

A STUDY ON PROFICIENCY OF EMPLOYEES TO WORK FROM HOME

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ABSTRACT

"Stay Home Stay Safe" is the buzz phrase which has gained immense popularity since March 2020 due to the outbreak of COVID-19. However, it is important to make stay at home comfortable for which employees should be assured of their pay. The best way to ensure this is by enabling employees to work from home (WFH). WFH however, is possible only for those work which does not need an office environment. It is imperative to ensure that employees are also capable of discharging their official duties staying at home.

This descriptive research, based on primary data collected from 354 employees, has attempted to assess proficiency of employees in working from home. The study has revealed that employees are self-motivated and willing to work from home without supervision. They are quite comfortable to communicate with their peers digitally. However, they are apprehensive about working for long hours at home. Elder employees with greater experience and willing to spend long hours at work, possess greater capability to work from home without supervision while employees possessing higher educational qualifications possess better proficiency to communicate with peers digitally.

Keywords: Work from home, employees, proficiency, long working hours, experience of working from home.

Introduction

"Stay Home Stay Safe" is the buzz phrase which has gained immense popularity since March 2020 due to the outbreak of COVID-19. However, it is important to make stay at home comfortable for which employees should be assured of their pay. The best way to ensure this is by enabling employees to work from home.

COVID-19 has disrupted normal life of almost all. Many private sector employees have lost their job totally, while others are working for half of their normal pay. The latter are luckier than the former and the concept of work from home has come to their rescue.

Shiseido of Japan has made its 8,000 employees to work from home. Many popular British firms such as OMD, Crossrail and Chevron have utilised the concept of working from home to keep their

business going. However, not all firms can enjoy the concept as their business might not suit working from home. Firms with immense net worth and turnover such as Starbucks, Walmart and other giant firms engaged in businesses such as retailing, hospitality, hotel, real estate, automobiles and other large scale manufacturing cannot utilize the concept of working from home due to the nature of their business.

Working from home capacitates employees to discharge their official duties anywhere. Bureau of Labour Statistics of US has estimated that during 2018, 29% of US employees discharged their official duties from home while 47% of employees possessing higher educational qualifications of degree and above worked from home, suggesting that employees with higher educational qualifications are willing to work from home.

Positives of working from home

Any work which can be discharged using Internet can be performed anywhere and anytime. Good inter-connectivity between the employees' home and workplace can enable employees to efficiently discharge their official obligations anywhere without stress. This emphasises that working from home is fairly advantageous for employees on the following grounds:

1. Working from home eliminates employees travelling to office and back home. This is very good for the environment as carbon emission due to transport is avoided;
2. Flexibility in work timings is available for employees. They can work and take breaks at home whenever they wish to;
3. Employees need not injure their health of taking food and snacks from outside hotels as they can enjoy home prepared food throughout the day;
4. Employees may get more time to spend with their spouse and children;
5. If job-related pressure heats up, employees can take a break, walk around their home, spend some time with kids or television and get themselves free from the pressure and return to work with fresh vigour.

Shutterstock and Anna Johansson (2017) cites Gallup poll results revealing that only 9% of US employees worked from home during 1995 and this figure rose to 30% during 2007 and reached 37% during 2016 due to the following favourable conditions:

1. Improved technology making high speed Internet accessible to all at economic rates;
2. Working from home augments productivity as more time can be spent at home for work with less disturbance from colleagues;

3. Employer is benefitted by work from home with saving of cost associated with providing space and amenities for the employees while employees save lot of time, energy and money involved in reaching the office and coming back to home;
4. Working from home has exerted a positive impact on reducing labour turnover and absenteeism, decreasing attrition rate and increasing productivity;

Since working from home is beneficial for both the employers and workers, its popularity is augmenting day by day. COVID-19 has made all to feel the taste of working from home and those firms having sweet feeling will definitely opt for continuing the concept even after the COVID crisis is over.

Limitations of working from home

1. Management has to take care of psychological welfare of employees working from home as demands of work and home at one place might put lot of emotional pressure on them;
2. Proper record of job performed by employees from home has to be maintained for their effective performance appraisal;
3. The Harvard Business Review exposed concern of managers about employees working from home, unduly focusing on both personal and official duties, reducing productivity;
4. Managers are also apprehensive of working from home decreasing colleagues communicating and collaborating among themselves and impeding possibilities of informal learning by employees at office.

Conditions for success of work from home

Andrew Hewitt, analyst at Forrester, has suggested that when more employees start working from home, technology with the company must be sufficient to withstand such massive usage. Forrester has quoted the following as imperative for successful working from home:

1. Collaboration: Ensuring technology is accessible for employees and they are proficient to use it;
2. Information access: All important files and documents pertaining to the job should be easily available for the employees without wastage of time. Applications involving transfer and storage of data in bulk should be available for the employees;
3. Security: Employees working from home should ensure confidentiality of company data by storing and disseminating them only through desired means.

Imperative Competencies to be Possessed by employees to Work From Home

Adda Birnir (2020) has hinted upon following seven proficiencies to be possessed by an employee to work from home:

- a. Effectively communicating with supervisors and peers;
- B. Self-organising the job to be done;
- C. Awareness about time zones of team mates who are doing the work from distant land with differing time zones;
- D. Proactive, independent, self-reliant and self-sufficient;
- E. Proficient in using technology;
- F. Self-motivated to complete the work without supervision;
- G. Passionate on other things such as spending time with kids and friends.

Shutterstock and Anna Johansson (2017) have observed that employees working from home should be:

- A. Self-motivated to work without depending on others;
- B. Self-disciplined to spend adequate time on rest, work and family;
- C. Good in oral and written communication;
- D. Reasonably familiar to the concept of working from home;
- E. Reachable anytime during the day for providing instructions;
- F. Tech-savvy, possessing proficiency to handle technology and willingness to spend long hours on computers.

Natalia Lusinski (2019) proposed that for effectively working from home, employees should:

- a. Be self-disciplined,
- b. Be self-directed,
- c. Be self-motivated,
- d. Be good in communicating,
- e. Be proactive,
- f. Be open for improvement,
- g. complete the morning routine tasks of walking, cleaning body and changing clothes which would set-up the day nicely for working enthusiastically,
- h. Be Well organised,
- i. Manage to have small breaks during the work,
- j. have clearly spelt-out space at home for concentrating only on work,
- k. Be free from disturbance from family, TV and social media,
- l. Be willing to learn from mistakes,

- m. Be determined to accomplish targets,
- n. Be willing to share all good accomplishments in the official group,
- o. Be able to socialise among colleagues through informal chats or weekly get together,
- p. Be able to develop networks.

Dave Anderson (2020) has also listed the traits to be possessed by an employee to qualify for working from home and has given some tips to be followed at selection level to identify whether the candidates are suitable for working from home.

Cheremond (2020) has hinted that management willing to have employees working from home should monitor working of their employees, giving due respect to their privacy. Performance appraisal of these employees should be done fairly so that they are not denied of incentives given to employees working at office.

ED HOWELL (2020) has given details about judiciary functioning with the help of work from home concept, citing the example of Hoyt Elliott, a circuit judge.

Carol Rozwell (2018) observed that firms resorted to working from home to save office space. However, the concept is associated with the following problems:

- a. Lack of trust between management and employees;
- b. Stereotyping regarding job which could and could not be done at home, resulting in impractical anticipation about roles and designing of unproductive strategies;
- c. Workers not used to work from home might lose interest and passion towards work;
- d. Installation of technology needed to work from home is a difficult task.

The author has advocated the following measures to tide over these complexities:

- a. Inculcating trust among employees by empowering them to handle complexities arising from working from home;
- b. Conducting effective job analysis and choosing work which can be done from home and then fixing proper functions, responsibilities and activities;
- c. Preparing employees mentally for working from home by setting realistic and practically possible targets and providing adequate supportive mechanism;
- d. Ensure that technological resources available with the firm are sufficient to support working from home.

Many articles, which have been published on working from home concept, has talked about the traits to be possessed by employees to discharge their official duties at home and the challenges which might crop up in the process. Nevertheless, there has been a dearth in studies exploring how far the employees are actually proficient in working from home. This article tries to fill this gap by collecting data from employees about their proficiency of working from home and assessing the association between such proficiency and their profile.

Objectives of the Study

1. Assessing the extent to which employees are proficient to work from home;
2. Exploring the association between employees' proficiency of working from home and their profile.

Methodology

This research is descriptive in nature, based purely on primary data, collected by administering a structured questionnaire to 354 employees working from home due to COVID-19, selected using purposive sampling. Data collected was cleaned by providing for missing data, non-response, unengaged response, and outliers. Reliability and normality of the data was checked using Cronbach's Alpha, Skewness and Kurtosis. The data was then fed to MS Excel and imported to SPSS and analysed using the statistical tools of Frequency, percentage, Mean, Cluster Analysis and Chi-square Analysis.

Data Analysis

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Of the 354 employees surveyed, 53.7% are males and 46.3% are females; 53.1% are aged up to 25 years while 46.9% are aged more than 45 years; 30.8% are married while 68.6% are unmarried and 0.6% are separated; 4.5% are working in public sector undertakings and the rest 95.5% are employed in private sector; 55.4% possess degree/ diploma as their educational qualifications while 44.6% possess post-graduation and more as their educational qualifications; 61.3% are engaged in IT service while 28.8% are engaged in industries dealing with other services and 9.9% are engaged in other industries; 26% have service experience of up to 2 years, 46% have experience of 2-5 years, 19.5% have experience of 5-10 years and 8.5% have experience of more than 10 Years; 28% are spending up to 40 hours on an average every week at work while 34.7% are spending 40-48 Hours and 37.3% are spending more Than 48 Hours at work.

Frequency of Working from Home before COVID

The frequency with which employees have been working from home before being compelled to do so due to the outbreak of COVID-19 has been obtained and displayed in table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of working from home before COVID

Frequency	N	Percent
Never	166	46.9
Occasionally	80	22.6
Sometimes	55	15.5
Often	37	10.5
Very Often	16	4.5
Total	354	100.0

Table 1 highlights that only 15% of the employees surveyed have good experience of working from home before the outbreak of COVID while majority of them (46.9%) have not at all worked from home before the outbreak of the epidemic while little above one-third of them have done so quite rarely.

Proficiency of employees to work from home

COVID-19 has compelled all to work from home or simply stay at home. However, some persons may be well capacitated to work from home and presence of this capacity among the employees surveyed has been obtained in statements in Likert's five-point scale and the outcome is displayed in table 2.

Table 2: Proficiency of employees to work from home

Statement	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
I am happy spending long time in work on my own at home	3.2825	-0.262	-0.076
I am self-disciplined and self-motivated to complete all work at home	3.7797	-0.691	-0.150
I am confident working without supervision	4.0395	-0.866	0.253
I am comfortable communicating with my colleagues digitally	3.6441	-0.533	-0.422

Table 2 establishes normality of data as the values of Skewness and Kurtosis ranges between +1& -1.

The table suggests that employees are willing to work alone from home without much direct supervision and they are self-motivated to discharge their official duties from home. The employees have also indicated that they are quite comfortable to communicate with their peers digitally, which is highly encouraging. The only concern for employees working from home is that they are apprehensive of working for long hours.

Relationship between employees being happy working long hours at home and their profile

The prevalence of substantial relationship between the employees feeling happy Working Long Hours at home and their demographic profile has been explored using ANOVA and the results are portrayed in table 3.

Table 3: Relationship between employees being happy working long hours at home and their profile

Profile	F	Sig.
Gender	0.199	0.656
Age	4.862	0.028
Education	0.197	0.657
Nature of Job	2.542	0.080
Work Experience	1.247	0.293
Marital Status	0.412	0.663
Prior Experience of Working from Home	1.256	0.121

Table 3 exposes the prevalence of substantial relationship between the employees feeling happy working long hours at home and their age. Table 4 gives details about this relationship.

Table 4: Relationship between employees being happy working long hours at home and age

Age	Mean	N
Upto 25 years	3.4309	188
More than 25 years	3.1145	166
Total	3.2825	354

Table 4 reveals that employees aged more than 25 years have average level of happiness towards working long hours at home while those aged upto 25 years have better degree of happiness.

Relationship between confidence of employees to work at home without supervision and their profile

The prevalence of substantial relationship between the employees confident of working at home without supervision and their profile has been explored using ANOVA and the results are portrayed in table 5.

Table 5: Relationship between confidence of employees to work without supervision and their profile

Profile	F	Sig.
Average Weekly Working Hours	3.410	0.034
Experience	5.916	0.001
Nature of Job	0.171	0.843
Education	3.378	0.067
Marital Status	2.408	0.092
Age	4.068	0.044
Gender	1.857	0.174
Prior Experience of Working from Home	0.681	0.605

Table 5 exposes the prevalence of substantial relationship between confidence of employees to work at home without supervision and their age, weekly working hours and work experience and the nature of such relationship is depicted in tables 6-8.

Table 6: Relationship between confidence of employees to work without supervision and weekly working hours

Weekly Working Hours	N	1	2
Upto 40 Hours	99	3.8788	
40-48 Hours	123	3.9919	3.9919
More Than 48 Hours	132		4.2045

Table 6 suggests that employees working upto 40 hours and 40-48 hours a week at home are confident of working without supervision while those working for more than 48 hours have higher confidence.

Table 7: Relationship between confidence of employees to work without supervision and work experience

Work Experience	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Upto 2 years	92	3.6848	
2-5 years	163		4.1411
5-10 Years	69		4.1594
More than 10 Years	30		4.3000

Table 7 highlights that employees with experience of lesser than 2 years have above average level of confidence to work from home without supervision while employees with greater work experience have much more confidence.

Table 8: Relationship between confidence of employees to work without supervision and age

Age	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Upto 25 years	3.9415	188	.98208
More than 25 years	4.1506	166	.96369
Total	4.0395	354	.97772

Table 8 highlights that employee's aged upto 25 years have good confidence to work from home without supervision while those aged 25 years and more have better confidence.

Relationship between Employees Being Self-Motivated and Self-Disciplined to Work from Home and their Profile

The prevalence of substantial relationship between the employees being self-motivated and self-disciplined to Work from Home and their Profile has been explored using ANOVA and the results are portrayed in table 9.

Table 9: Relationship between employees being self-motivated and self-disciplined to work from home and their profile

Profile	F	Sig.
Gender	0.670	0.414
Age	3.298	0.070
Marital Status	0.326	0.722
Education	0.140	0.709
Nature of Job	1.393	0.250
Work Experience	1.249	0.292
Weekly Working Hours	2.112	0.123
Prior Experience of Working from Home	0.234	0.919

Table 9 displays that there is no substantial relationship between the employees being self-disciplined and self-motivated and all the profile variables.

Relationship between capability of employees to communicate digitally with their peers and their profile

The prevalence of substantial relationship between proficiency of employees to communicate digitally with their colleagues and their profile has been explored using ANOVA and the results are portrayed in table 10.

Table 10: Relationship between capability of employees to communicate digitally with peers and their profile

Profile	F	Sig.
Gender	0.670	0.414
Age	3.298	0.070
Marital Status	0.861	0.424
Education	6.836	0.009
Nature of Job	1.852	0.158
Work Experience	1.980	0.117
Weekly Working Hours	0.605	0.547
Prior Experience of Working from Home	0.475	0.754

Table 10 displays the prevalence of substantial relationship between proficiency of employees to communicate digitally with their colleagues and their educational qualifications and the nature of such relationship is depicted in table 11.