 2020, when social distancing is a necessary part of the fight against Covid-19, remote work has become common practice for all but the smallest jobs. Teachers, NHS staff and other key staff continued to work in their usual environments, but for the rest of us the only office this year became the home office. Feelings are mixed around housework; some people relish the flexibility it offers and are pleased to see the former 60-minute commute reduced to 60 seconds. But for others, working from home means never switching off. The separation between work and home life has been eroded and the work-life balance is becoming more uneven as we log in earlier and log out later. According to Buffer's State of Remote Work 2020 report, 97% of people surveyed would like to work remotely at least part of the time for the rest of their careers; and the same percentage said they would recommend telecommuting to others. But 18% of home workers said they had trouble switching off and 20% said they felt lonely when working from home. For employers, working from home presents its own challenges. At the end of 2020, we commissioned a survey of over 200 IT decision-makers to find out how remote work is impacting the way they manage their IT. Only 14% of people we asked said they were "completely ready" to transition from work from home, and more than half (56%) of our respondents said they felt more vulnerable to security breaches due to the use of personal devices during remote work. This paper takes stock of some of the key challenges for working from home.*

**KEYWORDS:** Working from home, Challenges, Pandemic, Employers

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing tendency to work remotely has led to rapid improvisation on the part of both employers and employees. Although it offers some advantages, the problems of working from home must be addressed by both parties for greater efficiency. Employers must develop inclusive strategies to counter everything from potentially low employee engagement to

increased cybersecurity risks. Part of the basis for this is understanding the challenges employees face. The challenges of remote work are even greater for employers than the problems of their employees. In addition to considering the challenges and solutions their employees face, you must simultaneously address strategic organizational challenges. It is generally believed that employees will face the most remote work challenges and employers need to address this. But the reality is that both sides face unique challenges and employers face an onslaught of responsibilities. In order to work to address potential issues, employers need to understand the challenges faced by remote workers. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Careful consideration should be given to individual solutions that will fit your company and culture. The biggest advantage of any telecommuting scenario will be agility and a willingness to adapt the necessary tools and quickly develop actionable guidelines based on what you observe is working or not.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The widely accepted two-factor theory by Herzberg et al. (1959) is one of the central approaches in designing jobs and working conditions to achieve increased employee satisfaction. She established two groups of incentives that measure employee satisfaction in different ways: (a) motivators or intrinsic factors are aspects related precisely to the work itself (e.g. b) hygiene or extrinsic factors are linked to the external influences of work (e.g. working conditions and administration, benefits, job security) and do not necessarily create employee satisfaction - if they are fulfilled, but if they are absent, they reduce it. However, Herzberg's two-factor model, like the above theories, also neglects employee productivity as a possible consequence of internal and external factors of employees' jobs, apart from its essential importance for the development of beneficial telecommuting. In fact, increased productivity is probably the most widespread asset gained from implementing remote work (Bloom et al., 2015; Choudhury et al., 2020; Eriksson and Petrosian, 2020; Gajendran and Harrison, 2007; McCloskey and Igbaria, 2003; Pinsonneault and Boisvert, 2001; Smith et al., 2018). In fact, lost productivity due to quarantine and how to prevent it is one of the major issues since the COVID-19 pandemic (Larson et al., 2020). In line with the above, employee satisfaction and productivity have been considered both the most important consequences of telecommuting and the most critical to its success (Allen et al., 2015; Baker et al., 2007; DuBrin, 1991; Hartman et al., 1991). All of the above contributed to an integrative research proposal to incorporate employee productivity observations as part of Herzberg's two-factor model to gain a broader understanding of the motivations, attitudes, and behavioural responses of remote workers since the beginning of the year of the COVID-19 crisis. In a more general observation of telecommuting, research has distinguished between motivations and constraints as determinants of employees' willingness to telecommute, emphasizing individual autonomy, ICT skills, family issues, perceived interaction and distraction in the home office as foundations for its progress (Wicks, 2002). Depending on the work area, sector or discipline, researchers have discovered a number of job features that stimulate or discourage satisfaction and productivity and provide challenges such as employee skills and knowledge, technology quality, usability or equipment to use (Chen et al., 2014; Sheng et al., 2019). Other proposals indicate the positive and negative effects of telecommuting factors on employee behaviour (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020).

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

To draw meaningful inferences and conclusions, a minimum sample size of 100 is recommended (Alreck and Settle, 2003). Accordingly, 120 HRM Managers from Pune were

surveyed through a questionnaire containing the 10 statements stating challenges for work from home as given below:

1. Time management
2. No work-life balance
3. Isolation
4. Trouble communicating
5. Increased distractions
6. Technological/logistical issues
7. Increased or decreased supervision
8. Lack of motivation
9. Lack of networking
10. Overworking

Likert scales were used for response options. The response options were - 0 - Can't Say, 1 - Somewhat agree, 2 - Completely agree, 3 - Somewhat Disagree, 4 - Completely Disagree. Responses were received from 120 HR Managers. The questionnaire was tested for reliability, and it returned a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.84 and hence was considered reliable. The following hypotheses were formulated:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There are no challenges for work from home practice

**H<sub>a</sub>:** There are challenges for work from home practice

The hypothesis was tested based on the average agreement/disagreement responses to the ten statements of the questionnaire. The average agreement/disagreement response of the 120 respondents for all the ten statements was taken as the sample mean, and it was compared with a hypothesized population mean of 50% agreement/disagreement connoting an event by chance and not due to any statistical significance. A t-test was applied at 95% confidence level and based on the p-value the null hypothesis was tested for rejection or non-rejection.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

41 respondents were from the Northern region of Pune, 29 were from the Eastern region, 25 were from the Western region, and 25 were from the Southern region. 28 respondents were from the age-group of <30 years, 52 were from the age-group 30-40 years, and 40 were from the age-group of >40 years.

Table 1 gives the ten challenges statements and their agreement ratings by 120 respondents:

**Table 1: Agreement percentages for 10 statements**

| Statement                             | Agreement |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Time management                    | 82%       |
| 2. No work-life balance               | 81%       |
| 3. Isolation                          | 83%       |
| 4. Trouble communicating              | 91%       |
| 5. Increased distractions             | 84%       |
| 6. Technological/logistical issues    | 83%       |
| 7. Increased or decreased supervision | 93%       |
| 8. Lack of motivation                 | 79%       |
| 9. Lack of networking                 | 82%       |
| 10. Overworking                       | 80%       |

The average agreement for the ten statements was 84% and this was compared with the hypothesized population mean of 50%. Results were as under:

**Table 2: Summary statistics**

| Parameter                                             | Value       |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Sample Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )                             | 84%         |
| Hypothesized population mean ( $\mu$ )                | 50%         |
| SD of sample                                          | 0.93641     |
| n (sample size)                                       | 120         |
| t-value= $\text{abs}((\bar{x} - \mu) / (s/\sqrt{n}))$ | 3.97744     |
| p-value = $\text{tdist}(t, (n-1), 1)$                 | 0.00006     |
| Decision                                              | Reject Null |

Thus, the null hypothesis there are no major challenges for work-from-home practice was rejected in favour of its alternate there are challenges for work-from-home practice.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Working from home has always been prevalent and relevant to some extent as it has provided an opportunity for highly talented professionals from different geographical areas to come together and make the best out of the situation. In addition, the outward inclination towards high workplace flexibility that telecommuting brings is greatly rejuvenating the workforce. Now they can work on their own schedules, in their pajamas, possibly with their pets on their laps, and can take naps between likely work hours as long as the daily goal is met at the end of the day. Telecommuting is also beneficial for employers who have a wider pool to hire from as there is almost no geographical restriction. They can also bring more funds to the business and employee well-being, as they significantly reduce costs without infrastructure or other physical equipment. All in all, telecommuting has fundamentally changed the way people think about and handle work, with new innovations elevating the platform to a truly employee-friendly one. Such a transformation, which seeks to erase what has been generally accepted all along, will certainly encounter obstacles to overcome and problems to be solved.

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