

Work-life in the post covid era: A boon or a bane?

Exploring the teleworking surge and subsequent organizational trends

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1. Abstract

Do you ever look back on life before the Covid 19 pandemic? It seems like just yesterday we were living in a normal world, but now things are very different from what they used to be. It is as though we have left behind those "good old normal days" and embraced a "new normal." This pandemic has impacted the human race in more ways than one. It is now a place filled with uncertainty, fear, and tension. The repercussions of Covid 19 have been myriad and widespread, resulting in illnesses, fatalities, lifestyle switches, work-life impact, and so much more.

The paper begins by describing the pandemic and its impact on human society. Next, it explores how teleworking became a way for people to continue working despite the virus' presence.

Thereafter, it looks at the organizational trends that arose as a result of this new form of work.

Lastly, it concludes with observations about what can be expected from the future of telework in light of the "new normal."

2. Keywords

Covid 19, remote work, telework, work from home, remote workers, teleworkers

3. Introduction

Some of the notable post-covid effects have been as follows: 1. There was a drastic reduction in the population due to death and illness. 2. Many were forced into medical treatment facilities or shelters for extended periods, making it difficult for them to maintain contact with their families and loved ones back home. 3. Many people who were infected by the virus died within days of infection, while others developed symptoms that caused severe pain, fever, fatigue, etc. 4. The economy suffered greatly as some sectors collapsed altogether while other sectors were forced to scale down their operations due to a lack of workers. Based on all these factors, this paper digs deeper into the post-pandemic teleworking surge, the kind of challenges that arose under it, the organizational trends that ensued to support them, and its effect on employees' work-life (productivity and well-being) ranging from short term to long term.

3.1. Literature review

3.1.1. The ripple effect

Speaking of the areas that were most hit, the organizational sector of society was one of them. Before this pandemic, many organizations contributed to society in various ways. But after the virus hit, it became apparent that these organizations could not survive without their employees and had to close down due to a lack of manpower. This meant that those who depended on these organizations for work would have nowhere else to go, which created a lot of problems. During this time, most governments around the world implemented policies that would get rid of all the infected people. Due to these policies, many citizens moved out of their countries in search of greener pastures elsewhere. Some went as far as moving across continents so that they could be

with their families again. Others stayed put but left their homes in fear that they would be quarantined. This even affected government around the world as they lost a large chunk of their tax revenues due to people moving out and others dying.

Another organization that was affected by this new reality was the business sector. Since there were no longer healthy workers available, many businesses had to close down or scale back their operations. Those that did continue operating found themselves having difficulties because they had no workforce to re-employ. With this situation, many companies had to lay off some of their workers and hire others who were still healthy enough to work. But the problem was that there were very few people with jobs available, so it became difficult to find employees that they could employ.

The IT organizations, private sectors, and work life of the corporate sector were also greatly affected by this new reality. Before the pandemic, companies and professionals had no idea how to handle a situation like this. The companies did not have any plans in place to keep operations running while they were trying to find solutions for their infected employees. This caused a lot of problems around the world as they could not continue with their operations anymore and had to scale back or close down altogether.

3.1.2. The resurgence of teleworking and how

In an alternate work arrangement known as teleworking, employees carry out their duties away from the office. Employees can carry out their duties anywhere they choose, including at home, at other workplaces, or even while traveling. The advantages of this kind of employment for both businesses and people have been the subject of numerous studies. Studies showed that teleworkers were more productive than their office-based colleagues and that those who worked

from home were happier with their lives. Teleworking has not, however, been extensively embraced despite its obvious advantages. This is because teleworking still presents certain challenges for the majority of firms. These problems include productivity, effective communication, and security. Before launching such an endeavor, businesses must address these issues as well as how their teleworking rules already stand. For instance, businesses must have the right infrastructure in place so that workers may work remotely without suffering a loss in quality or production.

Post Covid-19, the world saw a massive shift in how people worked and lived. Covid contingency plans meant staying isolated, connecting virtually, and trying to make a livelihood. This meant, more advancements in technology and techniques. There also rose an increasing desire for flexibility. More and more people choose to not be physically present at their job sites. This was when we saw the trend of "telework", or "remote work". This opened more doors to the work-from-home culture which was not as widely prevalent earlier. Some companies benefited from this new dynamic while others floundered in the process. The teleworking trend was not easy for companies to adopt. Many companies did not want to let go of the traditional way of working, but they had no choice but to adapt if they wanted to stay afloat. With time, more and more organizations began adopting this trend. With this new trend, however, came a shift in how companies managed their teleworkers/remote workers and what they expected from them. It was vital for companies to develop policies and procedures that would help them manage the world of teleworking.

Speaking of some post-covid work statistics, between July and September 2021, (Dalton & Groen, 2022) state that 9 percent of all private sector occupations in the United States required some telework, and 13% required full-time telework. The proportion of companies that increased

telework was higher among those that began implementing flexible schedules for employees or reduced work weeks.

Also, as per (Zalat & Bulbul, 2022), the advantages of teleworking are time and money savings (89.3%), reduction in the COVID-19 spread (86.9%), and the ability to balance work and personal life (63.4%). They added that musculoskeletal issues (78.2%), work-related stress (65.9%), and vision issues (47%) were among the health issues related to telework. Male employees who were married, clocking in under 40 hours per week, and who had previously worked remotely before COVID-19 reported much greater levels of job satisfaction. On the other hand, married female teleworkers who worked more than 40 hours per week and had never before worked remotely before COVID-19 reported feeling much more worn out and recovering less quickly. The perceived exhaustion and recovery time were significantly higher in all teleworkers who had health issues.

Lastly, as per (Okubo, 2020), during the pandemic, telework usage surged all around the world. People who work from home in the US grew from 8% in February 2020 to 35% in May 2020. (Bick et al., 2020). In reaction to the spread of COVID-19, 37% of workers in Europe started teleworking, according to Eurofound (2020). According to Alipour et al. (2020), 20–50% of people in Europe are teleworkers. From 6% in January to 17% in June 2020, the extent rose in Japan (Okubo, 2020).

3.1.3. Organizational challenges posed by the teleworking culture

One of the biggest problems that companies faced was finding people to work from home. Before this pandemic, it was not common for people to work remotely. This meant a lot of trouble finding employees who would be willing to work from home and still get their work

done. Another thing that companies found difficult was managing the teleworkers' productivity levels. It became almost impossible to monitor productivity levels. Many companies found themselves in a situation where they had no idea how to deal with this. Moreover, they could not even afford to lose any productivity. It was a deadlock situation that nobody would have loved to be in.

The second major challenge faced by the work-from-home movement was that of the company's culture. Being away from the workplace, not seeing colleagues, not interacting with them, and having only virtual connections were not very favorable for team bonding and culture. A certain level of rapport and camaraderie gets built when you co-work with your peers. It takes a while and requires you to interact with them to build that. Now when everything came onto the virtual platform, this factor took a hit. This either led to good or bad teamwork which furthered the making or breaking of an organization's success. The companies struggled to come up with strategies that would help them keep their teleworkers engaged in the work environment and with each other.

The third challenge faced by the remote working movement was the issue of trust. It was difficult for companies to know whether or not their teleworkers were working. Workers did not have any direct supervision or mentoring, which meant that they could easily slack off without anyone noticing it. It was difficult to monitor this situation and get it under control since there were no policies in place, to begin with. This caused many companies to distrust their work-from-home employees and would have preferred that they work at their official sites. But this was not always possible because there were no jobs available for them, so it became a dilemma for both parties involved.

The fourth challenge faced by the teleworking movement was the issue of collaboration tools. Many companies did not have the necessary collaboration tools to help them collaborate on a virtual platform. They had no idea how to do it and what was required for such a thing. This caused them to fall behind in their competition, which was something that they did not want. So, it became an important factor for them to get these tools and install them so that they could start working from home with ease.

3.1.4. Betterment measures and employee wellbeing

Many organizations were able to overcome these challenges and achieve success at work. They developed strategies and policies that would help them manage their remote workers more effectively. They also came up with collaboration tools and other necessary resources that enabled them to collaborate on a virtual platform. In response to challenges faced by remote workers, many organizations were also forced to change their culture, employee policies, and management practices. That too, most times without providing employees with the necessary skills required for remote work.

According to (Turner & Baker, 2022), “Hybrid work is here to stay. With 75% of hybrid or remote knowledge workers agreeing their expectations for working flexibly have increased, there is no doubt that the future is hybrid. If an organization were to go back to a full on-site arrangement, it would risk losing up to 39% of its workforce.” They feel that the workplace must be designed around employee-driven flexibility, cultural connectivity, and human leadership to establish a new, human-centric paradigm for the hybrid environment. For, that has led to the hybridization of many organizations. Some workplaces, for instance, have a two-day rule. For two days that have been set aside, employees are required to work from home. They are then free

to work from home for the remaining days. In this approach, it is less likely for businesses to face the four aforementioned problems with higher severity. At least during those two on-site days, the staff members can discuss and resolve any difficulties related to working remotely.

As per (Gerdeman, 2021), one must be sensitive to trauma & burnout and lead with empathy.

Linda A. Hill says “People have been living in constant turmoil. They are grieving. Because we are all going through this together, I think leaders are developing closer connections with their people. They recognize they need to over-communicate and be transparent with people about what they know and what they don't know, the good news and the bad news.” She explains that leaders are aware that working people are becoming burnt out. One such leader advises to pay great attention and keep an eye out for burnout symptoms, which can be very subtle over Zoom. So many business executives are now discussing how they feel at work: Where are you now, exactly? Leaders want individuals to recognize that their emotions are not the result of any personal failing on their part, but rather the circumstances. They have started to celebrate any victory that they can. More consideration is being given to the entire person. Employees have started to care more than ever if their boss has their best interests in mind as well as those of the community. Thus, leaders must understand what individuals have gone through as a result of the pandemic and the significant shift in attitude that has occurred. In the future, employees can anticipate a commitment to improving the lives and livelihoods of individuals impacted by their enterprises. They'll be looking to leaders to find methods to be more considerate of the needs of others around them. Similarly, Rosabeth Moss Kanter states, “Burnout is running rampant. I've talked with senior vice presidents leaving for no apparent reason, as well as COOs and CFOs taking themselves out of the running for the CEO post. To emerge successful post-pandemic with top talent intact requires more attention to the human side and reaffirmation of mission and

values.” She explains that instead of throwing farewell parties after it's too late, perhaps businesses should start implementing recognition-rich recommitment rites (similar to reaffirming wedding vows). Creativity is necessary to improve interpersonal relationships and foster a sense of belonging. For instance, a large technology company with remote work teams dispersed across numerous far-flung locations created volunteers who were tasked with bringing people from the same postal code together through events (in cars, for example) and discovering people's non-work talents (concerts or comedy). Thus, company leaders are under increasing pressure to show that well-being ranks alongside income as a core goal of business, from empathy as a critical managerial quality to equity in the ecosystem.

Also, (Ratcliffe & Wilson, 2021) consider fostering inclusion, diversity, and equity (IDE) as a very significant factor to support the post-world work environment. They feel that global employers must make it a priority to build a diverse and inclusive workforce. For, they have the chance to draw attention to pre-existing societal injustices that have been made worse by a health crisis thanks to COVID. Therefore, even though these injustices had existed before COVID, they are now more pronounced, which should motivate them to take more action. Understanding workforce demographics and closely examining what is happening at each stage of the employment cycle is essential to developing a diversity strategy and identifying any unjust barriers to inclusion. Other options include evaluating the efficacy of diversity training, obtaining anonymous feedback from staff members who are underrepresented or not, and ensuring that the IDE approach is supported through workplace champions.

We also have (Galanti et al., 2021), who has a very interesting take that, “Employees’ family-work conflict and social isolation are negatively related, while self-leadership and autonomy are positively related, to WFH productivity and WFH engagement.” Further, they add that, to see the

benefits of remote work that are often anticipated, organizations and individuals should take these concerns into account and create guidelines on how to properly handle them. The initial strategy for businesses, HR officers, and employees should focus on enhancing opportunities for connection with coworkers and superiors because communication helps reduce feelings of social isolation. Numerous businesses have increased the purchase and use of technology and software that provide interactive experiences that mimic face-to-face or group interactions between people. Additionally, organizations should help employees develop their time management skills so that they can divide their attention and give each one the proper amount of time and attention at the appropriate time. Thereby promoting each employee's right to disconnection, enabling physical and mental recovery. Furthermore, self-leadership and autonomy are positively correlated with output and engagement at work. Promoting autonomy and self-leadership could, in theory, be a way to enhance the effectiveness of remote work programs and their associated effects on WFH engagement.

3.1.5. Conclusion

I believe that the aforementioned measures already adopted by most companies are some of the best ones. They can prove extremely useful in combating the post-covid 19 work-life challenges if implemented on a larger scale. Especially from the employee productivity, mental health, work-life balance, and wellbeing standpoint. Additionally, mental health sessions in the workplace, more time offs, occasional get-togethers, planned team bonding activities, and a socially aware/empathy-based leadership can help build a sustainable teleworking world. I strongly feel that more research can be done on effective teleworking techniques that are in favor of mankind and not organizational success alone.

Lastly, the remote working game is going strong and will continue for as long as people find it useful. This means that companies have to be prepared for this situation if they want to stay ahead in their industries. It can no longer be considered just a temporary solution, but rather, it must become an integral part of all business operations. As per (Najmi et al., 2014), Covid 19 has altered our way of life and work. Many people throughout the world were undoubtedly woken up by the realization that nothing in life is permanent. We must be ready because a lot of things can change suddenly and drastically overnight. We took away from this event the idea that no one should give up their job due to illness or disease. But, while doing so, one cannot neglect their mental health, well-being, work-life balance, and stress-causing elements, and stop living a normal life. As much as teleworking has proven to be a boon by enabling people to work from home and earn a living, it can easily turn into a bane. That can happen if humans start to become depressed, burned out, anxiety-ridden, workaholics, unhealthy, and lonely. This will defeat the entire purpose and do more good than harm. Thus, when we now understand the intricacies and depths of the post-pandemic world, we must learn to create plans and guidelines accordingly. For, the changes brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic are here to stay for a while and will continue to impact lives in the times to come.

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