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Working from Home during COVID-19: Challenges and Solution for Maldives Employees

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Abstract
The COVID-19 outbreak has pressured countries around the world to implement various restrictions to people's movement and instituted social distancing protocols as part of pandemic control measures. The COVID-19 pandemic has constrained companies to reshape their work culture. The current COVID-19 pandemic is the new normal of working from home (WFH), and its effects are not the same across all workplaces. The recent pandemic brought into focus the merits and challenges of working from home on a level of personal experience and employees are adapting to new work culture. Quarantines, lockdowns, and self-imposed isolation have pushed majority employers around the world to work from home, accelerating a workplace experiment that had struggled to gain traction before COVID-19 hit (susan Lund, 2021). With the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, home working has given some employers the flexibility they need to continue their business operations while prioritizing staff and customer health and wellbeing as part of their public health responsibility. With increasing numbers of employees working at home or using home as a working base for at least part of the week - it's clear there are a number of benefits for business such as, Flexibility and agility, Improved employee retention, Attract new talent, Increased productivity, Increased staff motivation, Less need for regular holidays, Less sickness absences, life balance, Convenience, Financial benefits. Though there are some disadvantages to employees working at home, most of these relate to those working from home for all, as opposed to part, of their working week such as Staff feeling isolated, Problems with staff development, Information security risk, not all jobs suit home working, doesn't suit everyone. In this manner, the relationship between employer and employee becomes a circle of give and take that benefits everyone involved.
Keywords: Work from Home, Quarantines, Pandemic, Life Balance

Introduction
The Maldives has a population of around 515,696 people dispersed across 185 islands. The country has been a development success; enjoying robust growth coupled with considerable development of the country's infrastructure and connectivity. More than 30 percent of the population live in the capital city Male and all main administrative offices are in Male.
The COVID-19 pandemic is the largest shock to have ever hit the Maldives' economy. The government closed borders between the end-March to mid-July 2020, resulting in a sudden

stop of tourist inflow. To mitigate the adverse welfare impacts of the crisis, the government spent USD 187 million or about 4.7 percent of estimated 2020 GDP on special financing facilities for firms and freelance workers, monthly income support allowances, and discounted utility bills (World Bank, 2021). By the discretionary powers vested in the Minister of Health by Section 33 of the 7/2012 Public Health Act the Minister has declared a State of Public Health Emergency from 12th March 2020.

The COVID-19 shock has shed renewed light on the importance of strengthening the Maldives' resilience to external shocks. Although there are plans to develop agriculture and fishing to diversify the economy, the scarcity of arable land is a binding constraint. Focusing on higher value-added financial and business services could create good jobs, but the growth of these sectors is currently constrained by a shortage of local skills. Investing in human capital, including retraining and upskilling workers, can help The Maldives build back better.

While some of us have worked from home before the COVID-19 pandemic, it's a whole new ballgame for those who haven't. Even veteran remote workers may experience unique challenges during the pandemic: Trying to focus in an otherwise quiet home that's now bustling with activity. Dialing into a zoom meeting while your toddler demands attention. Sharing an office with your spouse who is also working from home. Home-schooling your teenager when you take a break for lunch. Taking care of your aging parent while trying to balance work responsibilities. A typical workday no longer exists because nothing about our lives during COVID-19 is typical anymore. The good news is that remote health information management (HIM) staff can take steps to address various challenges associated with working at home.

The coronavirus (COVID-19), a pandemic sweeping across the globe, has challenged society in ways once considered unimaginable, forcing people to reconsider a wide variety of practices, from work to leisure, to basic travel and daily tasks. Not only has this had individual impacts, but it has also impacted countries as a whole from an economic standpoint, bringing an array of economic sectors to a complete standstill. The objectives of the study are to identify the challenges of working from home in Covid-19 and provide solutions for Maldives employees

Challenges of Working from Home and How to Overcome them

Working from home has gone from a dream to a reality for many people in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges of working from home have also presented themselves. The way we work has changed forever, and it seems like there's no going back.

At the point when COVID-19 constrained organizations all around the world to send their representatives home to work practically, far off work had a defining moment.

Indeed, the hurry to give representatives admittance to every one of the devices they'd need to telecommute was a little, all things considered, unexpected for some businesses. In any case, after everybody got comfortable, what immediately became obvious to numerous office-based groups is that representatives could be useful and cantered when not in the workplace as a rule, much more so. Businesses wherever started to comprehend that distant work truly works (Dans, 2020).

Regardless of whether you're on the chase for a distant work or are as of now working essentially, look at this rundown of the benefits of telecommuting, alongside a portion of the top organizations that recruit for far off positions.

Let's take a look at some specific challenges of working from home in the Maldives and how to overcome them. I've included actionable tips and solutions to help while working remotely.

Home-working has several straightforward positive aspects, such as not having to commute, easier management of household responsibilities and family demands, along with increased autonomy over time use and fewer interruptions. Personal comfort is often listed as an advantage of the home environment, though setting up a home office comes with physical and infrastructural demands. People working from home consistently report greater job motivation and satisfaction which is probably due to the greater work-related control and work-life flexibility. A longitudinal nationally representative sample of many employees in the Maldives revealed that homeworking is positively related to leisure time satisfaction, suggesting that people working from home can allocate more time for leisure activities (Bajarin, 2021).

Regularly-mentioned negative aspects of WFH include being disconnected from co-workers, experiencing isolation due to the physical and social distance to team members. Also, home-working employees reported more difficulties with switching off and they worked beyond their formal working hours. Working from home is especially difficult for those with small children, but intrusion from other family members, neighbours, and friends was also found to be the major challenge of WFH. Moreover, being away from the office may also create a lack of visibility and increases teleworkers' fear that being out of sight limits opportunities for promotion, rewards, and positive performance reviews (Dans, 2020).

The trend of WFH was already growing before 2020. But when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it increases rapidly. In 2021, the pandemic continues to distress the way we work. A major percent of government remote workers report that they are working from home because of the outbreak. While some private-sector employees say their organizations plan on making remote work permanent.

Why is it Essential to Identify the Challenges of WFH in Maldives?
More people working remotely brings a new set of challenges that can negatively impact productivity if not addressed.

The 'new normal' in the Maldives will be different from the normal life we enjoyed before Covid-19. But the country remains really lucky because of its unique geography. If the right testing protocols are established, the Maldives will enjoy a significant reasonable advantage something that could support its future success, even during these troubled and unsettled times.

•   Majority employees from government, sector say the biggest change is how they collaborate and communicate with their colleagues and their location.

•   Some of them said their work hours are what has changed the most.

These changes present new problems for both leaders and their teams. It's important to identify them to prevent or mitigate potential problems.

Identifying the challenges of working from home helps to develop the strategies to keep employees resilient, motivated, and productive.

Challenges of working from home in Maldives and how to overcome them
The image below shows the main challenges remote workers face. As a leader or member of a remote team, you've probably come across a few of them already:

Collaboration and Communication
Communication between humans is already hard enough face-to-face, but it's much harder when working from home.

People normally rely on nonverbal communication. This is why communicating effectively is one of the most common challenges you will face when working from home. Use the best communication technology available to facilitate communication with your team. If you're a team leader, organize regular meetings to make sure everyone is on the same page. Consider having an open-door policy so your team can approach you to ask questions related to their work or role. Freelancers and entrepreneurs should also maintain frequent contact with clients and vendors to make sure expectations are aligned, and everything runs smoothly.

Loneliness
A lack of social interaction causes all of us to feel more isolated and lonelier especially those working from home. Loneliness is bad for your mental and physical well-being and can affect your performance. Leaders should ensure that remote workers have the tools they need to navigate the challenges of loneliness. If you're working from home, try to plan social activities outside work that give you the social interaction you need. Do this of course while respecting the COVID-19 safety measures in your local area. Organize regular video calls with friends and family, or try working in a co working space or library (Gurchiek, 2021).

Not Being able to Unplug
Working and living in one space can blur the lines between your work and personal life.
This can make it difficult to relax and switch off once the day is over, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance becomes a challenge. Create a dedicated office space in your home. Better yet, if you're able, go work somewhere else, such as a coffee shop. This can help you create boundaries between your work and private life (Gurchiek, 2021).

Distractions at Home
Even the most disciplined and organized remote team members get distracted at home. A pile of dirty dishes or a dusty bookshelf might start calling your name. Then, a 20-minute break turns into two hours. Those who live with family or roommates also face regular, concentration-busting interruptions.
Try to find a quiet space in your home for working and remove all distractions. If possible, close the door and ask your co-inhabitants not to interrupt you, except in case of emergency.

Being in a Different Time zone than Teammates
An increasing number of companies are working across multiple time zones. This can make coordinating with intercontinental colleagues a challenge. Leverage project manager, instant messaging, and file-sharing services to collaborate with international teams. Leaders should encourage teammates to set regular working hours and communicate them to the rest of the team.

Motivation
It's easy to lose motivation when working from home, whether you're a remote employee or self-employed. The lack of external inputs and interaction with co-workers can make you lose sight of your long-term career goals. Ultimately, losing motivation. Then add the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it's no surprise that remote teams are losing motivation.
Write down the long-term goals. Include goals that relate to career, finances, and personal aspirations. Revisit them regularly to keep them fresh in your mind. Consider posting them on the wall in your workspace.

Make sure the senior employees are aware of your career goals so they can focus you accountable. Attending industry events and conferences can also be a great a motivational boost.

Taking Vacation Time
Taking vacations is essential for your physical and mental well-being. Vacation can actually increase your productivity, mental ability, and efficiency. Unfortunately, many people forget to take breaks when working from home (Courtney, 2021). If you're a leader, prioritize organizing your team's vacations to make sure they take enough breaks and are well-rested.

Finding Reliable Network
A poor internet connection or out-of-date technology can cause frustration for everyone. As a leader, make sure your remote team members have everything they need to connect from home. Make sure this includes access to the latest versions of the apps and software you use. You might even want to consider reimbursing internet costs so your team can invest in the fastest connection available. As a remote worker, it can help to have your personal devices as a backup for your work computer in case it stops working. Also, identify places with a good WiFi connection near your home that you can go to in case of emergency (Skirka, 2020).

Bad Habits
If you've lost your regular routine as a result of working from home, chances are you may have fallen into some unhealthy habits.
Perhaps you graze the contents of your fridge all day, eat your meals at random hours, or forget to exercise. Set reminders on your phone to get up and move around, take a walk around the block, or a short stretching or breathing break.
Make sure your body is nourished by incorporating lots of fresh vegetables and fruit into your diet. Set aside 20-30 minutes per day for gentle exercise such as yoga, walking, or working out (Shivdasani, 2020).

Time Management
For many remote workers, managing your own schedule sounds like a dream, but it's actually a major challenge of working from home.
While your working hours may be a little more flexible, you need to have the discipline to manage your time correctly. Without discipline you run the risk of procrastinating or taking too many naps.

How to Overcome this Challenge
Our brains and bodies work best with routine, so decide on the business hours that work for you and stick to them.
You may find it suits you to stick to conventional working hours, or prefer to plan your life to spend more time with your family.

The "Pajama Mind-set"
While it's tempting to roll out of bed, down your morning Joe, and sit straight down at your desk to work, it's not advisable.
Apart from the obvious hygiene issues, the clothes you wear affect your mind-set.

When you're dressed to impress, you feel and behave differently. Also, others perceive you differently.

How to overcome this challenge:

The way you dress may have changed since before the pandemic, but there's still no excuse to be a slouch at work.

Invest in some smart but comfortable work-from-home clothes that will help you get in the right frame of mind for remote working.

Neglecting your Network

Networking is an essential way for employees and entrepreneurs to stay connected, relevant, and up-to-date with their industries.

You're more likely to find your next opportunity through your personal network. As a remote worker, however, it can be easy to lose touch.

How to overcome this challenge:

Attend industry events online to stay involved in your professional community. Also, don't underestimate the power of social media for finding and maintaining professional relationships.

Tools that minimize distractions and tools to help remote workers work more effectively

Noise-cancelling headphones to block out unwanted noise.

Insulation to soundproof your doors and windows.

Project Management Tools

Trello is a project management tool that helps remote team members collaborate on projects and tasks.

Team Communication and Collaboration Tools

Slack is an instant messaging tool that facilitates communication between remote employees.

Video Conferencing Tools

Zoom is a video conferencing app that allows you to organize meetings of up to 40 minutes with their free version. It allows instant chats, screen sharing, and file sharing.

GoToMeeting is a slightly more advanced tool that emphasizes security and is designed for businesses (Gurchiek, 2021).

Accounting and Invoicing Tools

QuickBooks for bookkeeping.

Fresh books for invoicing.

Time Management Tools

Toggl for time tracking and productivity reporting.

The Pros of WFH

Of course, there are plenty of benefits to working from home. The image below shows some of the biggest benefits remote workers perceive.

The greatest benefits of working from home are similar for everyone. Whether you're a veteran remote worker or have started working remotely since the pandemic.

The newer remote workers see not having to commute as the biggest advantage of working from home. While pre-pandemic remote workers see their flexible schedule as the most important benefit (Gurchiek, 2021).

Other pros of working from home include:

- Being able to work from anywhere
- Spending more time with family
- Increased productivity
- Greater work-life balance
- Less stress
- Improved mental and physical health
- Reduced carbon footprint

Embracing Remote Work for the Long-term

Remote work and its challenges and benefits are here to stay.

Team leaders, remote employees, freelancers, and entrepreneurs should follow the tips in this article to keep up motivation and productivity and reduce the risk of burnout.

If you need further support in overcoming the challenges of working from home, get in touch with BetterUp. Discover how one of our expert coaches can help you.

Benefits of Working from Home

As we've long known, WFH has a host of advantages for workers. We're listing out the best of the best benefits of working from home some you may already be aware of, and some that may open your eyes even more to WFH impact on employers, employees, the economy, and the planet.

Better Work Balance

Many remote jobs also come with flexible schedules, which means that employees can start and end their day as they choose, as long as their work is complete and leads to strong outcomes. This control over your work schedule can be invaluable when it comes to attending to the needs of your personal life.

Whether it's dropping kids off at school, running some errands, attending an online fitness class in the morning, or being home for a contractor, these tasks (and more!) are all easier to balance when you work from home.

Less Commute Stress

WFH in every day is associated with health issues like:

➢ Higher cholesterol
➢ Elevated blood sugar
➢ Increased risk of depression

Ditching the commute helps to support mental and physical health. The time savings can allow you to focus on priorities outside of work, like getting extra sleep in the morning, spending more time with family, getting in a workout, or eating a healthy breakfast.

Location Independence

One of the considerable benefits of working from home is having access to a broader range of job opportunities that aren't limited by geographic location. This can be especially helpful

for job seekers living in rural communities and small towns where there may not be many available local positions.

Having no set job location means that, pre-pandemic, fully remote employees could also travel and live as digital nomads while having a meaningful career. Though a full nomad lifestyle is currently on hold, as borders begin to open up, it's still a definite perk.

People who have to move frequently, such as military spouses, can also benefit from having a remote job that can be done from anywhere, without having to start over at the bottom of a new company with each move.

In addition, WFH is a great way to avoid high-rent and high-mortgage areas, especially for positions (like tech) that used to require living in a city with a high cost of living. With remote work, you no longer have to live near a major metropolitan area to have a career you love.

Improved Inclusivity

WFH enables companies to embrace diversity and inclusion by hiring people from different socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural backgrounds and with different perspectives—which are often challenging to accomplish when recruiting is restricted to a specific locale that not everyone wants, or can afford, to live near.

And by hiring employees who can work from range in the communities where they feel the foremost comfortable and supported, companies prefer to support diversity, community, and family.

WFH gives people that may have a tough time finding steady employment at an onsite job, like those with disabilities or caregivers who need a versatile schedule, the chance to follow their career goals without having to worry about commuting back and forth to an office. It also gives employees the pliability to urge doctors and other healthcare appointments when needed.

Money Savings

And the savings aren't just for employees, either. In fact, flex Jobs has saved from WFH on things like:

> ➢ Overhead
> ➢ Real estate costs
> ➢ Transit subsidies
> ➢ Continuity of operations

The major economic benefit of WFH could continue as more companies make it a long-term solution.

Positive Environmental Impact

Many employees who worked from home at least half time before the pandemic reduced taxi fees, oils.

And by making environmentally sound choices like opting to use less paper and monitoring their air conditioning, heating, and lighting WFH have the same potential impact on air quality as planting an entire forest.

Impact on Sustainability

WFH supports a variety of sustainability initiatives, from economic growth and reduced inequalities, to sustainable cities, climate change, and responsible consumption.

One of the fastest, cheapest ways for employers and employees to reduce their carbon footprint and affect climate change is by reducing commuter travel. In fact, the world is already seeing markedly reduced pollution, congestion, and traffic during the pandemic response, and being able to experience the results first hand may be a driver of WFH for everyone involved.

A Customizable Office
Being able to create a comfortable home office is an excellent benefit of remote work. Whether you simply want a more ergonomic chair or you have health issues that require specialized office equipment, you can set up your home office and make it whatever you want.

Increased Productivity and Performance
Working from home usually leads to fewer interruptions, less office politics, a quieter noise level, and less (or more efficient) meetings. Add in the lack of a commute, and remote employees typically have more time and fewer distractions, which leads to increased productivity a huge benefit of working from home for both employees and employers alike.

When done right, WFH allows employees and companies to focus on what really matters performance. Unfortunately, the office environment can create "false positives" that can lead to bias and favouritism. After all, coming in early and leaving late may "look" like more work, but actual performance is a much better indicator of productivity.

And Flex Jobs' 2020 survey found that employees who thought they might be more productive working from home actually were more productive when working remotely.

Total number of employees said that they are more productive working from home during the pandemic. When asked why, many cited fewer interruptions and quiet work environments as part of the reason for their increased productivity.

A Happier, Healthier Work Life

Remote, flexible employees tend to be happier and more loyal employees, in part because working from home has been shown to lower stress, provide more time for hobbies and interests, and improve personal relationships, among other things.

In addition to personal health and well-being, co-worker and manager relationships can be more positive without the distractions and politics that come along with an in-office job. A high number of employers say WFH has a high impact on employee retention plainly put, employees are sticking with their employer when they have WFH options.

Working from home can also lead to better health in a variety of ways:
- More time for physical activity
- The ability to eat healthier
- Can recover from illness or surgery at home
- Less exposure to illnesses
- Ease of caring for a health issue or disability
- The option to create a comfortable and ergonomic workspace.

Working remotely can give employees the time and environment needed to make healthy choices.

Recommendations
The below recommendations include a series of possible actions that could be taken by the Government to make WFH more feasible in a local context.

In the *short run*, the Government should consider:
- ➢ Introducing a formal WFH guideline for employees and employers;
- ➢ Taking COVID-19 risk assessment into account when developing the guidelines;
- ➢ Providing different guidelines to different sectors;
- ➢ Allowing employees' expectations in the guidelines;
- ➢ Specifying minimal requirements for technology training for virtual office; and for technical facilities for WFH.

In the *long run*, the Government should consider:
- ➢ Re-examining the possibility of remote working to become the new normal;
- ➢ Reviewing the current labour legislation and to ensure the labor insurance policies are extended to home working;
- ➢ To encourage small and medium enterprises to adopt WFH measures by providing subsidy and other incentives;
- ➢ Strengthening the ongoing Distance Business Program; and
- ➢ To further promote family-friendly employment practices.

Conclusion

This article makes it evident that the once desired, highly favorable, WFH has not proved to be one of the best options for majority of Maldives employees. Interest in WFH remains, but not in its current form. Better guidelines and policies from the government should be in place to properly regulate and make WFH feasible. One area of policy where planning and implementation is an absolute necessity is guidance into adapting to remote online work. The choice to suspend face-to-face gatherings and work was executed quickly, yet with no direction, on the most proficient method to do as such. Labourers are unconscious of what WFH involves and do not have the assets needed for this change, similar to programming, admittance to true reports, and appropriate working space. Appropriate preparation is required if this training is to be a plausible alternative or the new ordinary. Possibly the working balance will be visible post-pandemic when WFH is not a forced mandate, rather a flexible option.

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