Telecommuting and its Implications in the Era of COVID-19: Issues, Challenges & Opportunities

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Abstract

Telecommuting as a substitute to conventional arrangements by which workforces achieve their work purposes during COVID-19 outbreak. Telecommuting is the practice of telecommunication expertise to permit personnel to accomplish their work responsibilities distantly, detached from their main place of work consistent with job arrangements. It’s a virtuous impression to comprehend the significance, paramount practices and possible wellbeing hazards tangled. As organisations around the globe are obligatory to telecommute amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous employees are struggling with the idea of working from home for comprehensive stages of lockdown periods. Before 2020, telecommuting for all the employees was viewed as unsociable nightmare. Currently, it's the prevailing trend of most organisations. This research paper is an attempt to find out the issues, challenges and opportunities of telecommuting in the era of Covid-19.

Key word: Telecommuting, Green Management and Covid-19

Introduction

Certain workforces will be doing telecommuting for the first time, which leads to estimating out in what way to perform the job in a novel setting that might not provide efficiency. But there are conducts to provide outcomes from setting up a worthy workplace to the system.
It is the need of the hour to give the compulsory option to the employees to work from home. Mother Earth is automatically soothing. Outbreak of Corona is a blunt cue of our negative association with environment. Industries measure how to arise from this disaster and governments are trying to formulate strategies to boost the economy but the one positive assessment is the telecommuting option has somehow settled the nature. 2020 is the Fantastic period for earth and the environment. Telecommuting, which is understood to be a different to the normal arrangements whereby employees assume their work, has in 2020 due to COVID-19 undergone remarkable modifications.

This trend of telecommuting is probably to raise greater in strength given the growing fear of COVID-19 and with respect to upsurge in prevention of the disease, maintaining social distance and the necessity to diminish office on the organisation’s side. Nowadays, telecommuting has become the significant part of corporate planning and strategy. Proper establishment of virtual communication in order to manage teams has been a principal task for the employers.

**Telecommuting as a Way to Green Management**

Some years ago, telecommuting was seemed as a distant dream, but today it is the future of work. Telecommuting is considered as a way to progress in green management by the researchers and considered as eco-friendly way to work in today’s time. It serves the dual purpose of human life i.e. work at home and immediate care of family. It also not only provides the flexibility of office work but also improves the family relationships, set personal goals and preparing schedules for the career growth. Following points will clear that how telecommuting is a way to Green Management:

**Conserve Energy:** Telecommuting helps in saving the energy, as when employees go office and work from office then they consume more energy. Energy usage in telework and energy usage in work from home are different but ultimately in telecommuting energy consumption is less.

**It reduces carbon emission:** As when an employee goes to office daily then he/she use car or other vehicle for the transportation which is a huge source of carbon release. But when it comes to telecommuting then transportation carbon emission is reduced to big extent.

**Reduce Air Pollution:** Means of transportation produces various dangerous gases like nitrogen oxide and other polluted components, which has many health and environmental effects. These pollutants cause many health diseases like asthma, respiratory problems and other dangerous body infections. But telecommuting helps to reduce air, soil, ozone concentration and other pollution.

**Less use of Fossil Fuel:** Fossil fuel is used in many forms like electricity, transportation and heat. Telecommuters decrease daily use of fossil fuel and energy consumption by working from home. It ultimately helps in improving the quality of environment and related substances.

**Saves Time and Money:** Telecommuting helps in saving ideal office time, which is wasted by employees in free chitchat or gossiping with colleagues. Employees working from home also save money through maintain wardrobe expenses, childcare crèche fee, transportation fares and workday lunches etc.
Less use of Paper: Telecommuting typically use electronic way of communication so they use emails, meetings through software’s and electronic data saving tools etc. But when it comes to office routine then offices usually use traditional filing system to save data. Every meeting and document files are saved in paper file format. So telecommuting helps to reduce use of paper which helps to save trees and protect environment.

Less use of Plastic: Office employees usually take coffee, breakfast and lunch on working days from office canteen or any food shop. These canteens use plastic beverage bottles, coffee lids, plastic bags for food packing, plastic utensils and aluminium or foil paper to wrap the food. All this plastic usage is harmful for health or environment. But telecommuters reduce this type of plastic usage through work from home.

Promote Health and Safety: No doubt when an employee is working from office then he/she follows the office routine. Sometimes daily hectic or busy schedule adversely affect the health of the person. Daily travelling involves risk of accident or other risk to human life. So telecommuting helps in promoting healthy and safe life for people.

Above given points makes a clear picture that telecommuting is a great way to green management. It not only saves environment but also protect the human life. It also plays a great role in balancing work life balance of individual, focusing on career growth etc.

Telecommuting as a Challenge for Organisations

Telecommuting is not a novel conception to the organisations, but Covid-19 has positively accelerated the procedure. COVID-19 has affected almost every sector and make it compulsory for the organisations to provide work from home opportunity. Organisations are downsizing for economic benefits due to this, various people lost their jobs. Employees have job insecurity in their minds which is affecting and disturbing their mental health. In these tough times, organisations have to properly take decisions and frame policies and guidelines to retain their talent and motivate them. People are assets for the organisations. It’s fine to invest money on the people as if COVID-19 will be over, these people will work for the growth and development of the organisation.

There are basically three constituents of telecommuting: application of technology, connection & proper networking with the organisation and distant working. Providing proper training for the application of technology is the biggest challenge for the organisations. Training sessions like stress management, time management and work life balance must be planned in order to maintain and upgrade the psychological wellbeing of the employees.

Businesses should have a procedure to confirm that regular jobs and projects are reviewed and accomplished in a well-timed method by work from home employees but telecommuting fails when the organisation wants to do micromanagement. During lockdown, work from home was one and only alternative and it may be problematic to apply a positive work from home planning if an employee practises outworking as an alternative for their steady dependent attention engagements.

Telecommuting as a Challenge for Employees

With the home currently also operative as a place of job, it has developed gradually problematic to sustain a work-life balance. It has resulted into job blurring, which is the know-how of misperception or trouble in
distinctive one’s job efforts from one’s personal roles in a specified situation in which these characters are realised as extremely combined.

Disturbances creep around each turn and throughout each meeting and discussion. Single explanation is to generate a distinct workplace in home and all of the essential office things to do job, preferably a distinct room.

Work from home leads to distraction in Social Relationships which can be a cause of harmful effects on psychological wellbeing. In this difficult time, a collective opinion amongst people is that work from home may be a drawback in relationships of career development and prospects. Reframing of job description and job specification is troublesome task for the HR managers. Periodic feedback and discussion with all the personnel of the organisation will help the HR managers for finding out the training need of the people.

Training need must be properly analysed by finding out the difference between standard performance and actual performance. Foremost confront is that the establishments are facing during COVID-19 is the improvement of all-inclusive training sessions to be responsible for the employees the mandatory assistances to accept and work properly in telecommuting.

Numerous works from home places are not ergonomically perfect. Employees’ objective for telecommuting during COVID-19 must be to eradicate uneasiness and hazard of damage due to efforts during telecommuting. People with lower need of social objectives are well suited for work from home but those who love to make social interaction, it is very troublesome for them to adjust in this problematic situation. There’s often an enticement to distribute responsiveness between home duties and job, ensuing in inadequate consideration to both.

**Telecommuting as an Opportunity for Organisations**

Telecommuting can deliver an extensive collection of financial benefits, in fragment concluded in dropping time spent in traffic but also by increasing access to work. Certain businesspersons have faith in that corporate would have a wonderful infrastructure. So, organisations are having overwhelming office, emolument the vital safety and charge sums, purchase equipment, and mark the everyday travel to do tasks every single time. With the pace of time during COVID-19 outbreak, they comprehend that they might have saved a big amount, if they accomplished their trade and business from home.

Organisations have a great opportunity involving like accumulative company earnings, dropping absence of employees, enhancing efficiency, dropping road traffic, dropping charges related with place of work and dropping pollution. These assistances considerable since they help the organisation to track the work more successfully.

**Telecommuting as an Opportunity for Employees**

Work schedule can be flexible but it must be specified. Telecommuting requires proper formulation of strategy regarding work in order to make it effective. It all depends on finding out the effective time, it can be in day or night based on the convenience of the employees but great competencies are required to make balance between professional and personal life. It can provide prospective of being able to put efforts for more than one job, and therefore upsurge individual income.

Work from home can give workforces can have a further significant lifetime, personal and work life to be balanced. Being able to telecommute for an employee to diminish travel time and the pressure generated from it. The saved travel period can also be used for our interesting hobbies.

Work autonomy of the people has been increased which can be motivating factor the people. Basically, the work and targets of the jobs must be completed doesn’t matter the place of the work. For inspired persons who relish working individually and are competent to emphasis on work by self-disciplined and self-controlled, work from home job is best. Telecommuting may be a virtuous preparation for employees doing projects work or autonomous jobs. It is also an upright procedure for employees whose efforts necessitate elongated phases of silent, attentive time.

Blind led a research study in which it asked technicians whether their organisation had accepted a telecommuting.

**Working From Home Due to Novel Coronavirus? (%)**

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<th>Company</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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<tr>
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<td>23.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Microsoft</td>
<td>81.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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Source: Blind.com

**Evaluation of Telecommuting Modes and Data security**

An effective administration method to telecommuting needs a combination of communication assistances, performance- tracing techniques, and the usage of equipment as a teleworking enabler and a proper channel for communication. Generating and upholding a positive work from home evaluation modes in the organisation is very crucial. Company’s IT experts can properly frame telecommuting program strategies, modes and predicting the IT requirements of the employees. Distant work necessities for home working employees can generate security disclosures from organisation’s IT systems. Procedure sought to be positioned to fill up any holes in data management and security, together with proper working on ERP software and recurrent modification in passwords. There are so many apps, virtual private networks and collaborative tools which are helping the people during their work from home but the concern of security is at high risk. The security of data has been a contemporary subject for companies nowadays. Employers have to ensure that the employees must maintain the confidentiality.
Organisations should do all-encompassing analysis before purchasing and executing novel IT techniques essential to introduce telecommuting strategies. IT experts can be predominantly expedient in defining strategies and predicting distant workplace requirements of telecommuters. IT Experts should consider the influence of telecommuters on all the departments, both in terms of functioning and employees motivations. Proper collaboration of HR and IT experts is a key to success in this time. Long telecommuting jobs necessitates broader funds in organisational-wide gearshifts to confirm professional steadiness in these unparalleled and impulsive times. Proper cyber security measures must be applied in the laptops of the employees. Proper firewalls must be maintained and checked for data security reasons.

**Company’s strategies for effective telecommuting:**

Telecommuting can be an isolated initiative in this period of social distancing, but it doesn't devour to be. Its great necessity to provide social support to all the employees. People can be dull, hassled, and enthusiastic to get back to the organisation.

Telecommuting may result in Job insecurity as many people are losing jobs due to COVID-19. Direct oversight is not possible but can be done by using online social platforms. During COVID-19 outbreak, there is fear in the minds of people regarding job and their financial stability. If there will be mutual trust maintained between employees and employers, there will be less stressful situation. If employees are working from home, doesn’t mean that they are more concentrating on their personal lives. So, proper trust can be maintained by employer and this in reoccurrence induces workforces to demonstrate their worth as significant assets to the organisations by acting tough to retain their jobs.

By telecommuting, as a responsible organisation, quality of work can be improved by proper planning of meeting, proper allocation of work and timely review of performance.

Since, organisations are uncertain about the future due to the outbreak of COVID-19, numerous strategies must be planned as a part of telecommuting like work from home, flexible work schedule, job sharing, part time work and flattened work weeks. The decisions related to these strategies must be planned by participative approach. Schools are closed, parents have to manage their children’s online classes and they have to take care of their children. If management will frame strategies with discussion with every employee by keeping in mind their priorities, the employees will better able to manage their work life balance and ultimately they will feel motivated in the bad times of COVID-19.

Managers should be a reliable foundation for precise and latest statistics on coronavirus and how it is influencing the firm. Circumvent collection and distribution of information through social networking sites and search on reliable resources such as the WHO. Normal telecommuting policy must be different from COVID Telecommuting policy.

COVID-19 is the first experience for the people around the globe. Building proper official guidelines and precise outlooks from employees work must be clearly defined. The plan would comprise guidelines for an
employee’s everyday task agenda, way of completing the task, explanation of being enthusiastic at home, performance measures and evaluation, and security of organisation’s database.

**Employees’ strategies for effective telecommuting:**

During the outbreak of COVID-19, the success of strategies depends upon the participative management with employees and employers. Quality work and Productivity consequences are attained if the employees have the confidence to do efforts, which originates with an optimistic approach on the mode to the responsibility. Proper time table and schedule must be framed. When it comes time to have an assessment or performance review, telecommuting can cause encounter in how the employees show their achievements.

Positive attitude and strong will power is must for the employees and it will only help them to work effectively as a great telecommuter. Discipline and proper completion of targets is vital for the workforces in order to save their jobs in these difficult times of Corona Virus pandemic.

**Enhancing Quality of Work Life through Telecommuting**

Telecommuting allows to do the work as per the lifestyle of the people which can help to maintain Work Life Balance which is a major factor in Telecommuting. Though during the outbreak of COVID-19, some people might not feel job satisfaction. It may be because of extension of lockdown periods and uncertainty towards the future. But if the things will normalize, definitely Telecommuting will contribute to Quality of Work Life if workforces will have high morale and positive attitude towards both personal and professional life. Organisations have to comprehend that a contented workforce is efficient & effective and they have to twitch to search for conducts to develop the Quality of Work Life during telecommuting. Telecommuters with high job satisfaction can achieve more period for enjoyable accomplishments and more time for kids and elderly care. To develop the quality of work life and eradication of mental illness, companies can do proper planning related to workload and work study. Managers need to inspect training opportunities, open communication, incentive systems, team building and virtual support systems.

**The Future Predictions of Telecommuting after Covid-19**

Covid-19 is a worldwide infectious disease which is declared as pandemic by WHO in March. Due to this disease social distancing and personal hygiene is most important. So to maintain social distancing, every sector and industry declared telecommuting. Now every sector is possibly doing telecommuting but the question arises here what will the future of telecommuting after Covid-19. Below are future predictions of Telecommuting after Covid-19 based on different news and research.

**Telework will stay in future:** Many researchers predict that telework in service sector will stay and bring a permanent change. Employees with possibility of telework will definitely adopt telework. Because it has many
advantages like flexibility in work schedule, reduce transportation expenses, better work life balance etc. According to the survey conducted by Global research Company Gartner, 74% plan to move permanently to telecommuting. With the all benefits of telecommuting and financial benefits it seems that there is minimal effect of telecommuting on productivity and work style.

Leadership will improve in Telework: As it is considered that there is not proper leadership in telecommuting and not proper scheduling of work. So in future it is expected that leadership and monitoring strategies will improve to strengthen telecommuting. On the other side when work is done through online portals then leadership will not be biased. Employees those who work will get the rewards and fair treatment and there will not be any favoritism or nepotism in the work.

Organizations will allow more diversity: As a traditional approach some organizations do not welcome diversity in terms of physical appearance of people but when telework culture will applicable in organizations then organizations will just focus on the productivity or work. People with disabilities have new ideas of doing work; their style of work is innovative or different. Diversity in organizations contributes in many different ways and serves with many advantages to the organizations.

Technology will play more significant role: Technology already plays a significant role in every aspect of office work. But in future it will be mandatory for every employee to get handy with the technology. In the situation of Covid-19, industries which are not earlier much using technological apps for meetings like Zoom, Google Meet etc. they also will use these. Online meetings are earlier done only when a person is very far from the place and to attend meeting is most important but now organizations will normally use these.

Telework policies get more strength: As every organization and individual comes to know the importance of telework in this type of pandemic. So organizations will definitely come up with more favourable policies and procedures. Earlier those who don’t like work from home due to the problems; they now also prefer telework because of good policies of telework.

Policy recommendations for Telecommuting

Telecommuting is an effective way to work from the place where a person lives. It is considered as effective way to work but due to some pitfall or some problems in telecommuting there must be proper policies and procedures so that employees who work through telecommuting they do not face any challenge. Following are some policy recommendations for making telecommuting an effective strategy:

Policy for Attendance of Employee: Sometimes due to telework employee think that whether I work or not there is no such problem. But to implement effectively telecommuting there should be proper policy for the attendance of employee. The attendance hours can be based on the online portal of the company where a company records the data of employees. Number of hours spends on the personal login for work can be the attendance hours for employees. Likewise other relevant tools or policies should be developed for the attendance of employees.

Policy for Confidentiality of Data: There must be proper policy for the confidentiality of the valuable data of the company. Rules and regulations should be mentioned properly so that employees can’t misuse the secret
information of the company. There must be proper policy for punishment and fine in case of any wrong usage of data.

**Policy for Equal opportunity of Telecommuting:** Sometimes organizations provide telecommuting only to experienced employees or the employees which are known to them. But there should be equal opportunity of telecommuting to every employee who can possibly do telecommuting. Eligibility, working hours of work and related aspects should be mentioned in the policy beforehand, so that employees who want to take telecommuting can opt for it.

**Policy for means of communication:** For remote employees effective means of communication is very much important because only digital communication means they can contact the appropriate boss or person. Secure and well established digital means of communication should be provided by the company. In policy rules it must be mention that person should keep their cell phone with them.

**Policy for medical leave or casual leave:** Even when employees work through telecommuting, they need leaves for the medical or any other purpose, so organization must have proper policy for taking leaves. Salary deductions for leave and allowed leaves per month or per year must be mentioned. For women employees’ organization must have special policy for their convenient.

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