



An Exploratory Research on Impact of Covid-19 on Organizational Culture with Special Reference to IT Professionals

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Abstract

Organizational cultures are the signs and symbols, shared practices and underlying assumptions of an organizations (Meyerson and Martin, 1987). Covid-19 has profoundly transformed the organizational culture. The companies are shifting and adopting the new norms of working and re-establishing the business in this new normal. This profound change represents a major challenge for manager. As they adjust to operating during a pandemic and prepare for the recovery, organizational leaders need to consider which culture changes they want to retain and which they must counteract. In this research, researcher has made an attempt to study the impact of pandemic on IT professionals & the trends which have emerged as a result of remote working.

A descriptive survey of 160 IT professionals was conducted with the help of Google forms. The exploratory simple random sampling was used for the study. The researcher found that more than 80% of the respondents preferred Work from Home as they get the opportunity to balance their professional & personal life and they have got accustomed to this way of working and gradually their productivity has also increased. The companies have realized that if they want to retain their competitive edge, they will have to ensure that learning and development of their employees will have to continue. Also, if the organizations wants to remain competitive and successful for a very long term then it must have an engaged workforce.

Key words: Organizational culture, remote working, covid-19

INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture is an important part of why employees choose to work for a company – and what keeps them there for the long-term too. More specifically, the culture of an organization is exactly what makes employees feel as though they ‘fit’ within a workplace, which can affect happiness, motivation and ultimately, productivity.

As we traverse through the new normal, it is quite evident that the COVID-19 era has given the IT industry an opportunity to learn more about their people, workplace, processes, and organisation’s culture," says Kulmeet Bawa.

To control the spread of virus during pandemic several precautionary measures were suggested by the health authorities. This led to the significant change in cultural, social and the day-to-day ways of living behaviours. Physical distancing, wearing masks in public places, frequent hand washing, avoiding visit to any mass gathering places like theatres, school/colleges, workplace, mall, religious places became integral part of life (Bavel, et al). Adapting to the changed scenario has huge impact on working culture. The new ways of living are disrupting our work, home and travel schedules, momentarily but with high impact. Many employees across various industries are fearful of job losses as the ‘new normal’ demands new tactics for managing with an ambiguous future (Watkin). Suddenly many people started working from home, it is expected that working from home will become a norm. It is anticipated to witness significant changes in how people work, shop, live, play, communicate and work across every organisation (Merriman).

There are plenty of tools available to enable an IT professional work from home and makes life much easier. Starting from Google Docs, MS Teams, Hangouts, Zoom and Skype for regular interaction. But it is furthermore important to be emotionally and culturally ready for the new world.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Edward B. Tylor mentioned "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor and Robert)". Thomas and Berger defined culture is the total way of life and it is passed from one generation to the next generation (Berger & Luckmann).

According to Professor Geert Hofstede organisational culture is defined as the way in which members of an organisation relate to each other, to their work, to the outside world that distinguishes them from other organisations.

When an organisational culture is analysed culture describes many facets of working relationships among the members (Waisfisz). Working relationships among supervisor and subordinates. The way both relates to each other & Working relationships and the way same hierarchical level relate to each other must be consider to define the organisational culture.

The Organisational Culture can be an enabler, or a hindrance based on the situation and the way it is implemented. A carefully evaluated and thought organisational culture can develop better employee relations & engagement promoting the productivity. The best technology can yield better productivity only if it is used in an effective way by the qualified engaged human resources. (Waisfisz and Hofstede).

Marc Berman and Tracy Thurkow mentioned that culture is steered by purpose and values. A culture can be validated during the time of crisis which is happening in the era of Covid-19. The findings of research conducted by Marc and Tracy suggests that profitable companies exhibited value driven strong culture which are people centricity, accountability, collaboration, agility, integrity, innovation and ambition (Berman and Thurkow). Therefore, organisations are required to recognise the significance of promoting and incorporating patience, trust and collaboration supported by a robust technological system to guarantee stability and development in difficult times (Bajaj).

In a research conducted by Harvard Business Review among call-centre employees shows that work from home increased productivity by 13 per cent due to a decrease in sick days, social break time and relaxed work environment at home (Choudhury, et al). All the participants in a research conducted by Blount and Gloet indicated that they are more productive and able to manage work life balance while working from home (Blount and Gloet).

During the prolonged lockdown and remote working a leader may consider the following steps to protect and nurture the organisational culture (McDonough, et al.):

- Decision making process should be driven by cultural values of the organisation and it should be visible in action to all.
- Leaders should take concrete and visible steps that can have a positive ripple effect as they flow through your organisation.
- Provide guided steps to adapt new ways of working to gain success during prolonged work from home
- Encourage collaboration, sharing and creative problem-solving

It is estimated that up to a third of employees may continue to work from home post Covid-19, as it will save cost, time and add efficiency. Geographical barriers will be thing of past. The best possible human resource can be recruited anywhere in the world. Working 10 miles away from customers or 10,000 miles away the productivity and experience will be the same (Sharma).

In a survey conducted by job search portal Flexi Jobs in 2019, it was found that around 31 per cent of women employees took unwanted career break after having kids (Reynolds). Work from home



policies will greatly benefit those women workers, who have young babies at their homes. This initiative will bring lots of good women talent into the workforce (Gautam).

But at the same time large number of employees are not willing to work from home due lack of productive environment at home. The virtual interaction lacks human feeling and expressions. According to a study conducted by Harvard Business Review the misinterpretations caused by the digital communications channels (Texts, Email, Conference calls) create a big concern which can affect innovation, productivity and employees engagement (Dhawan and ChamorroPremuzic). The physical, emotional, financial and social wellbeing is on focus to help improve employee productivity while working from home (Verghese). Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella mentioned in a media interview that permanently working from home can have adverse effect on mental health of employees and virtual video calls cannot substitute in-person meetings (Ahmed).

Many companies are adopting hybrid mode.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the impact on working culture due to pandemic caused by Covid-19
2. To examine the emerging trends in IT sector

METHODOLOGY:

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of Covid-19 on working culture and emerging trends of work from home. A descriptive survey of 160 IT professionals was conducted with the help of Google forms. Five senior professionals were interviewed to get the more detailed insight.

FINDINGS AND RESULT

More than 80% of employees are working from home: Over two-thirds of employees indicated that they spend more time working from home compared to office. The survey result supports the higher productivity while employees work from home as they spend more time working from home.

80% of respondents are now able to maintain healthy work life balance. This finding supports the research conducted by Giurge and Bohns in Harvard Business Review.

Due to prolonged work from home, employees starts to feel alienated because there are no informal meetings and socialization.

The pandemic creates economic downturn. Hence Over two-thirds of responded indicated that they feel job insecurity due to the current economic situation. There is no rise in the salary rather at some places reduction in salaries.

The era of prolonged work from home has an evident impact on organizational culture.

Some of the suggestions received from the respondents are re-communicate values and culture regularly, set clear expectations and frequent communication, speaks to each other twice a day, training on effective communications skills, build trust and empower employees.

Nearly half of the respondents are in opinion that continuous prolonged work from home is increasing communication gap among colleagues.

Half of the respondents indicated that prolonged work from home is leading to Psychological stress because they were not ready for this sudden change and there is a lot ambiguity regarding job security.

Objective 2: The second objective of this research paper is to examine the emerging trends due to wider acceptance of work from home.

After analyzing the data and extensive literature review researcher found the following results:

1. Employees are now able to able to maintain healthy work life balance higher productivity. The IT companies are adopting the hybrid mode. In some of the companies few employees are working from office at the same time some employees are working from home. In some



companies employees are divided in batches & every batch is working from home in one week & from office in next week.

2. There are several suggestions received from respondents about promoting the brainstorming and decision making discussions, some of them are use of ChatBox for giving suggestions and discussion for next session, small number of attendees, writing down ideas instead of just voicing them and video calls.
3. Now a day's office has become a place for collaboration. Which helps in creating better professional bonds and work atmosphere.
4. Employees expectations: Over two-thirds of employees expressed the need of more frequent organisational communication and better clarity of expectations on assigned task to them
5. Employees don't want to have a permanent place of work like home or office. In the qualitative interview, one of the respondents mentioned that anything which is forced has low adoption rate and many a times employees want to visit office to meet with colleagues as human touch is missing while working from home.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has given birth to the virtual world offering both opportunities and challenges. During the pandemic organisations opted for work from home & remote working. With this organisations are able to hire the best talent from anywhere without spending on office space and administration cost. Employees are empowered to work remotely based on their convenient flexible working hours. However, the flip side is long-term remote working may also increase psychological stress, diluted work life boundaries, communication gap among team members, lack of interpersonal relationship, concern over job security and diminishing organisational culture. To drive a profitable growth successful organisations need to adapt themselves for enhanced uses on cutting-edge technology and invest efforts in enhancing employee's experience. This may need a lot of training and sensitisation for employees to accept the newer ways of working. A successful organisation will be people centric and invest efforts to safeguard organisational culture.

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