From Office to Home Office: Concerns and Complications of Managers and Employees

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Abstract

Business organizations have been forced to reevaluate their operations, technology use, and virtual staffing in an effort to increase efficiency and effectiveness as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In this case, HR managers are crucial in identifying functional barriers and difficulties and creating strategies to effectively address them. HR managers deal with a variety of challenges, such as managing remote teams, fostering employee engagement so that they feel a sense of social belonging to the company, and reducing employee stress brought on by frequent virtual meetings and sessions. Thus, this study's primary goal is to pinpoint the main difficulties that remote employees and HR managers in virtual organizations encounter. The primary basis for the study was secondary data, which included websites, news items, published articles, and other online resources. The paper also suggests potential solutions to these problems.

Keywords: Telework, Remote Work, Remote Workers, Virtual Workplace.

1. Introduction

In recent years, professionals and researchers have increasingly examined innovative work models that overcome conventional time and space constraints enabled by information and communication technologies (Chopra & Chaudhary, 2022; Zahra, 2023). The practice of working remotely has been referred to by a variety of names, including telecommuting, telework, virtual work, remote work arrangements, and remote work; these terms are sometimes used interchangeably or with

subtle changes in meaning (Errichiello & Pianese, 2016). The phrase "working from home" was initially used in studies in the 1970s to refer to the remote working practices, which allowed individuals to work from their residences instead of in a single workplace (Coenen & Kok, 2014). Working remotely entails modern office-based tasks that can be accomplished through the use of computerized communication channels and information systems. One of the biggest digital changes in history is being sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic (Agarwal & Acharya, 2023). While technology development has increased the scope of this adaptability, the pandemic has also caused a significant upheaval in how workplaces function (Shagun, 2021). Here is where the role of human resources management is relevant. The basis of this change is human resource management (HRM), which aids firms in navigating from the hazy present to the unpredictable future. As a result of the discoveries and applications advancing this technological era, the HR department's structure will fundamentally change as we strive to master the interaction between humans and machines in the workplaces of the future (Mantzaris & Myloni, 2023). The world's top engineers are prioritizing the development of intelligent robots and AI/ML technologies, which will automate many industrial sectors, so HRM must adapt to new difficulties and previously unheard-of technological changes (Kumar, 2023).

Given that globalization and new HRM issues have changed the role of HR in this century, making it a major strategic partner for an organization, the significance of HR managers and their methods is even more critical (Nasir, 2017). The human resources are unquestionably the most crucial department in every business. Yet there are a lot of HR issues and bottlenecks in the modern workplace. Particularly, organizations struggle to address HR issues related to remote employees. The practice of HR is getting harder and harder as it deals with issues like retention, interacting with individuals from different cultures, and juggling informational and technological development (Abhishek et al., 2015). Therefore, the technology is significantly influencing HRM functions and unquestionably, has an impact on all corporate tasks.

A virtual workplace necessitates changes to communication and interpersonal dynamics as well as work routines and corporate procedures. How can HR efficiently carry out their duties when individuals aren't working in the same physical space? This poses a problem to HR. According to

the research studies, working virtually has both opportunities and challenges (McDonald et al., 2022a). It is now commonplace to work remotely, which was formerly restricted.

Operating a business remotely introduces new demands for the employers, includes the right talent search and getting them ready to embrace cutting-edge technologies. They also need to take into account the characteristics of the Millennial and Generation Z generations of workers, for whom time, place, and geography are less important than other factors. Consequently, the study is aimed to explore the challenges faced by HR in virtual workplaces and recommend the suggestive measures to tackle these effectively.

Remote Work and Covid-19:

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought attention to the significance of remote work as a concept and an organizational practice, which has become a major trend in HRM literature. In the past two and a half years, researchers have been focusing on how human resource roles need to be expanded beyond the motivation and retention of employees to ensure the performance as well as success of the organization outside the office boundaries while employees remain off-site (Garrote Sanchez et al., 2021). The world of work has transitioned due to Covid 19 pandemic, which has forced most staff to work from home in order to stop the virus' spread (Adekoya et al., 2022a). The pandemic has spurred widespread acceptance of remote working and a flexible work environment. It has made this more important to focus on maximizing the benefits of remote working. Additionally, this transition to remote work has presented difficulties for the organizations which were forced to quickly establish the required infrastructure to work from home including technological tools, software's, tangible items and organizational procedures to facilitate the success of remote working (Williamson et al., 2020). The main focus of HR policies and procedures before COVID-19 was workplace personnel management. When the pandemic problem unfolded, workers were not allowed to attend their places of employment, and HR staff found it challenging to persuade everyone to work from home. In order to adapt to the evolving needs of their workplace, they were forced to reconsider and reorganize their policies and procedures. However, the practice of remote working was not very common before the epidemic (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Owing to this, before COVID-19, the majority of employees had never worked remotely. With millions of people

being compelled to operate remotely due to the enormous COVID-19 in 2020, a de facto global study in tele-working has unwittingly been launched (Kniffin et al., 2021). Remote work has almost entirely become the "new normal."

2. Literature Review

The work-from-home (remote work) trend was growing in prevalence earlier than the COVID-19 pandemic because of technology improvements that made flexible scheduling increasingly possible (Golden & Eddleston, 2020). Scholars are only now starting to comprehend the effects the work from home has on people and the profession as a whole, despite the fact that perceptions of typical job settings have shifted and developed over time. According to some research, working remotely has so far been linked to benefits for businesses, including increased revenue and lower expenses (Richardson & Kelliher, 2015). However, it can be challenging to manage and sustain masses of remote workers due to logistical and communication issues, team development, and even performance evaluations (Alton, 2018). According to Mojtahedzadeh et al. (2021), workers are facing a plethora of difficulties as a result of the abrupt and unforeseen transition to remote work.

Anka A. et al. (2020) examined the growing body of research on how COVID-19 has affected protection of adult's practices, with a particular emphasis on distant employment. The study highlighted that COVID-19 restriction measures have exposed a weakness of the policy agenda and have given impetus to remote working (Anka et al., 2020). According to research by Camp et al. (2022) and others, millennials are particularly affected by the pandemic's lasting repercussions. The study has highlighted some challenges for managers as employee job satisfaction, loyalty and organizational commitment (Camp et al., 2022). Highlighting the challenges the authors have modified the Mumford skill model (Mumford et al., 2000) and added managerial effectiveness to the Mumford skill model and gave a new model as the millennial manager skill model. In a conceptual article, Jeske (2022) gave a summary of research on how electronic monitoring affected workers' feelings and satisfaction both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak began. The results presented that the pandemic has led to a rise in the usage of technology-based surveillance devices for remote workers across a wide range of industries and nations, indicating that many

organizations are going to clash with these novel digital instruments on several aspects (Jeske, 2022). Future research, according to the authors, could provide significant fresh insights into workplace dynamics and make use of a number of laws and practices. In their article, McDonald et al. (2022) discussed the ways HRD might support remote workers in maximizing the benefits and navigating the difficulties to guarantee the longevity of their careers (McDonald et al., 2022b). Further, employing proactive working habits in working remotely enhances the benefits and its associated flexibility (Adekoya et al., 2022b). Additionally, the study showed that companies and individuals must embrace smart working methods by taking aggressive actions to prioritize work over employees' physical presence and look for reciprocal advantages (for both employers and employees).

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the remote work challenges from the viewpoint of HR and remote workers.
2. To suggest measures to overcome HR challenges in managing remote workers.

4. Research Methods

To investigate the challenges in working remotely, researchers used secondary data i.e. journal articles as well as reports and web resources. The articles were retrieved from Google Scholar database. Thereafter, the retrieved articles were subjected to title and abstract screening and finally full manuscripts were reviewed. Only those articles that discussed about remote working and its challenges were included in the study. The challenges were explored from the HR manager's point of view as well as employees' point of view who are working remotely.

5. Results and Discussion

This section constitutes the discussion of key results coming out of thorough analysis of published articles as well as published reports such as state of remote work reports of different years. The analysis is categorized into two parts; Identification of major challenges of remote workers as well as identification of main challenges of Human Resource Managers in managing remote workers.

5.1 Key Challenges of Remote Working from the Remote Workers' Viewpoint:

At the individual, team, and organizational levels, remote work provides unique issues to organizations. Employees who work remotely experienced disengagement due to network issues, time zone differences, and other factors. The issues and challenges of remote workers are comprehensively discussed as under:

Fig. 1 demonstrates the key challenges of remote workers. State of remote work report (2023) by Buffer served the base of this analysis. In this survey report, remote workers were asked to respond about the challenges they face while working remotely. As per the results, not being able to disconnect from work and dealing with loneliness are the top two issues raised as per the Buffer's 2023 State of remote work report.

"Staying home too often and not having a reason to leave" was top most struggle faced by the employees. Further, loneliness (23%), Unplugging after work were the frequent concern reported by 22% respondents who work remotely. Domestic distractions (16%), time zones (19%), maintaining motivation (20%) and collaboration and communication (15%), also influence remote workers and the businesses they work for. Therefore, the analysis presents a clear picture of modern challenges the remote workers are confronting nowadays that need to be addressed.

Table 1 presents the year wise comparison of the remote work challenges from the past four years to present date. The data was extracted from the "State of remote work reports" published by Buffer. It is cleared from the above table that unplugging after work, loneliness, distractions, collaboration/ communication, staying motivated are the major challenges that remote workers are facing till date.
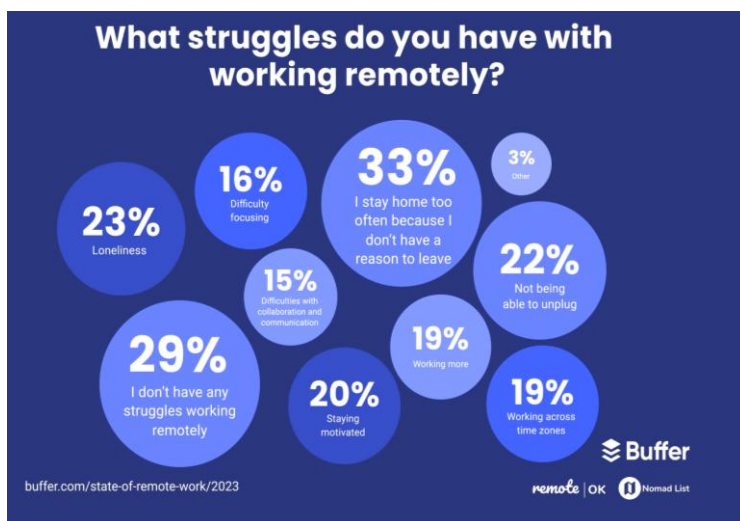
Figure1. Main Struggles of Remote Work in the Year 2023

(Source: https://buffer.com/state-of-remote-work/2023)

Therefore, while the majority of individuals appear to be adapting to the technical difficulties that come with working remotely, little progress is being made in overcoming the personal difficulties.

Table 1. Main Struggles of Remote Work during the Past Five Years

Struggles	2018 (%)	2019 (%)	2020 (%)	2021 (%)	2022 (%)	2023 (%)
Staying home too often	-	-	-	-	-	33
Unplugging after work	-	22	18	27	25	22
Loneliness	21	19	20	16	24	23
Collaboration/Communication	21	17	20	16	17	15
Distractions	16	10	12	15	21	16
Different Time Zone	-	8	10	7	21	19
Stay Motivated	-	8	7	12	21	20
Working more	-	-	-	-	20	19

(Source: buffer.com/state of remote work reports)

In the year 2019, unplugging after work was a major challenge for remote workers. In the years after 2019 also, it is observed that this is still one of the topmost challenges the remote workers facing presently. In the same way, in the year 2022, a greater number of respondents as compared to the past four years reported the feeling of loneliness as major issue they are dealing with. By interacting at workplace, an individual naturally creates friends in real life. But the case is not the same with the remote employment. To improve this, employing particular hubs to house remote workers is one way. Working from nearby cafes and co-working spaces is another option, as is making a concerted effort to create the desired social life. Further, it has been observed in the year 2022 that career advancement is emerged as a new challenge in remote work.

Table: 2 Different Challenges of Remote Workers

Challenges	Source
Interaction, Planning, establishing and embracing culture, creating a trust-based work environment, Sharing success	**https://blog.hubstaff.com/remote-management-problems/**
Communication (45.8%), Staying motivated (41%), Difficult to know what each person is working on (36.1%), Checking in (34.8%), Different time zones (26.9%), Difficulty in monitoring development (26.9%), Insufficient responsibility (25.1%), Deadlines missed or not set (18.1%), No digital translation of physical process (14.1%), Going over budget (11.9%)	2021 Remote Project Management Report **https://hubstaff.com/tasks/state-of-remote-project-management**
Unplugging problem (25%), Loneliness (24%), maintaining motivation (21%), Difficulty focusing (21%), Different time zones (21%), Workload (20%), Difficulties with collaboration and communication (17%), Career advancement or growth (15%)	State of Remote Work Report/2022 https://buffer.com/state-of-remote-work/2022
Mental health, Distractions, Communication and Collaboration, Technical difficulties, Work-life imbalance	**https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/07/22/5-common-problems-plaguing-remote-workers-and-what-to-do-about-them/?sh=af2035a4c57f**
Isolation	(Cascio, 2001).
Work family conflict	(Anderson & Kelliher, 2020)
Disengagement from work,	(Arunprasad et al., 2022a)
Isolation, High social distances among participants,	(Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017)
High expectations of organizational support	(Molino et al., 2020)

(Source: Prepared by the authors)

Nowadays, unplugging is closely connected with the employees working from their homes rather than in the office. Although it used to be a common choice, working from home is known to be challenging for several people. In the year when it wasn't often possible to go out with friends after work, it can be particularly challenging to unplug at the day end. Additionally, some CEOs have expressed concern that employees (especially younger employees) who work remotely are prevented from developing relationships with and learning from colleagues, both of which can happen organically in a co-located office.

Table 2 shows different challenges faced by remote workers as per different sources reviewed. It is cleared from the above table that communication or collaboration, different time zones are the most cited challenges in managing remote workers as per different sources. It implies that lack of communication or collaboration is a common challenge that HR manager should focus.

5.2 Key Challenges in Managing Remote Workers from HR Manager's Viewpoint:

The beginning of the epidemic presented HR experts with numerous challenges that had never been faced before. Due to the worldwide lockdown, businesses have transitioned from a conventional brick-and-mortar structure to a virtual workplace. As a result of this, the HR specialists faced a wide range of difficulties.

Table 3. Challenges in Managing Remote Workers from HR Manager's Viewpoint:

Challenges	Source
Training of employees, Performance Management, Lack of Trust, Lack of Physical Interaction	Wayne F. Cascio, 2000
Psychological Well-being, Career Development	Sunyoung Park et al., 2021
Building Trust	Choi &Cho, 2019
Collaboration	Wang et al., 2019
Building an agile workforce, Disengagement	Arunprasad et al., 2021
Mental Well-being of employees	(Jain et al., 2022)
Retraining and Upskilling personnel	(Przytuła et al., 2020)

(Source: Prepared by the authors)

There may not be much in-person interaction among an HR manager and a remote worker. They just arrive at a job site or client's house, get to work, and then depart. According to Arunprasad et al. (2022b), it appears that the employees are merely enduring the motions and is not actively participating (Arunprasad et al., 2022b). Thus, when workers work remotely, it can be difficult for HR managers to maintain engagement. They sense a rift with their supervisors. In a survey of business and HR leaders across 119 countries, Deloitte (2020) found that ensuring long-term organizational growth requires boosting employee engagement and intimacy to the company. Additionally, managers deploying a virtual workplace face a significant communication barrier (Akkirman & Harris, 2004). New communication skills need to be learned by managers so that employees don't feel isolated. Without effective communication, managers and employees may feel disengaged and be more susceptible to misinterpretations (Alton, 2018). It relies on dialing, emails, and printed documents, many of which are either missing or elicit no answer. Therefore, it's crucial to avoid relying entirely on email, which is a one-way form of communication.

HR's task is not completed by merely allowing workers to work remotely. The mental health of their staff members also needs to be taken care of. The largest challenge facing HR managers is figuring out how to guarantee employees' mental well-being while doing virtual work (Jain et al., 2022). Additionally, one of the main challenges facing businesses involves upgrading and re - skilling staff to deal with the change to remote working (Przytuła et al., 2020). Employees may experience difficulties even with the most thorough training materials and written procedures if they lack their coworkers' in-person support (Alton 2018). Further, identifying appropriate digital tools to train staff presents a challenge for HR.

Moreover, the biggest problem for HR professionals is evaluating workers who work from home and making sure that appraisal systems are operating properly. Defining, facilitating, and encouraging performance are the three things that managers must do successfully to manage performance, which is the hardest task. Compared to face-to-face encounters, performance management for teammates who work remotely is challenging (Allen et al., 2015). Now the performance can't be assessed based on working hours or leave etc. The older criterion for performance evaluation is now obsolete. Employers are looking at new metrics which is concerned with the output of employee rather than working hours (Jain et al., 2022). In this way, like anything

else, remote working presents various challenges in front of HR managers which should be dealt smartly with the help of technology advancements.

5.3 Suggestive Measures:

Although working remotely possess some drawbacks from HR's perspective. But if HR can't address and resolve these issues, HR isn't HR. Managers can contribute in a few different ways to the success of a virtual office environment; for example, clearly defining each role's expectations and conducting frequent check-ins to monitor progress are the best ways to make sure everyone is performing their duties. While expecting every employee to work at the same speed is unrealistic, the HR manager should have an overall estimation of how much time is required for that particular task. Every virtual conference suffers from the curse of dead stillness. When nobody speaks and everyone is just listening, everything is awkward and nothing seems to advance. Here, HR should pick individuals who can speak fluently and with clarity for this reason. How well someone communicates can be ascertained throughout the interview process. Consequently, if a candidate will be working remotely full-time, it's imperative to evaluate their communication abilities both in writing and over the phone. At the end, this makes it possible to guarantee that each video chat is engaging and fruitful.

Further, HR may make efforts to connect with the team frequently so that an open and effective communication environment can be created. By developing relationships amongst team members and holding meetings through media-rich communications networks, team leaders can lessen the detrimental effects of isolation (Liao, 2017). HR should make it clear to the employees how they should communicate. This can be accomplished by setting documented standards which outline the types of communication platforms, and the manner in which teammates are supposed to correspond with one another. This will help to clarify workplace communication and remove the mystery that so often surrounds it. Also, regular updates whether it is to evaluate the work done by an employee, offer an opinion or suggestion or congratulate the team on a goal met.

The cornerstone of a successful virtual team is technology. Technology can also be utilized to promote teamwork and individual collaboration (Arunprasad et al., 2022b). As team members assess one other's trustworthiness as well as that of the platforms or systems they use to

communicate with one another, technology will be essential to fostering trust in virtual teams (Choi & Cho, 2019). Nowadays, numerous apps are available to suit every purpose. For example, for web and video conferencing, Skype and Google Meet can be used. No matter where they are—on the job, traveling, or even at home— remote employees will always have access to their mobile devices. Their involvement will ultimately increase because an app enables them to always feel connected to the business. Apart from this, in remote teams, asynchronous work is increasingly prevalent. The manager should allow the staff to work the hours they desire when time zone and geographic disparities are bringing them down. It's one of the benefits of remote job. Just be sure to communicate clearly, whether it is decided to use a fully asynchronous plan or combine conventional scheduling methods. Further, establish deadlines, communication ethics, time tracking procedures, and other collaboration rules before making this significant change. In this way, the remote work challenges can be handled on the part of HR managers.

6. Conclusion and Directions for Future Research:

New working arrangements are the result of information technology advancements. The virtual office is one of them. While crisis pose a risk to an organization's status quo, they also offer chances for transformation (Brockner & James, 2008). The present article deals with the exploration of various challenges in remote working from the viewpoint of both the HR manager as well as remote workers and the suggestive measures to overcome these challenges. In this study, the researchers identified communication or collaboration difficulties, unplugging, distractions, work-life imbalance, loneliness, maintaining motivation level are some major struggles faced by remote workers supported by the survey reports. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of HR managers, performance management, emotional wellness, training of employees, difficulties in keeping them engaged are the key challenges. In contrast to the commonly held belief that monitoring attendance, production efficiency, resolving complaints, as well as clarifying autonomy and personal responsibility have become huge barriers pertaining to the management of remote workforce, it has been observed in this study that increased working days/meetings/teleconferences and mental exhaustion as a result of working in physical isolation, as well as network problems, have proven to be greater challenges. HR manager needs to be attentive towards the remote workers otherwise employees will not feel connected. Future

researchers might explore the challenges faced in remote working from the viewpoint of an organization and the measures to overcome the same. Also, how organization can leverage technology in setting up a better working environment for individuals could be the issue of concern in future studies.

7. Implications:

Current business realities as well as employees' needs for greater flexibility and autonomy call for virtual workplaces. The scope of the difficulties in running a virtual workplace will expand. Utilizing new tools and technologies only promotes competitive advantage and it calls for innovative company practices and good management. The organizations of the future will be flatter than they are today if virtual work arrangements succeed (Cascio, 2001). The autonomy and responsibility of knowledge workers in these environments will be greater than in conventional corporations. Therefore, new methods of communication and interaction are needed in the virtual world. The development and upkeep of the technical infrastructure—the vital spark for virtual environments is gaining significant attention. For both workers and managers to function effectively in these workplaces, ongoing training in new tools and procedures is required.

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