

Dhruval Bhatt

SOCI 50096

Research Project Proposal Memo

For the Network Analysis term project, I propose to study the impact on workplace collaboration networks due to the use of technology. The increase in internet connectivity and better platforms for online collaboration, more businesses are allowing and even encouraging their employees to work from home or whatever place they feel at home. This trend has received mixed reception – one hand studies show that working from home increases productivity, reduces employee turnover and saves company cost per employee, however, there is also concern that this practice increases isolation, decreases innovation, and amplifies stress of daily work (Sander).

To understand the impact of work from home in the collaboration and communication practices during work, I propose doing a deep dive into the network of work from home employees (WFHE) versus someone who works at a traditional office setting. Here are some ideas as to information I would like to learn: How many people does an employee connect with daily? Who are they? Are they mostly from their team or do they also connect with people outside of their immediate team? Is there any communication between coworkers or is it mostly with authorities in command? Is a large percentage of the conversation work related or are there non-work-related socializing? Has there been any impact of working from home on their non-work-related network? What is the main medium of communication? Has the medium of technology improved communication or caused lag? Understanding such factors in work from home employee and comparing similar parameters in non-work-from-home employees would give an insight into the merits and pitfalls of this growing trend.

To construct this network, I plan to reach out to an organization that institutes a work from home policy and one that does not and collect survey responses from employees. Since the nature of the job

and practices of the industry could affect the communication and collaboration practices, the goal is to select organizations in the same industry and function. Since I am interested in how innovation and well being of the employee is impacted, I would ideally be interested in collecting responses from creative groups such as a development engineering team. I plan to structure the survey questions such that I can gain information about both their work network and personal network to see the holistic difference in employee experience. I would be interested in the medium of communication, such as, email, collaboration tool like Slack, Skype or phone call as it might be a revelation into the type of communication maintained.

The main challenge in accomplishing this task is to find the right organizations that have creative departments with work from home or non-work from home policies and gaining access to the employees willing to participate and share this information. To find an approachable institution, I intend to tap into my professional network and University of Chicago alumni network to connect with someone who would be able to help connect with other employees that meet the survey participant requirements. Tentatively, I hope to get at least 5-10 responses for each, work from home and not work from home.

References

Sander, Libby. "It's Not Just the Isolation. Working from Home Has Surprising Downsides." The Conversation, 5 Sept. 2019, <http://theconversation.com/its-not-just-the-isolation-working-from-home-has-surprising-downsides-107140>.