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Steps to increase productivity in hybrid mode of working

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have debunked the idea that telecommuting leads to lower productivity. A Boston Consulting Group study of more than 12,000 employees reveals that, in general, employees feel their productivity has stayed the same or even increased since they were able to work from home. However, while it may be just as easy for employees to do their day-to-day work, working remotely brings additional challenges. Teams report greater difficulty maintaining work-life balance; they find fewer opportunities to collaborate and generally feel less connected to their colleagues. It may be easier to implement your own projects, but it is challenging to engage in collaboration with colleagues, communicate with clients and discuss in joint meetings. All of these things lead to a decreased sense of productivity and engagement. Many companies are starting to push for a balance of a hybrid work model – a system that allows both face-to-face and remote work. The hybrid work model is increasingly seen as the new future of work. It supports flexibility and collaboration by combining in-person and remote settings to work based on business and individual needs. While employees may appreciate being able to work from home, hybrid offices mean that some people may miss out on impromptu office discussions, while others may find the daily commute more challenging. If you're a manager of a distributed team, it can be difficult to stay on top of communications and projects. So how can we maximize productivity while supporting a hybrid office? This paper reveals ten such tips.

KEYWORDS: Hybrid working; Productivity; HRM; Increase.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many major surveys have shown that the majority of employees want a permanent hybrid work environment – or at least a more flexible workplace. That's a shift that's been coming for a while—the pandemic just accelerated it. For employees, hybrid workplaces combine in-person work and work from home. For organizations, this shift brings many questions about how to manage the new hybrid workplace. For many leaders, managing a

distributed team of people involved in different work modes – such as office, hybrid, remote and outside sales – is unfamiliar. If you're a leader in a hybrid organization, you probably see the benefits as well as the challenges. On the one hand, you can give your employees the flexibility they want, potentially increasing overall productivity and increasing retention in a tight job market. On the other hand, you are tasked with fostering sustainable communication, employee engagement, collaboration, and culture growth in an uncharted context. This paper tests the validity of ten steps to increase productivity in a hybrid work environment through a survey of 120 HRM managers from Pune.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The shift to telecommuting brought about by COVID-19 was hardly surprising. According to a June 2020 survey by Stanford University, 42% of US workers were working from home, including 33% unemployed due to the pandemic and 26% of frontline and essential workers who continued to work at a place of business (Wong, 2020). Similar numbers were recorded in Europe. In July 2020, Euroactiv found that 48% of EU workers work remotely, with 34% working exclusively from home (Fernandes, 2021). Evidence of workers' willingness to return to full-time work has fluctuated across the different waves of the pandemic, but there appears to be a hard core of workers who do not want to return to the status quo ante. One US survey in April 2021 indicated that only 10% of employees want to return to full-time office work, while 80% of CEOs do (Keegan, 2021). An early 2021 McKinsey global survey estimated that 20-25% of workers in advanced economies could work remotely in a post-pandemic environment (McKinsey Global Institute, 2021).

Not surprisingly, business leaders differ widely in their attitudes toward this potential permanent increase in remote work. Amazon has said it expects to permanently end remote work by fall 2021, and Goldman Sachs CEO David Solomon said at an industry conference in February 2021 that he expects the "anomaly" of remote work "is one that we will fix as soon as possible." (Keegan, 2021). In other industries, especially technology, there appears to be a contrary view, with Microsoft, Twitter and Facebook planning to give all employees the opportunity to work remotely permanently. Regardless of where companies stand on the issue of returning to in-person work, it is widely agreed that remote work has a significant impact on company culture, both negative and positive. Some companies have taken the opportunity to strengthen employee engagement through programs specifically focused on the impact of the pandemic on families and communities. For example, IBM created the "Work from Home Pledge" which specified how employees should support each other while working from home. Building on this promise, IBM employees have formed small groups to help each other manage childcare and elder care by arranging grocery deliveries for homebound parents and even reading bedtime stories to their colleagues' children.

The US operations of Chinese tech giant Alibaba have moved some of its cultural activities online. Its traditional day-long annual celebration, Aliday, became a distant event in quilt making to celebrate community values and collective activity (Hinds and Elliot, 2021). While companies such as Amazon and Goldman Sachs are clearly concerned about the impact of telecommuting on corporate culture, some commentators believe that forced telecommuting has brought distinct benefits. In an interview with the Cornell Chronicle, Bradford Bell, director of the university's Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies, suggests that many companies have experienced an increase in trust, a flattening of hierarchies, and more agile decision-making (Catt, 2021). Others noted, while there are exceptions, that telecommuting has increased rather than decreased employee productivity and will continue to do so after the pandemic. One study that surveyed more than

30,000 American workers showed a five percent increase in future productivity, largely due to reduced commuting times (Curran, 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

To draw meaningful inferences and conclusions, a minimum sample size of 100 is recommended (Alreck and Settle, 2003). In line with this guidance a sample size of 100 was fixed. Convenience sampling method was followed. Around 200 questionnaires were sent to second year MBA students from different B-Schools from Pune. 100 responses were received over a month, indicating a response rate of around 50%. Neither the name of the respondent nor of the Institution was recorded for ensuring confidentiality. In fact, it was only when the respondents were assured of their confidentiality, they agreed to cooperate. A questionnaire was designed in Google Forms. It was divided into following parts:

- Demographic Profile
- Perception about employability skills

The questionnaire had following features:

- Responses were sought by way of a selection from a range of options.
- In seeking agreement or disagreement on a particular issue, the sequence of responses was designed as under –
  - 0 – No option
  - 1 – Somewhat agree
  - 2 – Completely agree
  - 3 – Somewhat disagree
  - 4 – Completely disagree

"No option" choice was deliberately kept as the 1st response to provide an early exit option to those who either didn't knew the answer or didn't want to answer. The questionnaire was tested for reliability, and it returned a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.871 and hence was considered reliable. The questionnaire is given at the end of the article.

The hypothesis set was:

- **Ho**: There is a positive perception amongst the MBA students about their employability skills.
- **Ha**:There is a negative perception amongst the MBA students about their employability skills.

The hypothesis was tested based on the average agreement/disagreement responses to the ten statements in the questionnaire related to possessing employability skills. The average agreement/disagreement response of the 100 respondents for all the related 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

43 respondents were from the Northern region of Pune, 47 were from the Eastern region, 15 were from the Western region, and 15 were from the Southern region. 39 respondents were from the age-group of <30 years, 41 were from the age-group 30-40 years, and 40 were from the age-group of >40 years. Table 1 gives the ten productivity increasing statements and their agreement ratings by the 120 respondents:

Table 1: Agreement percentages for 10 statements

Statement	Agreement
1. Focus on the core: employee engagement	86%
2. Do away with "top-down" communication	82%
3. Acknowledge the human experience	91%
4. Create community	84%
5. Be mindful about time	83%
6. See and use the whole playing field	86%
7. Define outcomes and let your team deliver	79%
8. Value people over desks	80%
9. Up your meeting game	81%
10. Be less supervisor, more coach in the hybrid work environment	82%

Based on the above summary average sample mean the hypothesis was tested as under.

Table 2: Summary statistics

Parameter	Value
Sample Mean ($\bar{x}$)	83%
Hypothesized population mean (μ)	50%
SD of sample	0.9265
n (sample size)	120
t-value=abs(($\bar{x}$ - μ) / (s/$\sqrt{n}$))	3.90175
p-value =tdist(t,(n-1),1)	0.00008
Decision	Reject Null

Thus, the null hypothesis productivity cannot be increased in hybrid working conditions was rejected in favour of productivity can be increased in hybrid working conditions.

5. CONCLUSION

MBA students are quite pessimistic about their employability skills after doing the two-year MBA program. Despite facing declining demand and questionable quality of course content and faculty, the MBA remains one of the most preferred postgraduate courses in India, according to a survey by university search engine India College Search. It is still believed to be the common man's ticket to a high-profile job and a better quality of life. A degree allows individuals to acquire a vast amount of knowledge and acquire key skills in a relatively short period of time. Clearly, the mighty MBA still holds much promise and has the ability to live up to its lofty standards. All of these programs require a well-thought-out and deliberate strategy to overcome the challenges that plague them today. Special skill development initiatives are required from the University and the B-schools to improve the situation.

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