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Online Work from Home: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Work from home has become a new normal because of COVID pandemic in the business world. However, as the world is recovering from the pandemic through normalizing the business activities, it has posed a tough challenge for existing staff. Keeping a work life balance is an important aspect for the business organizations. The case firm is Oman Arab Bank (OAB), and the research work will emphasize on the issues and challenges of online work from home. Due to technological innovations, work from home allowed flexibility and personalization to the existing staff. The recent pandemic has highlighted the benefits and challenges of working from home. The research paper will use convenient sampling by targeting OAB employees from head office for their working from home. The purpose of this study is to investigate how OAB employees collaborate online work from home (WFH) during pandemic. Shift of working culture will be analyzed based on employee satisfaction levels. Secondary data will be analyzed based on critical literature review of WFH and its issues and challenges faced by employees.

Keywords: Online Work From Home, Issues and Challenges of WFH, Work Life Balance, Employee Satisfaction.

Introduction

By the mid of 2020, governments across the world decided to restrict people from public movements and therefore the concept of work from home came into existence. This was due to COVID-19 precautionary measures taken by various governments across the world. These pandemic lockdowns lead to temporary closure of businesses and residential work. Even schools, universities, commercial operations, dental clinics, social events, restaurants, etc were closed. It affected a lot of livelihoods and eventually many companies and individuals became bankrupt.

Imhanrenialena, Obi et al (2021) highlighted those COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations to rapidly adapt to the culture of work from home. It included both employees and customers, as these two are the main stakeholders of any organization. This research focused on the applicability of work from home culture with the help of an online survey. Findings indicate that despite positive features of remote working and online technology, there were many negative implications and risk associated with remote work culture.

Literature Review

Implications of Work from Home

Farooq and Sultana (2022) states that there is positive as well as negative impact of work from home for employees at their personal and professional levels. People find less commuting and more control over time while working from home during the official hours. In addition, it gives more autonomy to the employee and less office related distractions are observed while working from home. Work from home has more comfortable environment and flexibility with domestic tasks is also an added advantage for the employees. However, work from home brings isolation from colleagues and the work may have less defined boundaries. Work from home also requires a high level of self-discipline to meet the needs of the workplace requirements (Islam, 2020). In addition, work from home requires reliance on private infrastructure and communication among the colleagues becomes difficult for the employees.

Table 1
Positive and negative impact of work from home

Mostly positive	Mostly negative
Less commuting	Isolation from colleagues
More control over time	Less defined work-life boundaries
More autonomy	Higher need for self-discipline
Less office-related distractions	Reliance on private infrastructure
More comfortable environment	Communication difficulties with colleagues
More flexibility with domestic tasks	

Factors that influence remote working environment include share of computer facilities, internet access at home, family demographics, level of comfort at home, and staff level generated through video conferencing or online tools. According to Rozman and Cancer (2022), COVID-19 has increased the flexibility and remote working capabilities of employees but has taken a toll on their daily work patterns. People faced obesity and health issues as the main concern that affected their personal lives while doing remote work. For example, Shi and Wang (2022) state that working from home has many drawbacks and could create disruptions and even health issues for people working from remote locations. Nadiv (2022) states that effect of COVID-19 pandemic resulted in flexible employment relationships and changing the career prospects of the young graduates. The lockdown motivated people to embrace online remote working and use digital tools that helped them to cope with remote working issues. Collaborative platforms and video conferencing tools helped employers and employees to get maximum productivity during the remote working hours. Tech savvy tools like MS teams and Google meet were productive software applications that helped the employees and increased their productivity. However, it is observed that most of the software applications and the IT firms benefited from the pandemic. Retail and manufacturing sector were the highest affected sectors due to the current pandemic restrictions.

Analytical Framework

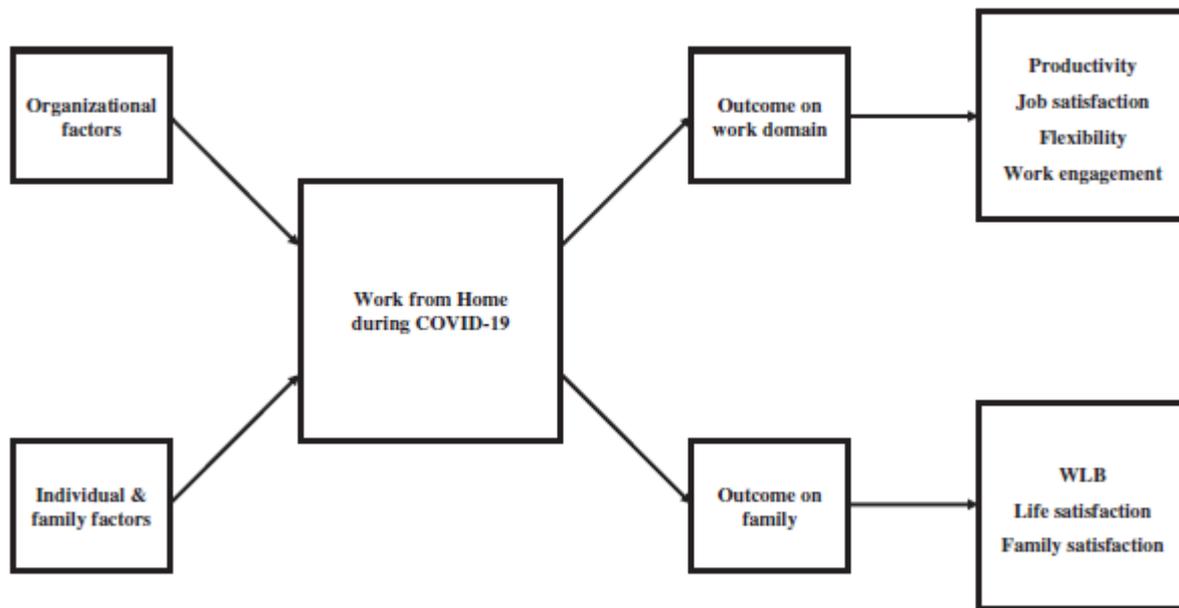


Figure 1: Analytical framework

Khan, Aslam, Asad, Oad and Almusharraf (2022) states that work from home during COVID-19 were based on organizational factors as well as the individual and family factors. The organizational factors were mainly focusing on the hierarchical framework of the workplace. The individual and family factors are pertaining to age, family size, demographics, educational background, etc. The consequences of work from home during the pandemic are based on outcomes on work domain and outcomes on families. The outcomes on work domain include job satisfaction (Javed et al., 2020), flexibility, and work engagement activities. Outcomes pertaining to the family refer to work life balance, life satisfaction and family satisfaction levels (Hossain et al., 2018).

Self-determination theory

Marzban et al (2021) states that one of the key theories that mentions why people have adapted very quickly to changes of work from home concept is the self-determination theory as reflected in the table below. The theory of self-determination reflects into the employees as how they are motivated towards working from home and excel during the period of remote working. The theory of self-determination recommends that the individuals can be intrinsic or extrinsically motivated towards doing work from home rather than physically visiting the office and doing their work. Employees of any business organization wishes some internal and personal motivational factors that will help them to excel at their work force.

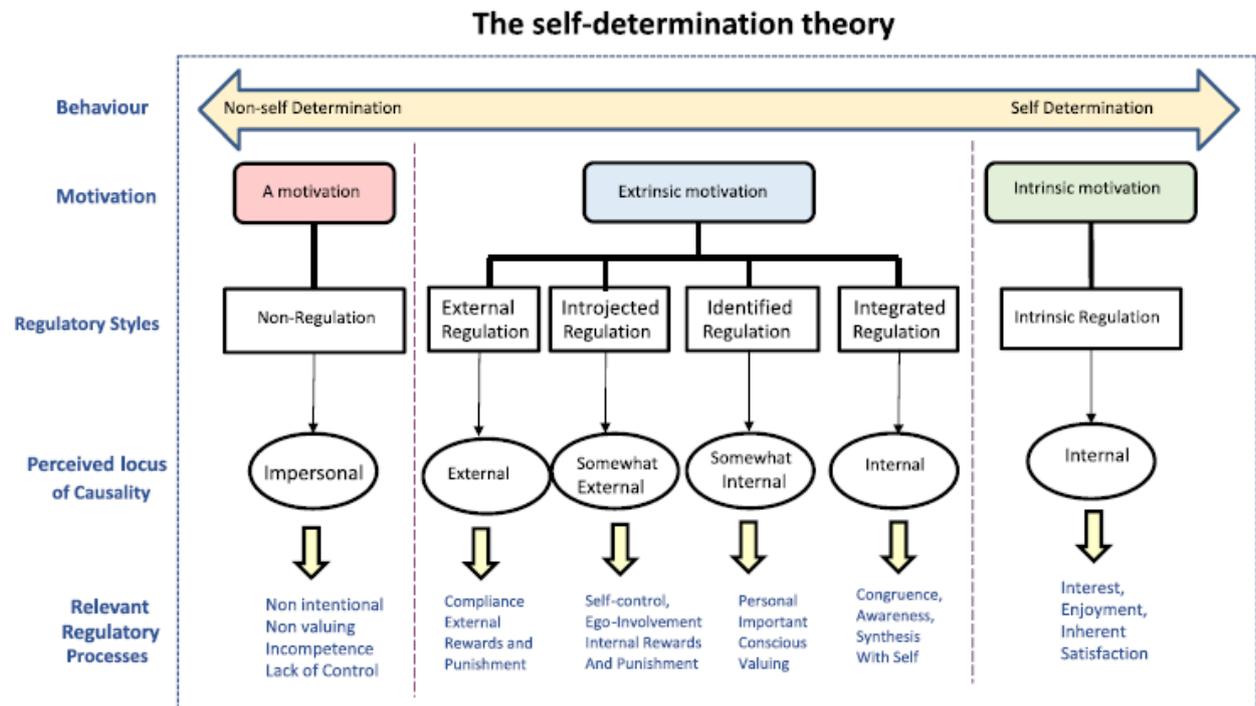


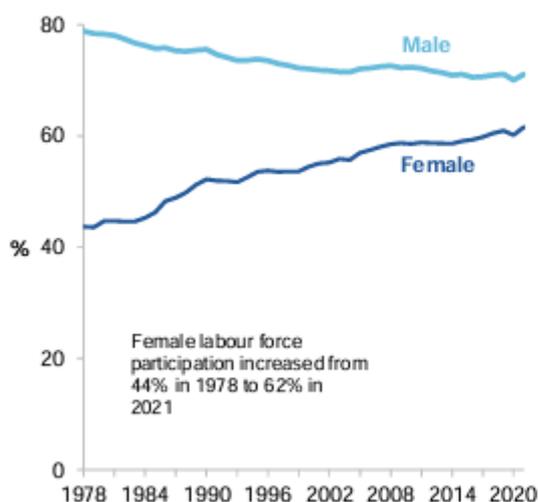
Figure 2: Self-determination theory

The factors that are reflected in the self-determination theory include behavior, motivation, regulatory styles, perceived locus of causality and relevant regulatory processes.

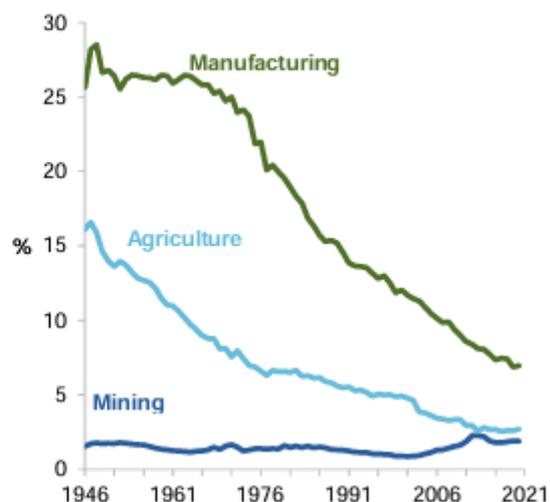
Secondary Data

The below mentioned figure highlights that the female labor force participation has increased since 1978 till 2020 pre-Covid era. This indicates that females are also contributing towards the overall labor market, and they are also a part of work from home concept. Manufacturing industry has the maximum decline in the share of total employment whereas agriculture sector has also seen decrease in the market share. Service industry and mining industry is least affected from the work from home concept.

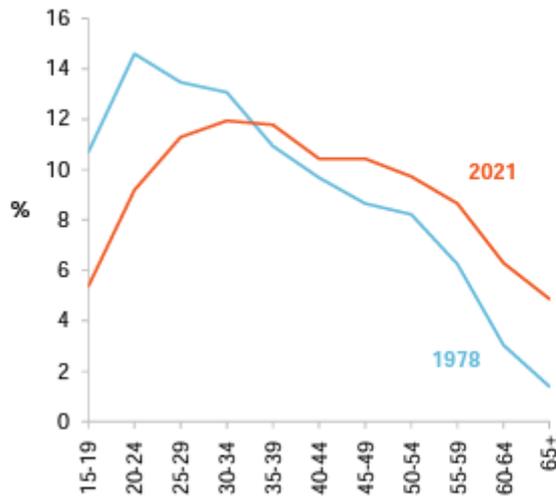
a. Increasing female labour force participation



b. Declining manufacturing share of total employment



c. The ageing of the workforce



d. Increasing work from home^a

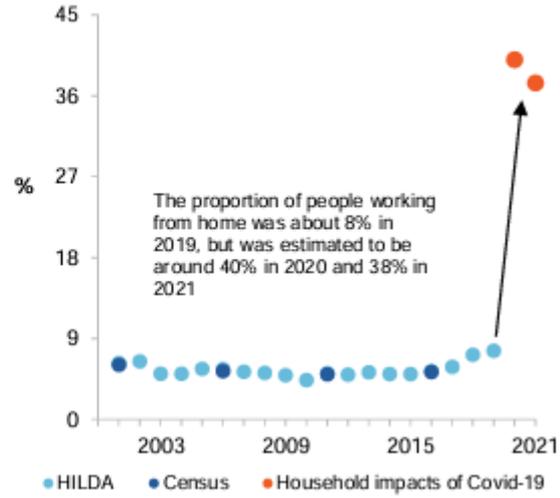
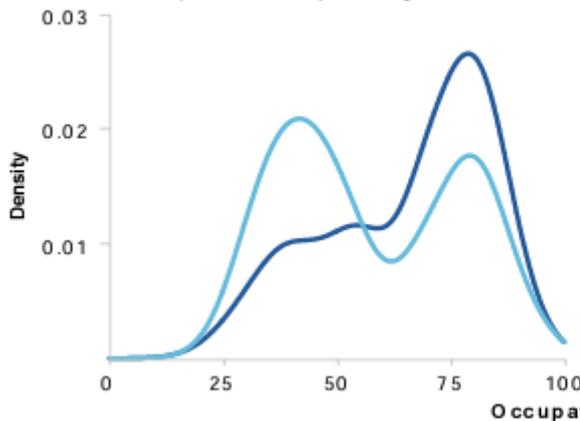


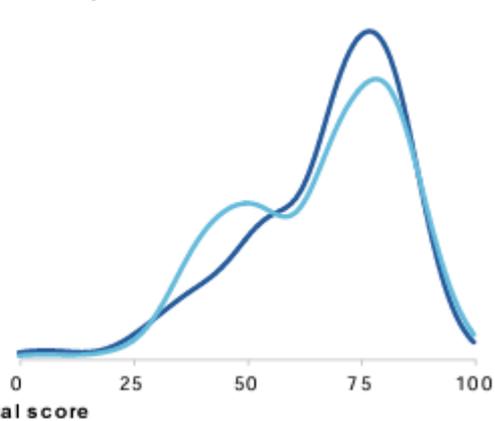
Figure 3: Secondary data

The ageing of workforce has increased from 60-64 years to 65+ years. It reflects that people are working even at their older age. In addition the proportion of people working from home was 8% in 2019 but this was increased to 40% in 2020 and was 38% in 2021. This reflects that work from home culture has seen a boon during 2020 and 2021 pandemic era.

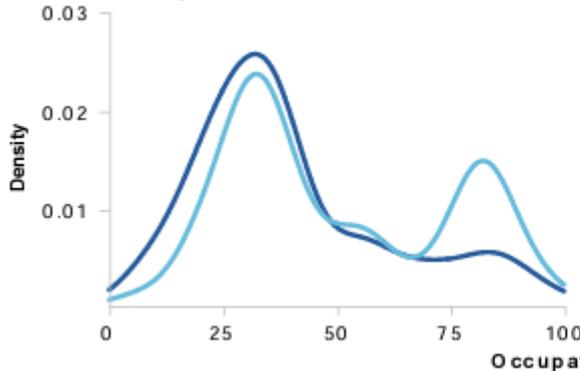
a. People who could potentially work from home



b. People who did work from home



c. People who can not work from home



d. People who did not work from home

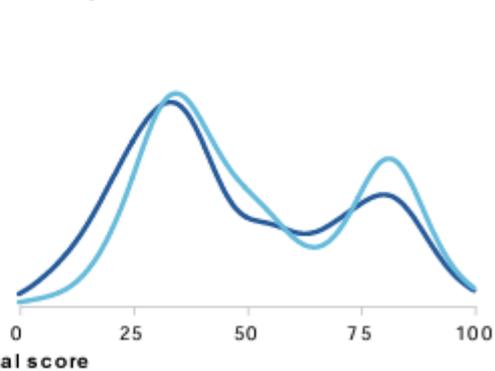


Figure4: Occupational score

Research Methodology

The researcher has done an online survey during the pandemic lockdown and shared online via MS forms tool. The survey questionnaire is the mix of multiple - choice quantitative questions and open - ended qualitative questions. This helped the researcher to collect the data and subsequently transfer it to MS excel. Further analysis was done with the help of graphical and statistical presentation. The main participants of the survey were based on the employees who were working from home and therefore are appropriate for responding the issues and challenges of the remote working. The survey reflected exploratory research that was aimed to gain insights into the respondent's adoption and familiarisation to the work from home culture. There were three hypotheses for the research:

H1: There is a positive relation between the adaptability of work from home and features like age, education level, experience of homeworking, device capability, speed of internet connection, and software features.

H2: There is a positive relation between the adaptability of remote working with the mentioned challenges including distractions (these distractions include childcare, snacking, checking news frequently, and risk of redundancy), lack of resources (and lack of resources include poor internet, lack of access to necessary documents, lack of printing facilities, lack of suitable space at home, lack of lab facilities, lack of opportunity to be on site to do technical work) and wellbeing concerns (and wellbeing concerns include lack of face to face communication, being lonely, lack of physical exercise).

H3: External and home related challenges will result in less enjoyment and motivation of remote working. (these external factors are childcare, poor internet reliability or speed, unhealthy snacking, lack of access to necessary documents, lack of printing facilities, lack of discipline in respect work or family, a lack of informal discussions, a lack of IT support, a lack of suitable space at home, being lonely, checking news frequently, lack of face to face communication, lack of lab facilities, risk of redundancy, lack of physical exercise, lack of opportunity to be on site to get technical work).

The data was collected based on the MS forms software application, and the survey link was sent to the employees of various sectors and demographics. Once the responses were received, they were transferred to MS excel for further analysis and interpretation.

Respondents

A total of 212 people gave the respondents, and these were collected through MS forms software application. Among the respondents, 50.5% were males and 49.5% were females. The age of the respondents was from 25 - 34 (42%), 35 - 44 (22.16%), 45 - 54 (17.9%), 18 - 24 (10.8%) and 55 - 65 (6.7%).

Results

With relation to the work sector of the respondents, most of the respondents were from the education and industry related employees. However, other sectors of the respondents include civil servants, commercial and trading, financial and legal, nonprofit organization, SMEs, transportation, utilities and publishing and translations. A wide variety of respondents has helped the researcher to include a thorough scope of analysis and interpretation.

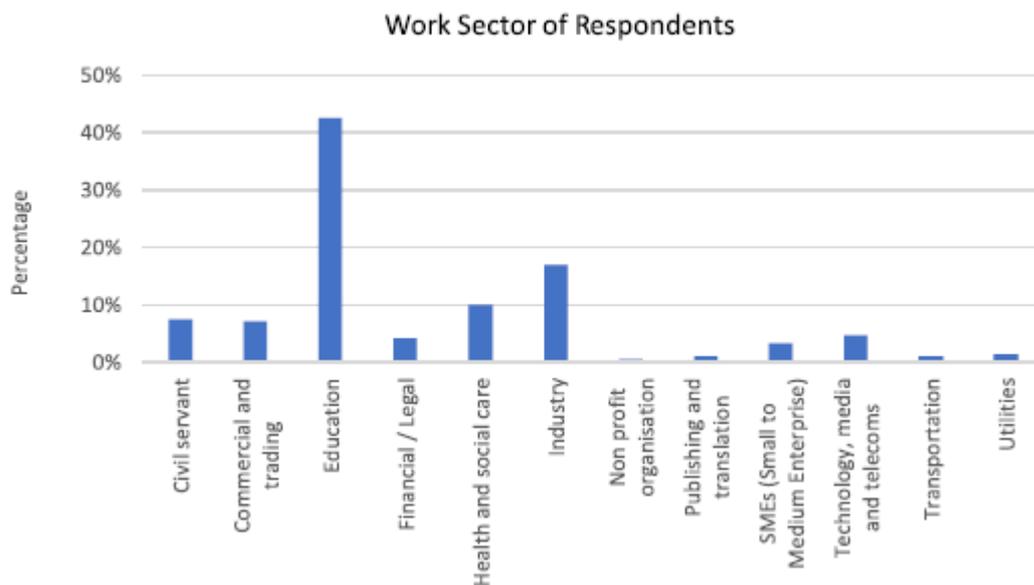


Figure 5: Work sector of respondents

In terms of software application used during the remote working, most of the respondents replied that they used MS teams’ software. This is usually the best software as most of the computers and their operating systems are also provided by Microsoft Company. This has provided an edge to the Microsoft Company. Secondly, respondents used skype for businesses and zoom meeting software applications for their remote work from home operations. Apparently, it is identified that MS teams, skype and zoom are the best software applications for remote working for individuals as well as business organizations. In addition, WhatsApp application, google hangouts (google teams) and WebEx are other software applications that were used by the respondents. It is evident that most of the software applications that are used are from US and this shows a better quality and operational efficiency of US business entities.

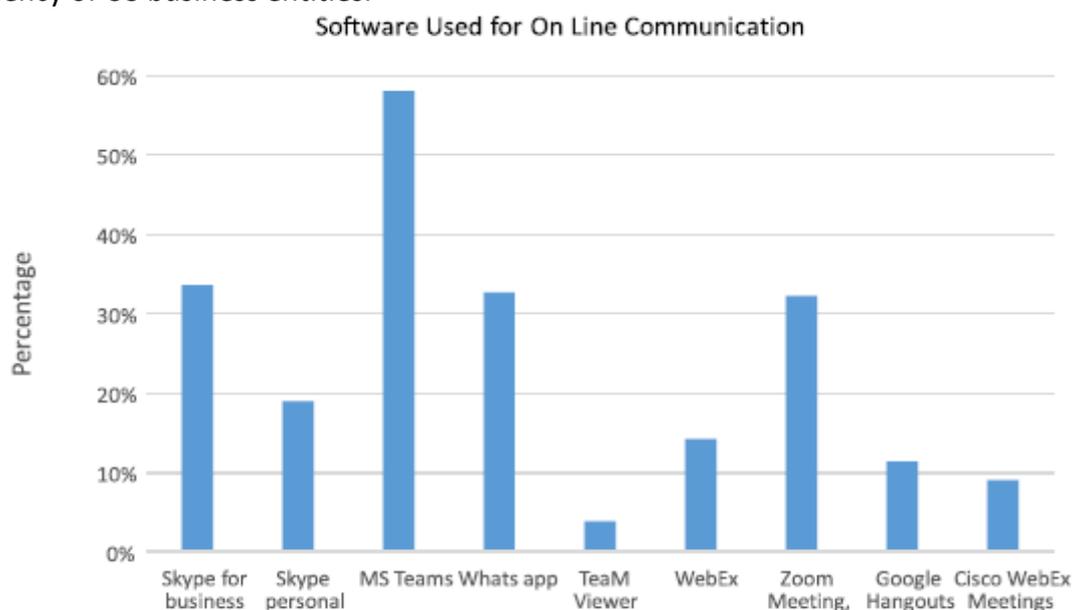


Figure 6: Software used

In terms of reasons for software selection, most of the respondents replied that my company / organization standards or recommended software application is the main reason. This reflects that employees are forced by their business entities to adapt to the work from home software application. It is reflected that the software application is mainly bought by business entities, and therefore their convenience and group - based operations are the main benchmarks for business entities. The role of business entities and their management is influential is the type of software application. Other aspects include the cost, software features, availability, experience, security, device capabilities, and speed of internet connection of the individuals as well as business organizations.

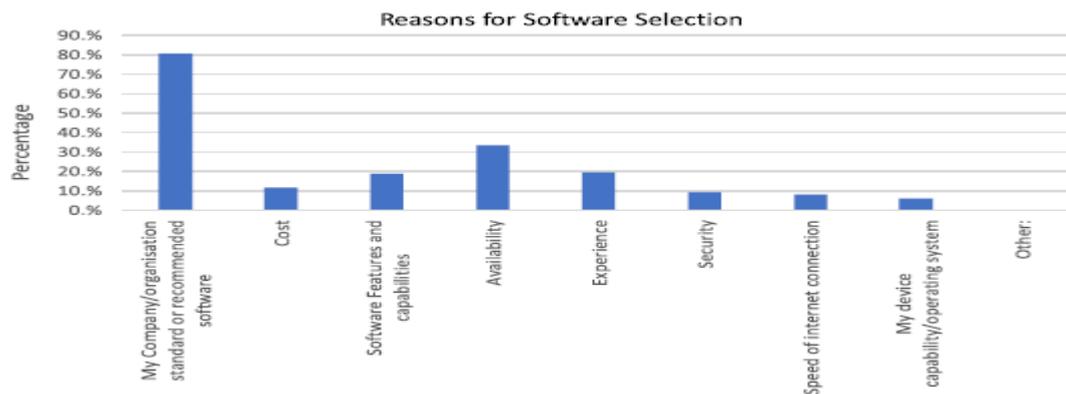


Figure 7: Reasons for software selection

The survey question pertaining challenges of working from home, the main issue identified by the respondents is lack of face - to - face communication and lack of eye contact with other employees in the business organization. In addition, other main issues identified are lack of informal discussions and advice, being lonely at home and lack of daily social life, and lack of physical exercising during the day. It is identified that working from home has the challenge at both personal as well as professional lives of the individuals.

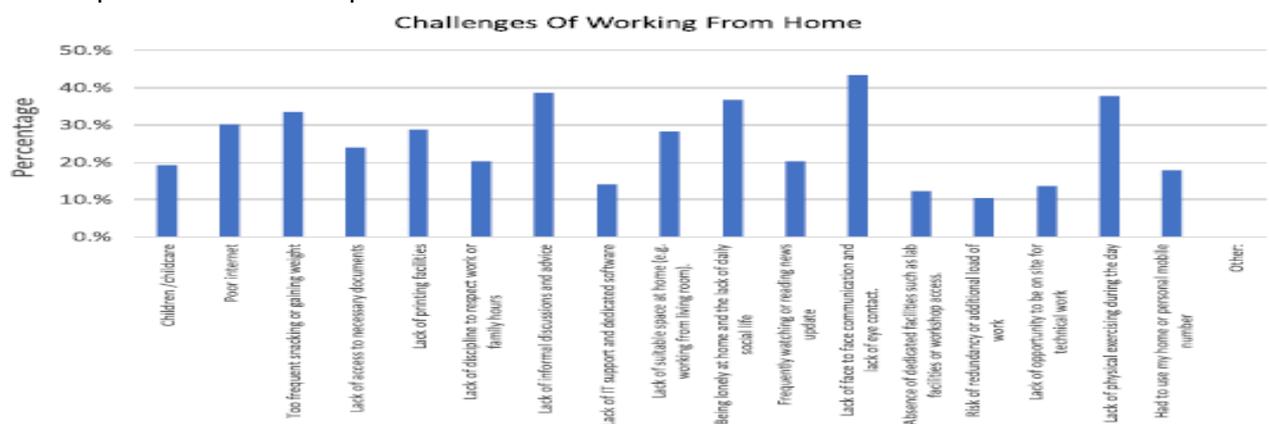


Figure 8: Challenges of work from home culture

In terms of benefits of working from home, it is identified that less travel time is the most preferred feature of working from home. In addition, other features of working from home include less cost of travel and subsistence, more time with the family and comfortable clothing. The respondents were of the opinion that they feel quite cheaper to work from home because of cost saved through travel and the time saved during the travel. However, it is observed that the employees should be highly motivated if ever they want to make it more effective and efficient.

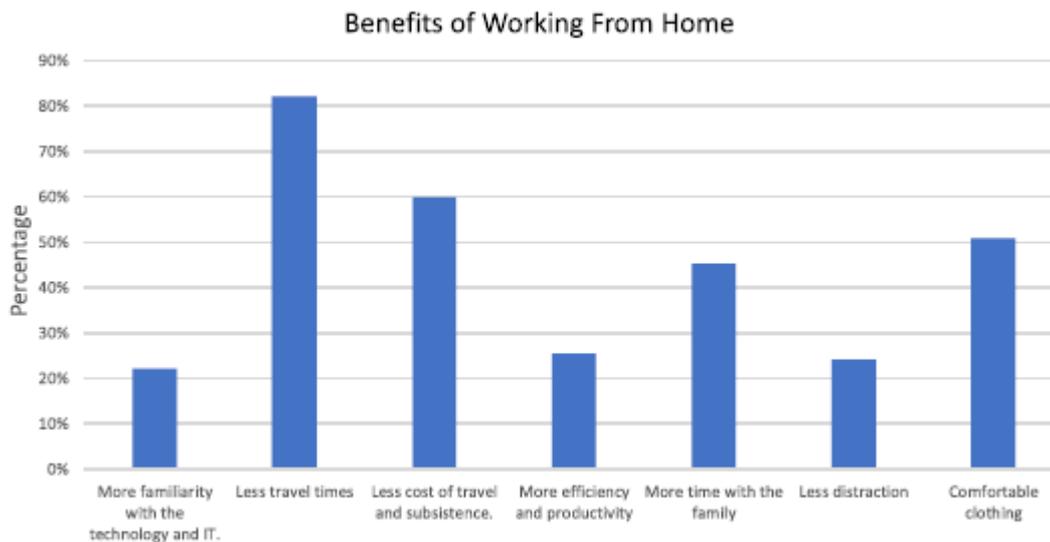


Figure 9: Benefits of work from home culture

Reflections

Prodanova and Kocarev (2022) states that it is evident that employers and employees are adapting to the culture of working from home whenever they feel deem fit for their workplace environment. However, the role of the software application is key for their overall productivity and efficiency. There are both pros as well as cons for the work from home concept. The main opportunities from work from home concept are reduced travelling time and reduced transportation costs for both the employees as well as the employers. The issues identified were a lack of social activities, of face-to-face meetings and hierarchical discussion. Employees working from home have also faced serious health issues and motivational drawbacks. Their physical activities were low while using only a room or chair for most of their business activities. Ozcelik and Sevinc (2022) states that being lonely at home was also identified as a negative aspect for work from home concept. Primecz (2022) states that on - line meetings provided an excellent tool to share documents and work on projects with several people with reduced travelling time and higher productivity. Wong et al (2021) argued that that on - line working styles are not suitable for hands - on work and only limited days of the year can work be done at house for operations such as writing reports of field visits. Viererbl, Denner and Koch (2022); Hossain et al (2018) argues that employers who are responsible for their employees with young children reported difficulties in utilising the working hours during the day when they had lot of work pressure and operational challenges. Ullah et al (2022) underlines that the main opportunity for remote working is that people have learnt new software and presentation skills, and this could enable permanent culture change in organisations. Anh et al (2022) argue that employees reported the lack of a healthy office desk and space to allow healthy working conditions, but the author's findings have reflected that some employers are providing office furniture or allowing employees to take

their office facilities home with them. In addition, according to Mehta (2022), the theory of self-determination is useful was useful in knowing how employees managed to adjust and adapt to the rapidly to the conditions for working from home.

Conclusion

This study was conducted for analysing the effect and implications of working from home. It focused on the opportunities and challenges of working from home. An on-line survey was conducted to capture the information and the survey was used with the help of MS forms (MS teams) software application. The success of online survey itself shows that work from home has some efficiency and productivity. The main challenges are of a psychological nature such as being lonely and lack of daily face-to-face discussions and informal meetings. While a lack of physical activities in and the challenges of key factors such as childcare and workload management has been also identified. The main advantages of remote working were reduced travel time and cost which has made people more productive but has prevented effective work-home life boundaries being maintained for some.

Recommendations

- Maintain Regular Hours
- Create a morning routine
- Set Ground Rules with the people in your space
- Schedule Breaks
- Leave Home
- Do not hesitate to ask for what you need
- Keep a dedicated office space
- Maintain a separate phone number

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