

CONCERNS OF WORK FROM HOME: THE NEW NORMAL

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ABSTRACT

When the lockdown (a situation where people are advised to stay at home without getting exposed to other people for restricting the spread of deadly virus COVID-19)was announced in India in March 2020, many companies chose Work From Home (WFH), a way in which the employees work staying at home as a way to carry on with the unstoppable work. When 2021 came, COVID-19 did not allow the companies to physical mode of working so they chose Hybrid model. But by the end of 2021 many of IT companies are choosing to physical mode of working than remote working. WFH can be one of the alternatives for women empowerment if it works in right direction. This paper tries to analyze the various concerns which arose due to WFH mode of working. Also if these concerns are taken in consideration then this can bring new direction to more women in work force.

Keywords: *Work from Home, Internet, Office, Family, Relationships.*

Introduction

The pandemic situation due to spread of COVID-19 has changed the working style. The world was striving hard to working style. Offices had come to homes and it had ended up with lot of challenges. The first case of infection due to virus COVID-19 was reported in India, in Kerala on 30th January, 2020. The Government of India came into action. But when the cases of COVID-19 began rising, the central and state authorities were working in overdrive to try and curb the spread. The Indian Centre for Medical Research (ICMR) had assured that the virus was still in phase 2 of transmission, which gave indication of not having local transmission yet. But, when the cases rose to 500, the only alternative left was lockdown. So the Prime Minister Narendra Modi had put India into complete lockdown in the country for 21 days in first phase on 24th March 2020 and 19 days on 14th April 2020 in continued phase for safety and security of people. Lockdown continued for many days after in various phases and in various manners. Lockdown is a situation where people have to stay where they are and are not supposed to exit the building until the orders for coming out comes from the government officials. This situation left people with a challenge to work from home. The second wave came in India in April 2021 and once again the situation in India lead the again with no alternative than to work from home. To overcome the various health hazards the companies especially IT industries setting up goals to work from home as an alternative not only for short span but for longer span. This will bring the hybrid culture of working in to existence.

Work from home describes work being done remotely, instead of at an office. The acronym "WFH" is mostly used to speak about this concept. Indian Companies particularly IT sector, education eased for remote working after the lockdown was announced. When lockdown was announced many organizations like TCS (Tata Consultancy Services) made sure that they have transitioned their office to work from home. Not only this, they will continue even after the pandemic is over, 75 percent of the employees will work from home till 2025. TCS with its workforce 4.48 lakh globally are to discard their 20 year old model and making an intake of new model i.e Work from Home. The IT giant is framing for a 25/25 model which means lesser office space required and lesser infrastructure. TCS could be the perhaps of many companies mulling remote working. In-fact the IT Giants have approached the State/central government to change the labour laws while WFH. This is changing with the progression of digital transformation. With that they were denied with comfortable desk chairs, monitors at eye level, external keyboard. The new transit WFH did not provide many of these comforts leading to injuring their health. Not only this, this new culture has brought at some point a feeling of loneliness among the employees.

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From Factories to Cubicles to Wi-Fi

Remote working is not a new phenomenon. It did not start overnight. Working remotely was there long before downtown offices and commuting even existed. Before industrial revolution, most of the work was done from homes. Carpenters, goldsmith, potters skilled blacksmiths set up their shops at their residence. Even today these artisans and craft men work from their homes and sell goods at their door step. It was only after industrial revolution which brought automation of work and lead to creating the factories. Large scale production required huge machines which the houses could not suffice, lead to development of factories and to manage that people started putting up offices. Now people travel to offices and manage their work from offices which are present in various cities to promote the factory product (anonymous, 2020).

Due to industrial boom it gave rise to corporate headquarters, larger office spaces in big cities and aisles of drab cubicles in offices. The 8-hour workday was also born during the same time of development of corporate and offices. Computers and technological development has flagged the way for modern day remote workers to work from their homes. With the gadgets in their hands and Internet connectivity at their door step has made their fingers to the talking, connecting their homes to World wide Web. So the internet and public WiFi turned the workplace tide yet again and now again going back to homes i.e WFH. Now the employees can work with their office laptop sitting at home or at coffee shop. Not only that their smartphone with the facility of Internet is helping them to access to cloud-based applications which let them do everything they would in their cubicle... outside the office. Now virtual employees' work all hours of the day and can stay in touch with their coworkers from all over the world thanks to the internet. And that's just one reason why remote work continues to be so popular (anonymous, 2020). The COVID-19 has changed the way we worked all these years. The transition to working from home was extremely fast for lot of companies during COVID-19. But now, most of IT companies are preparing their employees to call them back to office. The concern is why this WFH model cannot to put into working in spite of them declaring to be working with hybrid model till 2025(Tata consultancy).

Company Name	Decision taken after September, 2021
Infosys	This is IT giant Infosys, which has almost 2.6 employees, is now all set to call back their employees, keeping the threat of the third way in mind.
HCL	Indian multinational information technology services and consultancy company, HCL is following in the footsteps to end WFH and call its employees back to the office. But before that they made sure that all the employees are vaccinated. Company have over 1.7 lakh employees
TCS	At the start of COVID-19 pandemic in India, the company declared 25-25 model. But now they want to call 80 percent of their employees back to office. Again before that they are checking on vaccination of employees. As per TCS CEO, Rajesh Gopinathan, about 90 % of its employees are vaccinated. "Depending on the COVID-19 third wave, sometime towards the end of 2021 or early next year, we will get 70-80 percent of our workforce back in office,"Rajesh said. The number of employees are more than 5 lakh
WIPRO	The company is having around 2lakh employees and 55 % is vaccinated according to the chairman RishadPremji. "After 18 long months, our leaders @Wipro are coming back to the office starting tomorrow (twice a week). All fully vaccinated, all ready to go - safely and socially distanced," Premji said in a tweet. In another tweet, he shared a video that show the COVID-19-related safety protocols, including temperature checks and QR code scans, that have been put in place at the Wipro office.
NAGARRO	The IT and digital product engineering firm, Nagarro has reopened its Gurgaon office with all Covid protocols in place. However, it is optional for employees to choose where they wish to work from. "After 18 months of working from home, we can finally say something that many Nagarrians have long been waiting for! Yes, we are reopening the Nagarro office in Gurgaon, India. Of course, with all Covid protocols in place," said the company via a LinkedIn post
NASSCOM	An Indian non-governmental trade association and advocacy group, Nasscom followed other big giant companies and adopted a hybrid work model with less than 30% occupancy. DebjaniGhosh, President at Nasscom said on Twitter, "After 1.5 yrs of remote work, our key offices open today for hybrid work with strict covid protocols. Few key steps we are following, Less than 30% in office, Contactless solutions in washrooms, cafe etc, Improved ventilation, Strict covidprotocols, Vaccination."
APPLE	Apple is another big IT giant that follows the footsteps of other organizations by using a hybrid work model and asked its employees to come back to the office from this month. In hybrid style employees need to work from office work for three days a week. The hybrid model was already proposed by Apple CEO Tim Cook back in June 2021.

Source: Indiatimes.com

But the question arises, why this WFH model is not fully functional. Then the answer is laws which govern in Indian scenario. There are many debates on the need for regulation as WFH increasingly becomes the way forward. There are many countries that have previously passed the laws stressing on the importance of the right to rest and leisure and Portugal was the most recent one to do so.

Let us check out the laws which most of the countries govern when they have WFH mode.

Countries	Mandates
Portugal	Portugal recently passed a law, which is popularly known as Right to Rest. In this law the boss is banned from sending work emails and texts to employees after work hours. It is an era of digital nomads. In Portugal, this law is applicable especially to people who are working from home and for the companies which do not have more than 10 members on their payroll. They are also offering temporary digital nomad visas, which will help in attracting people to visit them and stay there, and take care of work given which is mostly done through teleconferences and does not require physical presence in an office space.
France	It was way back in 2017 when another European nation, France, implemented a mandate that allowed working professionals the 'right to disconnect'. According to this, employees are entitled to not respond to any correspondence or texts after their working hours. This has been hailed by many HR researchers as a good step towards ensuring quality work-life balance. Neighbouring countries Italy and Spain soon followed France and stressed on the importance of disconnecting. However, Spain did add caveats on workers' function after work hours depending on the nature of their work and assignments.
Ireland	Earlier this year, Ireland also stressed on the importance of disconnecting from work. The Irish law ensured that this would be done in accordance with the working hours for those doing international business. The law asks managers to not just set these hours to work and disconnect, according to the nature of their work, but also look into the problems faced by anyone who finds it hard to disconnect from work. 31% of the global workforce will be working remotely, as opposed to 19% in 2019, says a recent Gartner study. Another study suggests that in the United States, around 53% of the workforce will be working from home.
India	In India in 2018, 'Right to Disconnect' bill was introduced in parliament that no disciplinary action can be taken if the employees do not respond to work related queries once their shift has ended. The bill could not be passed as it was a private member's bill. But now it is time to rethink and nomad working is new normal and can be a boon for workers especially women/.

Source: Times of India

Since the labour laws were amended to suit IT sector WFH. Central Government had ostensibly given consent in May 2020 and has advised IT Giants to give blue print of Amendment of Labour Laws for suitable changes. This made amendment in Income tax to include expenses incurred at home. So it was the matter of time before Acts/Laws were crystallized.

WFH had come to stay and no more necessity for IT people to stay at Tier 1 or 2 cities. There were professionals who have taken loans and taken homes in major cities like Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Bangalore were facing double impact of inflation in cities as already can be seen with jacked up prices of vegetables, lower property rentals and small negligible reduction in existing home loans of around 2%. The properties may come under duress due to job loss or non-availability of rents. Forget buying houses from builder, as market was already flooded with resale and distress sales. Not only that working from home as increased the household expenditure like electricity bills as well.

A survey of 65 countries by Workplace Software developer Atlassian found that people across the world started found that that the WFH scenario has increased the working hours. When it comes to Indians, they were spending 32 minutes more than before. The study also indicated that while working remotely, people finished higher amount of work in the morning and evening while productivity dipped during the afternoon. This could indicate employees were taking advantage of the extra flexibility of WFH but that it could be encroaching on what have previously been free times. This shows how boundaries between home and office blurred during the pandemic (DhawanHimanshu 2020).

Conclusion

WFH is not a new phenomenon. Pandemic COVID-19 is very contagious and to beat the same, there is a need to be at home and work from home. It is giving women to work at home and also manage her house hold chores without comprising her social and family life. The work from home after COVID-19 has opened up a new horizon for the market and now the companies are rethinking about their work culture. With the change in laws can bring this model into much workable scenario and will open new avenues for women especially in Indian scenario when a women life is still in transition period (creating a balance between work and home life). Even today a women has to take care of household activities and then professional life sets other challenges that are more if the laws which govern the scenario are not

clear. A report titled "Changing landscape of work" which surveyed 170 companies including 40 % from Gujarat states that 43 % companies across the state have already embraced the hybrid work model by identifying job roles which can be permanently shifted to remote location roles. A new market opening means the women who were not able to explore their talent in the field of market can do by sitting at home and at one click away. Thanks to Internet which is opening new avenues to women for the jobs to explore the innate talents of women other than household chores. Companies with strong HR policies and bringing various awareness programmes can take this role a long way.

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