

Unique challenges faced by Employees and Vendors under WFH scenario in the Offshore Software Development in India

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1. Introduction:

The Global Pandemic for Novel Corona Virus COVID-19 was unanticipated, unsolicited and shocking for all of us and it forced us to experience a new world that this generation had never experienced or even unheard in the recent past. The best and easiest way to combat Covid in early days was Social Distancing.

The severity and rapid pace of infection forced governments all over the globe to implement lockdown and stricter social distancing norms. It forced organizations' workforce to stay at home and work from home (WFH). As per By mid-April 2020, 59 countries had implemented telework for nonessential publicly employed staff" (ILO brief,2020, P. 1-2). India witnessed one of longest nationwide lockdown starting from 25th March, 2020 extended till 31st May, 2020. The unusual and unexpected working from home of this magnitude was the biggest change and created a paradigm shift in the way we use to live and work.

The Work From Home scenario proved quite effective. However it had some Advantages and Disadvantages for various stakeholders like Employees, Vendors, Organizations and Clients

2. Literature Review

1. Master of Science Thesis

- Topic: Is working from home good for work-life balance, stress, and productivity, or does it cause problems?
- Author: Christian Wiradendi Wolor, Ahmad Nurkhin, Yudin Citriadin
- Link: https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/74883923/HSSL202193237-249-libre.pdf?1637323841=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DIs_Working_from_Home_Good_for_Work_Life.pdf&Expires=1678700472&Signature=GIRkw1wTHHARe1CMvwIS TpdZ PIBB6F25dkJzZMelw-cJkrnO-zSSofQhgyf66E0JLRlanmmx82AC-4axRkE8FOhw0Jvuravtxx4Pe47E5ZCzutXnnd~TURF9ZdG1chksJt5SXIPIRbDH6rvGAdi4YurbJx5geWUeagOWSGZYOYtAGBG9SwkAzqRA~nXCw5yDWb84GBegKmn~yvjev9QddTiZwcWD7uPQ8vO6RhMDGE1tInW~jrICbdf4H5UVQ8Mompoy2MNvMbfpnqSEISpFVp0GkKZODjox9WKV3aa9ge3a8riQ5LUzzgZYbLF2cQ

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- Date: 25-Aug-21
 - The researcher did the analysis based on Questionnaire collected from 135 people WFH. The results of this study indicate that working from home has no influence on increasing employee productivity. Therefore, this research will have an impact on company policies and strategies regarding increasing productivity, one of which is the collaboration between working from home and working from an office. This research is limited to employees who work from home in Jakarta. Due to various restrictive rules that apply in Indonesia, future research is expected to reach broader areas and evaluate the results of allowing employees to split their working week between home and office.
2. LinkedIn Article:
- Topic: 5 reasons why WFH model will collapse in India, soon
 - Author: Saro Velrajan: Chief Strategy Officer at Ginkos India
 - Link: https://in.linkedin.com/in/svelrajan?trk=article-ssr-frontend-pulse_main-author-card
 - Date: 4-Apr-22
 - In his article on LinkedIn Mr. Saro Velrajan starts with new obsession of Indians with WFH. Furthermore he discusses the problems faced by typical corporate employees while he works from home. In the later part of the article he suggests how and where the WFH model will work better
3. Working from home during COVID-19 and its impact on Indian employees' stress and creativity
- Topic: Working from home during COVID-19 and its impact on Indian employees' stress and creativity
 - Author: Akanksha Jaiswal & C. J. Arun
 - Link: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41291-022-00202-5>
 - Date: 10-Oct-22
- The authors in their research paper explored the impact of WFH on employees during the lockdown. They conducted interviews of 24 employees across manufacturing and technology-enabled sectors in India and analysed the data using Gioia's methodology. They found that service sector employees reported current work-related stress, whereas manufacturing sector employees reported future-related stress. Interestingly, they discovered sparks of creativity among employees during this period either towards nurturing themselves (technology-enabled sector) or towards solving long-pending organizational issues (manufacturing sector). Interestingly they also found that these creativity sparks were self-initiated. The study was novel as it explores the impact of large-scale WFH enforced during crisis.

4. Master of Science Thesis
 - Topic: The Future of Work is Hybrid
 - Author: Dahlia Baker
 - Link: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1573134/FULLTEXT02.pdf>
 - Date: Jun-21
 - The research is done in Swedish Transport Administration. The research based on Questionnaire on topics like remote work statistics like Gender and age distribution, Remote work employee perspective, Remote work managerial perspective, Mental and physical health, Remote work during the pandemic, Time and cost savings of remote work etc. The result shows the Swedish Transport Administration as well as their employees saves significant amount of money while they work 2 days remotely

5. Article in Harvard Business Review (HBR)
 - Topic: Figure Out the Right Hybrid Work Strategy for Your Company
 - Author: Mark Mortensen
 - Link: <https://hbr.org/2021/06/figure-out-the-right-hybrid-work-strategy-for-your-company>
 - Date: 15-Jun-21
 - The article starts with discussion of the author with various many executives of the corporates. He then draws attention towards 3 conversations namely Productivity, Staffing and culture. The author then tries to summarize the problem statement faced by many executives over Hybrid work model. Lastly the author proposes three steps based on his research. These include Step 1: Surface the differences and recognize the value in each position; Step 2: Focus on integrative solutions and finally step 3: Revisit

6. Working Paper 22-063 in Harvard Business School:
 - Topic: Is Hybrid Work the Best of Both Worlds? Evidence from a FieldExperiment
 - Author: Prithwiraj (Raj) Choudhury, Tarun Khanna, Christos A. Makridis and Kyle Schirmann
 - Link: https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%2520Files/22-063_639195cc-e7b5-47d3-9281-62d192c5b916.pdf
 - Date: 24-Mar-22
 - The researchers start with study of Daily Patterns in Remote Work and Emails and Examining the Role of the Sender and Recipient of Emails. Then they move on to Sentiment Analysis, Robustness Over Productivity Results and External Validity Using Gallup's COVID Panel. The team then studies the Relationship Between Work Novelty and the Intensity of Working-from-Home, Alternative WFH Classifications

7. Research by McKinsey & Company:

- Topic: New research details what empowered employees love about hybrid work models and the risks to diversity, equity, and inclusion if managers get the evolving flexible workplace wrong.
- Author: Bonnie Dowling, Drew Goldstein, Michael Park, and Holly PriceSchirmann
- Link: <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/hybrid-work-making-it-fit-with-your-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-strategy>
- Date: Apr-22
- The article starts with stating the overall observation that companies/employers eagerly hope employees will return to office and employees opposite to this for reasons including health, family, and the work–life balance. Article confirms that Hybrid model is here to stay and hence needs a lot of attention. The article shows that pre pandemic 53% wanted to work on site however post pandemic this number has shrank down significantly to 25% is by more than half! The article shows statistics that younger employees are even willing to leave the job if not allowed to work remotely at least for more than 50% in the week. The article furthermore discusses on related issues of Work Life Support, Team Building and Mutual Respect and how these are important to make Hybrid Model a win-win situation for employees and employers.

3. Objectives:

- To find unique challenges faced by employees working under WFH scenario in the Offshore Software Development in India
- To find unique challenges faced by vendors working under WFH scenario in the Offshore Software Development in India
- To analyse the impact of WFH scenario on the productivity of employees and organization
- Suggestions to employees and vendors about effectively handling the challenges

4. Research Methodology:

- The Research was conducted with 52 participants which included an even blend of employees and vendors working in Indian Software Development companies specific to Offshore Software Development projects while Working From Home (WFH). Data was collected with the help of Google Forms. A set of qualitative, quantitative and open ended questions were included in the questionnaire.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

- While analysing the data I found below observations and pain points by the employees and vendors:

WFH Advantages for Employees and Vendors:

- Less Commute Stress
- Time Saving
- Fuel Saving
- Location Independence
- Improved Inclusivity
- A Customizable Office

WFH challenges for Employees and Vendors:

- No Dedicated working space
- No Work Life Differentiation
- Same Environment Fatigue
- Continuous switch between household and office responsibilities
- Less Concentration
- Sound pollution
- Air pollution

Unique challenges faced by Employees and Vendors under WFH scenario in the Offshore Software Development in India:

- Continuous Bandwidth issues:
 - The broadband and optical fibre internet network is increasing very fast in India
 - However in rural areas even in Tier 2 & Tier 3 cities, the broadband hasn't reached yet
 - If it has reached the connection is not so stable
 - The restoration service though getting better is still not up to the mark
 - Hence the network outage issues are frequently faced.
- Low internet speed especially in Rural areas:
 - The places where broadband and optical fibre haven't reached yet, the employees and vendors have to depend on dial up or mobile networks for the internet
 - This has significant less internet speed
 - The internet speed is absolutely crucial in WFH especially in offshoresoftware development
 - The major issue is that the internet speed and connectivity is not in the hands of employees & Vendors doing Work From Home
- Electricity issues:
 - This is one of the major issues which is faced
 - In most of the states across India except Metro cities, the electricity issues still persist in the form of unplanned power cuts or planned

- activities or even unstable voltage
- Unstable voltage i.e. voltage fluctuations severely damage the electronic devices like Laptops, computers, mobile phones, routers etc.
- As we can understand, electricity is Single Point Of Failure (SPOF) i.e. if this fails, everything fails
- Again, this constraint is not in the hands of Employees or vendors
- As they are WFH, even the organization cannot provide the uninterrupted power supply

- Mobile Network:
 - The mobile phone is one of the key factors in effective communication amongst the team sitting remotely
 - The low mobile network cause difficulty in communication with the team sitting remotely
 - The mobile phones are often have to be used for committing the codes and using project management tools
 - Also mobile phone's internet serves as a backup internet in case the broadband fails
 - Hence a low network makes the communication a real problematic

- Security and Accessibility issues:
 - These are the major issues faced by employees and vendors WFH in Offshore Software Development
 - Office computers are secured using softwares and the access is given to client machines through secured channels
 - These channels are secured using techniques like Firewalls, IP approvals, 2 factor authentication, 3 factor authentication etc.
 - However in WFH scenario, the employees and vendors loose these access and are locked out as they are either using personal compute or persona network for doing these tasks
 - This results in the critical issues like:
 - Lock out
 - Denial of Service (DoS)
 - Not able to access client machines which are remote (i.e. not in the office premises)
 - Not able to commit the code

- Access to support:
 - Because of WFH, the employees and vendors doing work like coding, testing are not able to get their work reviewed easily by the seniors
 - Seniors also face problems in checking the work
 - Employees and vendors face also face the issues in accessing the support from other teams as even they are WFH

- Time Zone issues:
 - This is another unique issue faced by WFH employees and vendors in offshore software development
 - As offshore software development team always works with out of India clients, the problem of time is always an issue
 - This issue is escalated in case of intercontinental projects
 - For teams that have members across the globe, i.e. teams from multiple continents work over same project, managing time zones is a real challenge
 - Continuous off time zone working can deteriorate the physical and mental health of employees and vendors

6. Suggestions and Recommendations

- The Work From Home model has pros and cons for every stakeholder involved
- While WFH model continues, the companies must be in a constant touch with employees and vendors

7. Conclusions

- Unique challenges are faced by Employees and Vendors under WFH scenario in the Offshore Software Development in India as compared to other industries
- The ideal way forward would be a blend of WFH and WFO model i.e. HybridWork Model
- A more systematic study needs to be done and a framework / working model needs to be developed specifically for “Hybrid Work model in Offshore Software Development in India”