Effects of Work from Home on the health of Information Technology employees during Pandemic COVID 19

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ABSTRACT

Work from home (WFH) is unquestionably not new idea in India or even abroad. More conversation began this subject in India especially during late pandemic of COVID-19.The purpose behind same was impulse for some associations to move their activity to WFH for employees because of limitation on working from office just as because of lock down pronounced by government also. Since March, everyone has settled comfortably into a work-from-home arrangement. That seems to lasting longer than anyone initially anticipated

Surveys from around the globe are surfacing of an gloomy trend: even though employees save time on their commute, they are investing it right back into their work. Depending on where employees are located in the world, their working hours might be anything from one to four hours longer than usual as they spend additional time in meetings and check-ins, attempting to prove their productivity, or they simply lose track of time because the working day no longer has clear limitations.The Scholar has made an attempt to studythe consequences of work from home for employees of Information Technologysector and how they confronted the challenges during that period. Significant thrust was to comprehend their work life balance while working for office from home. It was intriguing to realize numerous viewpoints including whether gender orientation explicit or conjugal status have any diverse impacts due of this arrangement. Also it was essential to know whether they would they like to carry on with the samepermanently or wish to return back to office.The study has also observed the results of WFH on the wellbeing and life patterns of the employees due to the unexpected changes at home.

KEYWORDS: Work from home, Information technology, Employee, Human resource, health, family, lifecycle, COVID 19

Introduction:

I)   COVID 19

In the most recent 100 years of humanity the COVID-19 infection was among the one where the entire mankind was affected. Similar to plague or Spanish flew it has affected individualsprofoundly&the most noticeably terrible aspect of the disease is it tends tospread through individuals who are asymptomatic. This implies that it will be difficult to track down the carrier of the spread. This nature of the novel Corona Virus compelled the governments to limit individual

movements and impose lock down.There is ample heard and talkedabout the Pandemic COVID 19 in media and articles. End of March 2020 a National lockdown was declared by legislature of India. The purpose of lock down was to reduce the spread of the infection among individuals.It all seemed normal, but not for long. The infection sustained and continued to grow compelling the government to continue the lockdown. That was the time whenmost of the organizations realized that they will have to continue with this challenge and find a solution for business continuity.

Unquestionably it was difficult errand, numerous standards and guidelines were important to guarantee individuals are protected. Government imposed laws torestrict the free movement of the individuals in a country with sever implications. Indeed, even there were limited hours for purchasing the everyday supplies. This was important to ensureuntil theinfrastructureis not ready for treatment, the wide spread of virus had to be curtailed down.

One of the important guidelines government imposedwas to confine/urge the individuals in their homes and organizations should encourage work from home instead of going to workplaces as otherwise at workplace working could increase the risk of virus spread. For Information technology industry it was a boon in disguise. This arrangement was immediately adapted by numerous organizations to keep the business congruity as it was the only choice given by government under strict imposed regulations.Organizations were edgy to discover the available resources to handle this COVID 19 effect on the business and were no choice but to prepare for adapting this work from home if they need. Same case for employees to remain employed, there was far minimal choice to them but to adapt the work from home according to the regulations from government and adaption by organizations looking at seriousness of COVID 19 and at same time need for endurance.

Detection of the infection was just conceivable either by checking the temperature of the individual or taking swab from mouth/nose. As referenced before due threat of asymptomatic transporters possibility of spreading the infections , work from home was just viable option where individuals can be limited to go out for work and at same time keep economy running.

Effects of the pandemic

Sever acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) infection identified at Wuhan of China encountering extreme respiratory disorder including fever, dazedness and cough. New RNA infection strains from family Coronaviridae, presently usually referred to as nCOV-2019 recognized as SARS family. Which was detected similarto previous found in bats from China. By end of March India had 909 affirmed cases with 19 deaths and spread across 27 states. While around the world affirmed cases were 462684 as on 28th Mar'20 with 20834 deaths.The vast majority of the public authority comprehended the seriousness of the circumstance and proclaimed crisis circumstance like lock down.

Out of nowhere individuals from world including India needed to confront this vulnerability with life danger to mankind. Because of absence of possible medication and even obscure medicines to treat nCovid aside from following no movement by human there was not substitute left to any administration to spare the lives of individuals. Indian Prime Minister announced 21 days lockdown with impact from 25th Mar'20 with limitations of a wide range of movements. Whatever availableresources organizations had toadapt these limitations and keep battle for organization to

work. Most fortunate was the information technology industry as they were somewhat furnished with the assets of Personal Computer /Laptop and access to internet because of nature of the work.

Most significant change for them was the shift of work from office to home.

Concept of Work from Home - Famously known as WFH, had changed way of life of many. This is certifiably not another idea at all for some ventures. Just this was highly talked about during the ongoing pandemic as though there was no work from home previously. Indeed, even previously and now also many free lancers work from home. Likewise this is called as small office home office (SOHO) which include small business people or freelance specialists who want to set up office at home because of cost and just single individual who are proprietor working fromhome.Numerous information technology organizations likewise explicitly in software industry additionally have adjusted this practice far previously. Worldwide pattern to permit employees work from is a greater amount of human asset and the executives activities to give the adaptability of work from home while one can deal with family duties. Explicitly for ladies workers this was one of the additional appreciationsto join such organizations because of such adaptability. In any event, for men it is favored in numerous nations to keep away from to and fro travel to office explicitly where it is distant offices.

Indeed, even organizations understood that the cost spared by permitting work from home. This spares the expense for organizations towardsinfrastructure, utilities and other amenities. Consequently organizations additionally adapted this work from home to their employees as a forced decision as well as even some time as habitual choice to work out. Work from home as referenced above have numerous points of interest to the both organizations just as employees who truly adjusted the equivalent far previously. While in India similar was executed currently out of compulsion during pandemic. A Human is a difficult entity to comprehend as the progressions in encompassing influences thema lot more than others.This unexpected change in the working style for employees had large effect. Regardless of whether it is psychological or physical both effects were difficult to adjust and cope up for some. People excepted change gradually and the unexpected change to work from home has created unease to them.

Work from home additionally had a socially cut off effect to the employees for whom it was anewchallenge. Many needed to change the propensities likewise while working from home. The pressure and weights of the employment are not new and many could ready to adapt that effectively when they were at office. As it had silver lining of sharing to colleagues taking break during the work. Additionally counsel coordinated with anybody. Work from home made parcel of limitations on front of connection with individuals. The social remainder of the general public itself got changed. Individuals began going of video calls as fun at first which was likewise utilized for organization video conferenceas well for meetings. Later on that got unwieldy to go to such video calls for the duration of the day. Multiple such impacts made employees stress more than how they were functioning previously.

In this paper scholar have contemplated this and made endeavor to discover the impact of work from home to employees of Information technology industry. Scholar has confined research for information technology industry as they had before. Additionally numerous normal things like office culture, end of the week culture, adaption of technology rapidly and so forth.

Research Methodology:

Since the pandemic was a new area of research and the supporting information accessibility for this subject was restricted, the scholar chose to proceed with primary data collection and secondary data was collected from various reports and articles. The questionnaire was designed with the intention of getting a real overview of the individuals indulged in work from home along with personal meeting with individuals with social distancing.It was ascertained that the respondentswere from Information technology sector only. The research also aimed to understand whether the gender difference effected the adaption to WFH and also did the marital status have any challenges.Total 120 participants data was captured out of which 109 were from information technology industry. The same was retained and processed further.
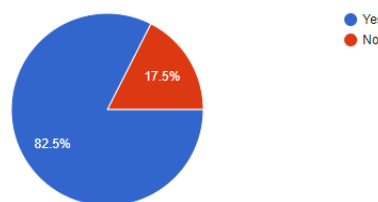
Fig 1 – Gender Break up
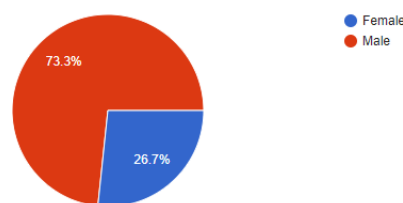
Fig 2 – Marital status

Out of total respondents total Male respondents were 73.3% & 26.7 % were female, 82.5% were married while 17.5% were unmarried.

Analysis and Findings: The factors effecting individuals working from home were

1. Work Stress–

62.5% of respondent expressed that it was more stressful to work from home than working from office. During personal interviews it was noted that stress wasmainly due to long working hours. Expectation from team mates regarding response time and no fixed working schedules compelled people into stretched working hours.
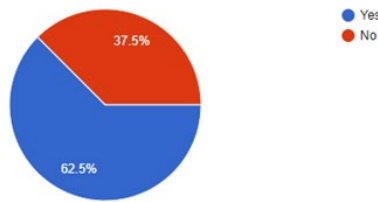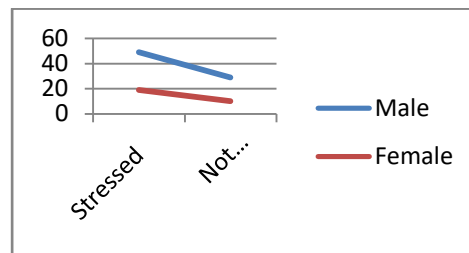
Fig 3 - WFH Stressfulness

Fig 4 – Gender Specific stress for WFH

It was also observed that male respondents were more stressed compared to female respondent while working from home. Observations regardingmarital status revealed thatmarried employees are found more stressed working from home compared to unmarried employees.This was because they had to manage office and family at the same premise.

Fig 5 – Marital status specific stress for WFH
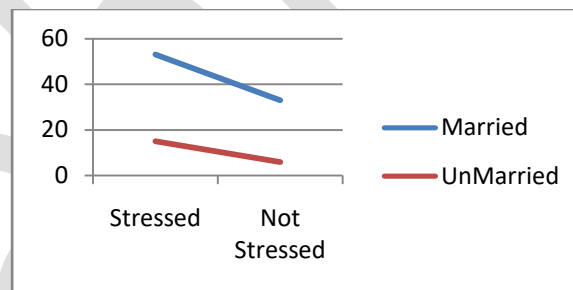
2. Space:

Whilesufficient space or separate room is subjective adjustment for many employees while working from home, seems to be a means of convenience to all. 62% employees feltthat they were managing this space and managed a separate room for themselves to ensure their work is not disturbed while working from home.

Fig 6 – Sufficient space/separate room for WFH
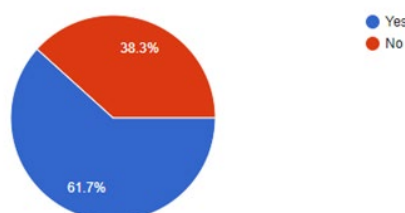
It is important to one expects personal space in social life, and that while working from home having own space gives you more productive and peaceful working environment. The figures in the table indicate that the female respondents found little difficult to find separate space at home while working for home. This difference needs a separate introspection. Though factors responsible for this discrimination was that they were unable to separate themselves from household duties and operate from a separate space. Otherreasonscould be cultural differences also.

Fig 7 – Sufficient space/separate room for WFH
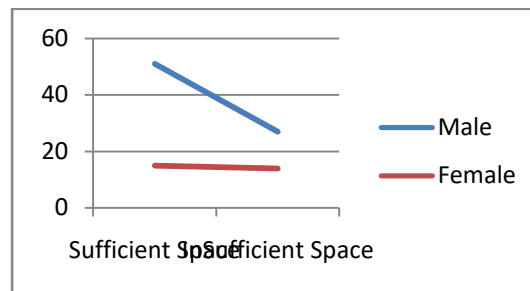
3. Break Outs during work:

This question is aimed at understanding   how employees managed their break-outs while working at home and in office. It was observed that while working from home employees did not find continuity in work due to frequent distractions at home. 60% of employees admitted to fact that they are able to take break during the work irrespective of long working hours. Interviews revealed categorically that, colleagues at office as well clients felt that it's not difficult and not necessary that employees at home should answer calls beyond usual timings. Having facility to work at home makes this shift in expectations from employees.

Fig 8 – Taking break during long working hours at home
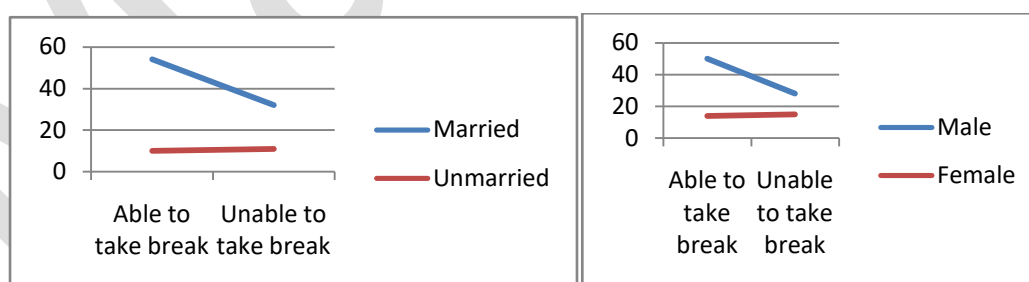
Hence even though there was an increase in working hours due to operating from home, the good part is many employees were able to take break during work either by compulsion or voluntarily. Two interesting observations were taking break was comparatively difficult for females and bachelors compared to males and married people.

4. Physical Health:

This was one of the most important areaof the study and. The effect of work from home was evident from the observation.Usually there is a tendency amongst individuals to neglect small pains and discomfort to the body which results in a major illness in the future. This study completely reveals that there is significant effect of work from home on the health of the employees. During work from home many employees did not follow any particular formal seating arrangement whichresulted in back pain/neck pain. Irritation to the eyeswas a common complain whether working from home or office, the only theory applicable was due to extended hours of work at home with few breaks the irritation persisted even more.

Fig 9 – Effect of WFH on health
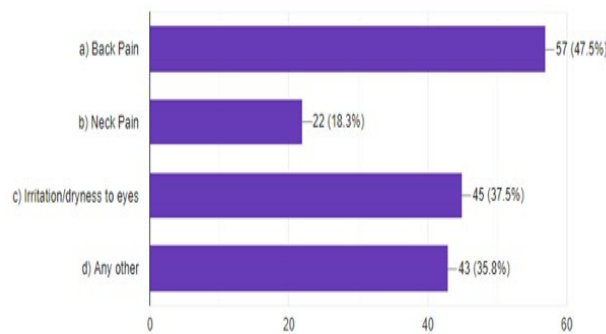
48% respondents agreed that they had back pain as well close to 38% referred to irritation in the eyes.

5. Biological Cycles:

Lot of new information came to light during this study, which was ignored by many employees in WFH. Couples complained that they could not have lunch together though working from home This only reflects that work from home doesn't seem as easy as it seems to be. The basic biological cycles such as eating and sleeping got affected due to the unpredicted and irregular timing of work while at home.Also as mentioned earlier increased expectations from colleagues and clients made it compulsive for employee to bring these changes in the biological cycles.

Fig 10 Effect on Biological cycles
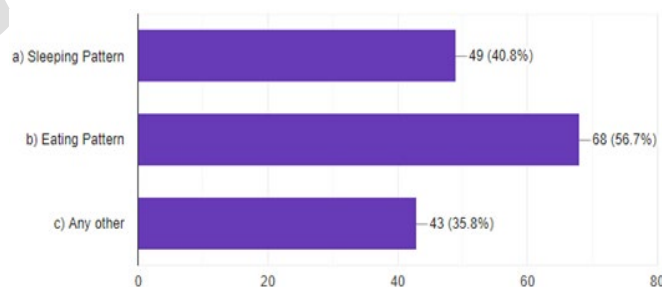
40% respondents felt that their sleeping cycle is disturbed due to WFH and to 69% felt that their eating pattern was not the same when working from office. It was found that Men were more prone to

eating irregularly compared to females. Onthe other hand females had more sleeping disorders compared to the male.

Fig 11 Gender wise effect of WFH on health
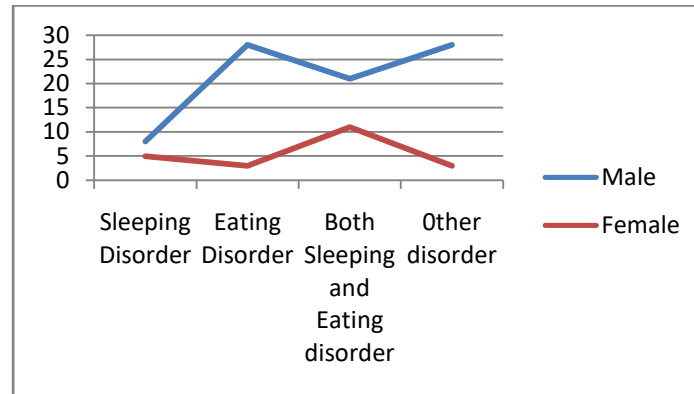
6. Work Life Balance:

73% of respondent mentioned that they were able to manage both home & office responsibility equally. The most thoughtful part in this study was that married people were able to manage this balance much better than unmarried. Expectations from family, colleagues and friends of unmarried employees weremore due to which they were unable to strike a balance. Also bachelors are more inclined to an imbalance because they become more workaholic for quick rise in their career.Also time management was found better amongst married employees compared to bachelors.
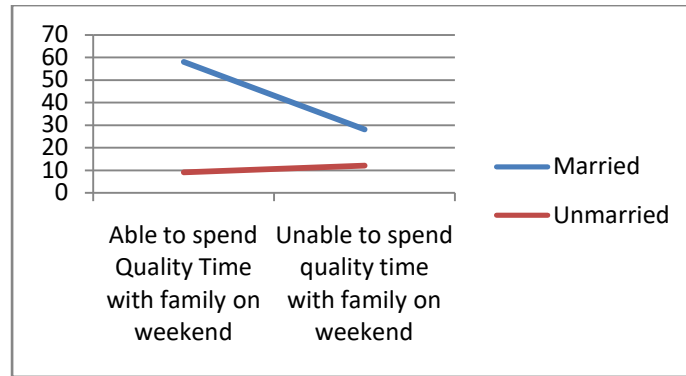
Fig 12 – Meeting family and office responsibility equally.
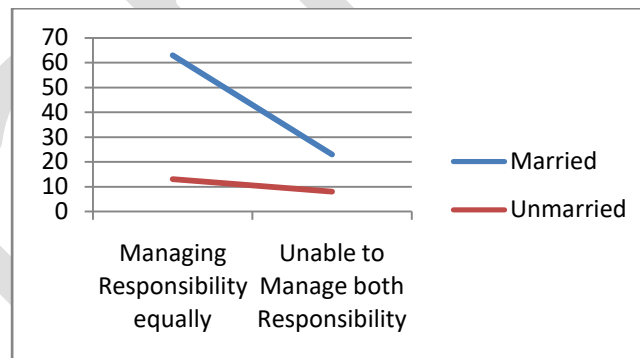
7. Family Time:

Weekends were lesshectic for the information technology employees.

Fig 13 – Ability to manage quality time with family on weekends.

Before WFH the observation was that the bachelorsdid not get quality time to spend with their families compared to married employees. 65% respondents answered that they were able to spend quality time with their family during weekends.

8. Family Acceptance for WFH:

Most of the employees agreed that their spouse/family were happy to have them at home and work rather than going to office. Due to the pandemic people had more priority to safety of their dear ones and one of the most advantage for work from home was safety of the entire family. Hence families and spouses accepted the change positively and extended support to the member working from home. 75% employees have clearly voted for the same and only 25% people felt their family may not be happy for them having at home due to WFH.Hence scholar plotted response of only unhappy employees to understand the pattern by which it can tell us more about these employees who feels their family or spouse may be unhappy.

Fig 14 – Employee's Family happiness Pattern of over WFH
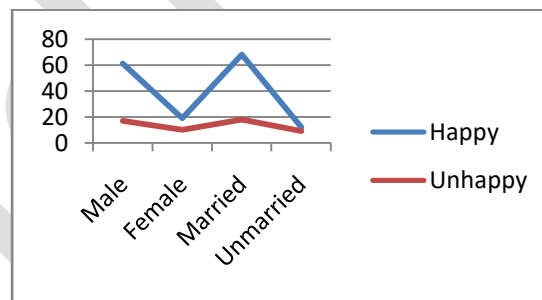
This graph indicatesthat female employees were happy working from home.Those bachelors who were at the start of their career did not like the arrangement of WFH since they wanted to explore new things and network socially more as compared to married employees. Female employees who were working from home found themselvesinterfering on home front and indulging more on disciplining their kids when at home. This was one reason why their family preferred them to be at office instead at home.

WFH (Work from Home) vs WFO (Work from Office)-

When comparing the responses of work-from-home against work from office it was observed that75% employees agreed that their families are happy while they were working from home.57%

employees agreed if given a choice they would prefer to work from home.This explains the fact that 32% employees in spite of finding their family happy for them at home still preferred that they work from office only. Reasons expressed were bio cycle disturbance, unable to manage work and life balance or even higher stress compared to work from office while selecting this choice by employees.

Fig 15- Choice of work from home or office
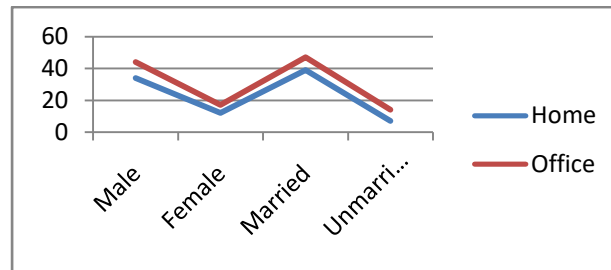
There is a marginal higher preference of male to work from office than home when compared to female employees. Also married employees felt they should go back to office than work from home if given a choice.

9. Infrastructure:

This factor was studied to find the comfort and satisfaction level of employees while working from home. In many of the software companies there is practice to provide financial support for procurement of infrastructure including furniture for the employees to work from home. While some mid size companies provide only basic amenities such as laptop and internet. It was found that the expectations of infrastructure also varied from person to person.

Fig 16 – Infrastructure satisfaction at home
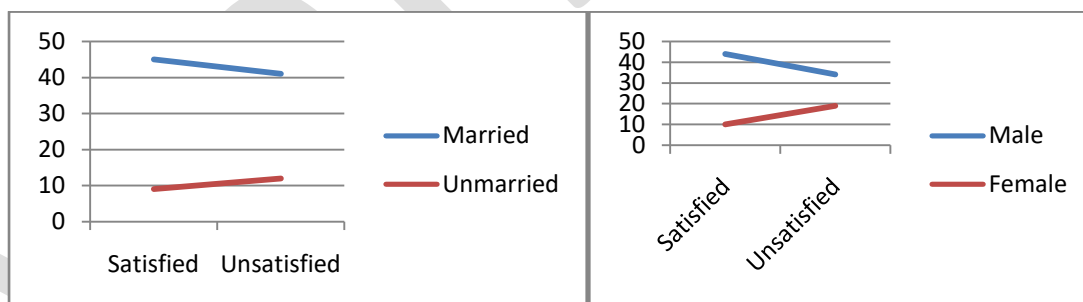
It was observed that bachelors and women employees expressed that they were not satisfied with the infrastructure. The reason could be that the millennials have higher expectations than the Gen X and they compare the facilities with other competing companies as well. Female employees found office working environment better than home, where they have compromise with space.

Conclusions:

Findings of the paper will be a resourceful earning for human resource personnel as well as management of IT organizations. The Key take away from this study can be summarized as follows:

1) Employees have adapted to work from home.

2) Separate space for working from home can be created even in a small place, by ensuring the mindful division of work and home

3) Break during work is a necessity; there are many ways it can be done. It's more of individual choice and deliberation for self-health. Cautious approach to observe & follow strict self-discipline can help to achieve this.

4) Physical & Mental health can be preserved if one enjoys the work even at home. No company will push beyond point to ignore any of the employee's health. Hence its utmost important to follow strict guidelines during work, like drinking water frequently, washing eyes intermittently, schedule break during work. In fact some time keeping cell phone notifications silent also can help to complete work in shorter time and avoid the unnecessary fatigues.

5) Need for balance in life between home & office.This is as said earlier more need is to have partition in mind. While doing office work one must try & avoid interference on household things and vice versa. This may be difficult for many but not impossible by practice.

6) Since individualsearn and do job for themselves and their families, families have all rights to get complete attention from them when it's due and it's dedicated for them. Weekends are most worthy to spend time with them which will not only give them attention and satisfaction but also to an individual employee can dedicate rest of working days towards family

7) While most of the employees agreed that their families were happy to have them at home, for balance 25% of employees those who felt their families were not happy must only look at possible solution by which the situation can be better. As for many companies the new way of working like Work from home may be inevitable, in that case employees will need to find the solution to make their families happy for their working from home. Including the quality time spending on weekends with them or psychological partition between office work and household priorities. Balancing the responsibilities at both ends.

8) In spite of all the advantage during pandemic one may still feel that office is better choice than home. Also as scholarunderstand from current trends from many companies also, they would be looking at hybrid solution here. Where neither it will be complete work from home nor will be completely work from office. Either by category of the people, who needs workfrom home or on rotation for all the employees many organizations are looking at exploring alternatives to only work from home.

9) To make employees happy about infrastructure at home, biggest missing part will be table and chair, as giving laptop and internet connection is not much difficult. Management may look at this option for sure. Those who don't have enough space might find this difficult for sure to manage even if company provides infrastructure like table /chair, it wouldn't be possible for them to use due to space constrain. In n such condition company might have to look at the alternatives like hybrid models suggested for such employees or even look at co-working options instead of full fledge offices where even walk ins can be accommodated by company.

10) Nature of stress to employees for working from home have many contributors, one need to study those further to ascertain individually as well as by management also

11) Pandemic may not last forever but effects of work from home on employee's health and family will be for long. There is need of serious attention on this from employees as well as organizations and tackle them at early stage.

Employees also will have to figure out ways and means to cope up this change. As fittest is survival for organizations, the only cost which can be minimize immediately is office operation and infrastructure cost, which is better to compromise over manpower cost. Hence in good spirit if employees welcome this move and adapt the same quickly it may not be that difficult to sustain the change.Finally hybrid is new normal people will see way of life, while organizations need to survive with cost reduction and one of the actionable is work from home for them, at same time constant productivity with work life balance is what will surface as need of hour as well which can have better control with work from office and work from home combinations.

Further scope of study:

This study has also opened up new directions for further study of the deep understandings of the subject. Many findings were surprising to note and it made researchers think that there is much further scope to understand effectiveness of work from home. Even many organizations are looking at various analytical tools to gauge the productivity of employees at home.It will be difficult to really map all employees specifically for larger organizations. Hence productivity tools and artificial intelligence has scope here to collaborate for same.Deeper psychological study can help human resource and management to make win-win situation for organization and employees. The congruent approach will keep the employee spirit high which will be good for company as well to extract best results.

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