

# A Study on Employee Experience and Perceived Challenges Arising out of Work from Home during Covid 19 Situation

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\*Pankaj Misra  
\*\*Pranjali Mishra

## ABSTRACT

The recent outbreak of one of the most fatal and deadliest diseases in the history of humankind has on one hand caused severe disruptions in the world economy and on the other hand has paved the way for the emergence of new practices of living through our professional and personal lives. The subsequent fallout of the Covid 19 situation in terms of lockdown has broadened the concept of Work from Home among the employees across the organized sector in India. Prior to Covid 19 situation, this concept was quite limited to employees of a few companies in the IT sector only. However, today employees across different organizations are experiencing and living through the concept of Work from Home for the first time. Seemingly attractive, this concept carries the practical challenges being faced by the companies as well as its employees. Issues like disruptive power supply, risk of data theft, and lack of work environment have practical implications which arise out of the Work from the Home concept. Nevertheless, this concept has become a part of life for a majority of employees under the Covid 19 situation. However, there exists a need to examine the employee experience with Work from Home and their perceived challenges towards it, which will help the companies to reconfigure their approach towards work from home policy in a more sophisticated manner for addressing the evolving needs of employees while working from home, which is set to become a "New Normal" of work-life even beyond the crisis lasts.

**Key Words:** Employee experience, Covid 19, Work from home, Work-life challenges

### 1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic had entered our lives several months ago and it has forced everyone to look at and think of this world in an entirely different manner. The business and industry fraternity is no exception to it. In order to chalk the way out of the severe constraints imposed by the ever-challenging circumstances amid the pandemic situation, the majority of business organizations have started to make novel changes in the manner they used to function earlier. For its employees, the concept of work from home is evolved by companies, which would help in maintaining its flow of business operations along with safeguarding the valuable human resource from exposure to health hazards. Though the concept of working from home is as such, not new in the corporate and business world, its sudden and widened application across the length and breadth of the organized sector has created a need to evaluate and examine its impact on different dimensions of work and personal life of stakeholders, specifically, the employees. Conventionally working from home has been thought of as putting a positive influence on employees' work-life balance and care taking of

members of their families (Ammons and Markham, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007). However, factors like intermittent disturbances, extended working hours, and working days put an adverse impact on employees' work-life balance (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; Johnson et al., 2007). It shows the vitality of emerging challenges in doing office work from the home environment by the employees. The same may have a negative influence on their job satisfaction levels and productivity.

In India, the persistent lockdown which was imposed throughout the country in March 2020, has made realize business organizations the importance of digitized space which helped them transfer all their work on the virtual mode. Since then the widespread application of work from home has consistently evolved across the whole organized sector. Employees have been asked to do their work from home till the pandemic situation subsides or the government instructions are issued for opening up physical office spaces, whichever is earlier. A recent survey reported that the majority of workers in India are preferring working from home. The survey report "88% of workers in India prefer work from home" published in the Times of

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\* Assistant Professor, School of Management, IMS Unison University, Dehradun

\*\* Student-MBA (IInd Year), School of Management, IMS Unison University, Dehradun

India (Das, 2020) also talked about the possible loss of productivity due to environmental distractions as a huge challenge among workers. Thus while the employees are having mixed reactions towards work from home concept, the organizations have started to comprehend the advantages of this concept from point of view of optimum utilization and judicious use of material and human resources.

Since the situation of the pandemic has evolved leading to nationwide lockdown, some observational studies, as well as research work, have taken place on work from home in India focusing on its benefits and drawbacks from organizational viewpoints. However, those studies have been limited in their scope of analysis of the concept in terms of covering only employers' points of view. The current research work focuses on studying the employees' overall experience with the work from the home concept from across service sector organizations and also on their perceived challenges towards practicing this concept in their daily lives. As is being suggested by various industry experts the work from home concept is going to be adopted by companies in long term perspective, the outcome of the current study will help the companies in understanding employee perspective towards the concept and incorporating the same in their policy decisions for employee-working related issues in future.

## 2. Literature Review

Earlier studies on the work from home concept have focused on various aspects of its advantages and benefits as well as constraints and limitations for employees and business organizations (Perez et al., 2003). Some of the benefits include liberty of planning (Gurstein, 2001; Morgan, 2004); enhanced autonomy over work execution (Harpaz, 2002); lesser unofficial communication (Khalifa and Davison, 2000); more spare time for family (Ammons and Markham, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007); reduced tension and stress (Fonner and Roloff, 2010); better productivity (Bailey and Kurland, 2002); better job satisfaction (Gurstein, 2001; Pratt, 1999); lesser traveling time (Tremblay and Thomsin, 2012); and lesser commuting and related costs (Morgan, 2004). Work from home could tend to be more productive as the employee may utilize his work time without getting disturbed and distracted by their colleagues (Golden and Veiga, 2008; Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2008; Tremblay and Genin, 2007). Also, the work-life balance could be positively affected by work from home as it gives the opportunity to take care of the family members simultaneously (Ammons and Markham, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007).

However, the contrast situation has also been reported in past literature. The longer work duration every day and even on weekends adversely impacts the work-life balance of employees (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; Johnson et al., 2007). The amalgamation of professional and personal life has created a never-before challenging situation for the employees. They worry about the longevity of career prospects with their organization due to reduced visibility among superiors (Khalifa and Davison, 2000; Maruyama and Tietze, 2012) as well as their consequent social isolation (Golden and Veiga, 2008; Madsen, 2003).

The influence of the work from home concept on employee productivity could not be found conclusively in absolute terms in many research studies, however, the positive influences have more often been seen than the negative ones (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). The work from home influence on life satisfaction has also been investigated. The study by Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) stated that based on the kind of interrelations and interactions between professional and personal life, the concept of work from home has been by and large supportive to the general life satisfaction. A recent study by Richardson & Writer, (2017) evaluated positive and negative influences of work from home and stated that though it has given convenience to the employees, in some cases has resulted in the delay or late accomplishment of work.

## 3. Research Methodology

The study is undertaken among the employees working first time from home during the current pandemic situation. A total of 200 respondents were approached, out of which 144 respondents turned up with complete information, thus giving a 72% response rate.

The responses were collected with the help of a structured questionnaire, inclusive of 3 scales on perceived benefits, perceived disadvantages, and perceived challenges respectively. The scales to examine perceived benefits and perceived disadvantages consisted of 10 items each and were rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scale to evaluate perceived challenges consisted of 14 items and rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The responses were collected through an online survey and were analyzed using SPSS version 22.0. While conducting the analyses the level of statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.01$ . The Spearman's rank-order correlation and Kruskal-Wallis test were the statistical tests used for data analysis.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics**

Variable		N	%
Gender	Male	95	66
	Female	49	34
Age Group	21-30 years	29	20
	31-40 years	44	31
	41-50 years	51	35
	51-60 years	20	14
Education	Bachelor's Degree	78	54
	Master's degree	45	31
	Doctoral Degree	21	15
Occupation Field	IT/ITeS	37	26
	Education	35	24
	BFSI	32	22
	Telecom	30	21
	Others	10	7

#### 4. Results and Analysis

The examination of correlation was conducted between the socio-demographic variables and the perceived benefits, disadvantages, and perceived challenges of work from home. As shown in Table-1 (annexure), the male and female employees have varied responses towards their perceptions.

The men strongly admitted the benefit of being able to freely structure and schedule their work ( $r = -1.77$ ,  $p = 0.033$ ), having opportunity to restrict useless interactions ( $r = -0.291$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), avoid formal dress code and appearance ( $r = -0.561$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and reduced expenses during work from home ( $r = -0.393$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The women employees realized the disadvantage of coworkers' responsibility being decreased for joint results ( $r = 0.242$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), stress of extended online meetings ( $r = 0.526$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and facing over expectations by superiors ( $r = 0.242$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). However men felt the disadvantage of stress due to extended decision making time ( $r = -0.383$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and complexity in access to work related information ( $r = -0.383$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The female employees perceived challenges of doing work from home in terms of missing face to face interaction with colleagues ( $r = 0.458$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), blurred demarcation between work and

personal life ( $r = 0.494$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and challenges related to self motivation ( $r = 0.321$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). However the male employees strongly realized the challenges of absence of team spirit ( $r = -0.335$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), distractions by family members while working ( $r = -0.462$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and lack of understanding by family members ( $r = -0.528$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

The correlation analysis between employees' age group and their perceptions towards work from home experience and effects produced the following results. The younger aged employees perceived the work from home benefits more strongly than elder ones in terms of opportunity to restrict useless interactions ( $r = -0.172$ ,  $p = 0.040$ ), avoiding formal dress code and appearance ( $r = -0.372$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), reduced expenses during work from home ( $r = -0.443$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and time saving ( $r = -0.195$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ). Whereas the elderly age group employees felt the benefit of working individually stronger ( $r = 0.241$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). The darker side of working from home was felt as its disadvantages across the age groups. The younger employees felt more stress of extended decision making time ( $r = -0.283$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), complexity in access to work-related information ( $r = -0.283$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and no certainty of work time ( $r = -0.197$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ). Though the stress of extended online meetings was more felt by elderly aged employees ( $r = 0.390$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The work-from-home challenges were also perceived, largely by the elderly age groups. They felt the challenges of missing face to face interaction with colleagues ( $r = 0.257$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), blurred demarcation between work and personal life ( $r = 0.377$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), difficulties of self-organization and work routine ( $r = 0.206$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), overburden of intensity of communication with regular work tasks ( $r = 0.246$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) and self-motivation related challenges ( $r = 0.219$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ). Whereas the younger employees perceived the challenges of an absence of team spirit ( $r = -0.204$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ) and distractions by family members ( $r = -0.367$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) while working from home.

In order to further analyze the age group-wise responses, the Kruskal Wallis test was applied. It was found that the benefits of work from home like an option to decide upon workplace was highly perceived by employees of 31-40 years and 41-50 years age group ( $p = 0.000$ ); option to decide upon work timings by employees of 21-30 years and 41-50 years age group ( $p = 0.000$ ); option to freely structure and schedule work by employees of 31-40 years and 51-60 years age group ( $p = 0.007$ ); option to work individually by employees of 41-50 years and 51-60 years age group ( $p = 0.009$ ); avoiding formal code and dress



appearance by employees of 21-30 years and 31-40 years age group ( $p=0.000$ ); reduced expenses by employees of 21-30 years and 31-40 years age group ( $p=0.000$ ). The disadvantages of the stress of extended online meetings were felt more strongly by employees of 41-50 years and 51-60 years age group ( $p=0.000$ ), the stress of extended decision making time by employees of 21-30 years and 31-40 years age group ( $p=0.007$ ), adverse effect of asynchronous communication by employees of 21-30 years and 41-50 years age group ( $p=0.003$ ), complexity in accessing work-related information by employees of 21-30 years and 31-40 years age group ( $p=0.007$ ) and no certainty of work time by employees of 21-30 years and 31-40 years age group ( $p=0.015$ ). The perceived challenges of working from home were strongly felt in terms of missing face to face interaction with colleagues by employees of 41-50 years and 51-60 years age group ( $p=0.000$ ); missing face to face interaction with superiors by employees of 31-40 years and 51-60 years age group ( $p=0.028$ ); absence of team spirit by employees of 21-30 years and 31-40 years age group ( $p=0.042$ ); blurred demarcation between work and personal life by employees of 41-50 years and 51-60 years age group ( $p=0.000$ ); distractions by family members by employees of 21-30 years and 31-40 years age group ( $p=0.000$ ); difficulties of self-organization and work routine by employees of 31-40 years and 41-50 years age group ( $p=0.005$ ); feeling missing information while working from home by employees of 31-40 years and 41-50 years age group ( $p=0.015$ ); overburdening due to intensity of communication by employees of 41-50 years and 51-60 years age group ( $p=0.002$ ); challenges related to self-motivation by employees of 31-40 years and 51-60 years age group ( $p=0.004$ ) and lack of understanding by family members by employees of 21-30 years and 31-40 years age group ( $p=0.020$ ).

The correlation between education level of employees and their work from home experiences was also examined. It was found that work from home benefits were more strongly perceived by employees having lower education degree in terms of option to decide upon workplace ( $r= -.190$ ,  $p= 0.023$ ), option to freely structure and schedule work ( $r= -.196$ ,  $p=0.019$ ), opportunity to restrict useless interactions ( $r= -.184$ ,  $p= 0.028$ ), avoid formal dress code and appearance ( $r= -.476$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ), reduced expenses ( $r= -.509$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ) and time saving ( $r= -.184$ ,  $p= 0.028$ ). These employees also perceived the disadvantages of stress due to extended decision making time ( $r= -.299$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ), and complexity in accessing work related information ( $r= -.299$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ). The challenges of work from home were perceived more

strongly in terms of absence of team spirit ( $r= -.195$ ,  $p= 0.019$ ), distractions ( $r= -.398$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ) and lack of understanding by family members ( $r= -.231$ ,  $p= 0.005$ ) by employees with lower degree. At the same time the higher degree holder employees were more concerned for missing face to face interaction with colleagues ( $r= 0.363$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ), blurred demarcation between work and personal life ( $r= .399$ ,  $p= 0.000$ ), intensity of over communication ( $r= 0.167$ ,  $p= 0.046$ ) and self-motivation ( $r= 0.243$ ,  $p= 0.003$ ) as challenges of doing work from home.

Further investigation with the help of Kruskal Wallis test revealed that the strongly felt benefits were: option to freely structure and schedule work ( $p=0.001$ ) by bachelor degree holder employees, option to work individually by master and doctorate employees ( $p= 0.007$ ), opportunity to restrict useless interactions by bachelor degree holder employees ( $p= 0.045$ ), avoid formal dress code and appearance by bachelor degree holder employees ( $p= 0.000$ ), reduced expenses by bachelor degree holder employees ( $p= 0.000$ ). Further, the following disadvantages of working from were strongly perceived: the stress of extended online meetings by master and doctorate employees ( $p=0.000$ ); the stress of extended decision making time by bachelor degree holder employees ( $p=0.002$ ), complexity in accessing work-related information by bachelor degree holder employees ( $p= 0.002$ ). The perceived challenges of doing work from home were the following: missing face to face interaction with colleagues by master and doctorate employees ( $p=0.000$ ), absence of team spirit by bachelor and master degree holders ( $p=0.011$ ), the blurred demarcation between work and personal life by master and doctorate employees ( $p= 0.000$ ), distractions by family members ( $p= 0.000$ ), the intensity of over communication by master and doctorate employees ( $p= 0.021$ ), self-motivation by master and doctorate employees ( $p=0.011$ ) and lack of understanding by family members by bachelor degree holders ( $p= 0.003$ ).

## 5. Conclusion

The study focused upon analyzing employees' experiences and perceptions towards the work from home concept, currently practiced by the organizations due to the severity of the pandemic situation. The responses of employees were taken on scale items, divided into three categories: Perceived Benefits, Perceived Disadvantages, and Perceived Challenges of work from home practice. The results showed that large, the benefits of work from home were strongly perceived by young-aged people holding comparative lower education degrees. This reflects the fact that people who have comparatively lesser exposure

to the traditional office-going work culture find more benefits and advantages in work from home practice. Though the disadvantages of work from home were equally perceived by both men and women employees however on different aspects of work, the female employees found work from home more challenging. With respect to the challenges arising out of working from home, the elderly and comparatively more educated people perceived the challenges more strongly from a work and communication viewpoint. At the same time, the younger employees with a lower educational degree, though strongly perceived the benefits, they found it challenging due to the distraction and disturbance from family members. The outcomes of the study point towards significant differences in perceptions towards work from home benefits, disadvantages, and challenges across different demographic sections of society. By the passage of time, the work from the home concept will evolve further and by taking a cue from the outcome of this study as well as future research works on work from home, organizations can customize their work policies and procedures so as to gain its wider acceptance among the workforce.

#### 6. Limitations and Future Scope

The current study has taken limited and most significant demographic variables for analysis of employee experience and perceptions towards the work from home concept. The same could be widened in future studies. Being the large contributor of employees working from home, this study has chosen the target respondents from service sector organizations only. Future studies may incorporate other sectors of the economy to diversify the results.

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