

Influence of Covid-19 on Virtual Employment Practices by Corporates

Pooja Paharia

Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, University of Rajasthan
JLN Mard, Jaipur -302004, Rajasthan, India
poojapahariyapp@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research article attempts to review the existing literature and further extend the scope of management research by identifying the emerging HR trends that are likely to impact the future of work, exploring the impact that the pandemic exerts on virtual employment practices, and identify the factors that enhance employment experiences in a virtual workplace in post-Covid scenario. The research identified certain trends that are likely to impact work approach in the post pandemic scenario, such as increase in remote work, greater tracking of workers, emergence of new top-tier employers, and expanded use of contingent workers. The research also identified certain factors enhancing employment experiences in a virtual workplace, namely- the degree of social cohesion of the workforce, the extent of communication and coordination among the members, the level of mutual trust, and the degree of knowledge, experience, and skill sharing, all of which collectively affect employee performance and the results achieved. This study indicates the need to develop strategies, training programs, and HR policies to give greater emphasis to interpersonal interactions during implementing virtual work practices, to take measures to improve effectiveness of virtual communication, and to train workforce to schedule their work at home more efficiently.

Keywords: Impact of Covid-19, Virtual Employment Practices, Virtual Work, Remote Work, Human Resource Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations continuously adapt to the improved operating procedures, new business models, updated regulations, and better exponential systems, based on technological development and human experience, to bring sustainable changes at behavioral, cultural, and organizational level as an attempt to compete and

survive in globalized markets (Victor et al., 2021). With the increasing globalization of business, it is becoming more and more common for diverse employees and teams to use technology to cooperate and communicate with each other, to coordinate their activities (Ahuja & Carley, 1999). In a more globalized and diversified world, prompt advances in the field of information technology have transformed the work model and environment from traditional Work From Office to non-traditional Work From Home or working through a remote virtual center (Ahmed & Bedawy, 2015).

In addition to planned transitions in business models and work arrangements, unforeseen events, such as the recent outbreak of pandemic, often force organizations to change the work environment and develop new strategies for managing performance at the workplace. The pandemic has strongly impacted all organizations and created an intricate and challenging environment for human resource practitioners and managers, who need to find efficacious solutions to maintain the stability of their organization. With social distancing, travel bans, virtual meetings, virtual teams, and remote work becoming the new norms to contain the global pandemic, dramatic transition was evidenced at workplace and organizations of all sizes and industries faced the need to develop new strategies to rapidly adapt to a predominantly virtual employment practices.

Virtual employment practices or arrangements, where an employee works remotely from other co-employees and managers using modern technology, are now a reality in the current global and corporate landscape than ever (Cascio, 2000). The virtual work environment or virtual workplace exists digitally through virtual networks and workspaces. It has no physical existence. It is created and maintained with the help of various technology-enabled tools to connect, collaborate, and complete work.

Organizations also support such an approach for a variety of reasons, including improving customer service, increasing productivity, reducing real estate costs, environmental benefits, increasing profits, and entering more global markets (Cascio, 2000). However, Virtual employment practices require better managerial styles and administrative skills of subsisting leaders, including formal and informal communication (Cascio, 2000). Hence, virtual employment practices are not always suitable for all organizations, jobs, managers, and employees (Cascio, 2000); as such, organizations must consider carefully when choosing to support or adopt virtual or remote practices (Choudhury & Larson, 2018; Rock & Smith, 2020).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Adamovic et al. (2021) studied the predictive factors and conditions predicting individuals' virtual work adoption by examining the degree to which self-efficacy, work atmosphere, and their interactions. The results evidenced that an effective virtual work atmosphere encourages employees with low virtual work self-efficacy to enhance their virtual work engagement and experience.

Bennett (2021) studied the pandemic impacting organizations from a “multidisciplinary approach” focusing on how supporting technologies, continuity plans, and employee health/safety and welfare have shaped human resource management practices. The author challenges human resource managers to turn to models with great flexibility in work practices by appropriately removing the organization’s dependence on the physical structure.

Emanuel and Harrington (2021) studied the call center employees of a large US company, including those who suddenly moved from Work from Office to Work from Home due to Covid-19. The research observed that the average productivity of remote workers was lower than that of office workers. They concluded that remote work has an adverse selection effect and that more productive employees prefer to work in the office.

Gibbs et al. (2021) used the personnel and analysis data of more than 10,000 skilled Information Technology professionals to study the impact of working from home on productivity. The study observed that working hours have increased by about 18% and productivity has fallen by 8%-19%. Compared with employees without children, employees with children at home have more working hours and a greater decline in their productivity. The productivity of women employees has fallen even more. The time spent coordinating activities and conducting meetings increased significantly, while uninterrupted working hours have been greatly reduced. The results of the study raise key issues that companies need to address when implementing virtual work policies.

Jooss et al. (2020), in their paper, systematically and comprehensively reviewed 100 articles on flexible work arrangements. They asserted that global human resource functions must be considered in response to unstable changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic, through remote work arrangements, to support the development of strategies and sustainable considerations for organizational mobility.

Lund et al. (2021) conducted a study to examine how the pandemic acceleration trend will reshape the future of work in the long run by exploring working trends in eight economies with different business and labor market models: United States, United Kingdom, Spain, Japan, India, Germany, France, and China. The study concluded that after the pandemic, jobs in closer work areas may undergo greater changes, and the shift in business models will trigger a chain reaction in other work areas.

Minbaeva (2021) published a paper focusing on three emerging global trends, namely virtual workforce, adoption of digital trends, and artificial intelligence, aiming to study their overall impact in the context of post-pandemic scenario and emerging HRM strategies. In addition, it discusses potential paradigm shifts that can ultimately provide HR practitioners with the knowledge needed to deal with the disruption caused by these trends.

Newman and Ford (2021) observed that leading virtual teams in diverse home office environment is quite dissimilar from leading work teams in a traditional face-to-face office environment. HR managers must be aware that when workforce is dispersed, a transition in leadership style, communication procedures, and techniques will be needed. Leaders can use the following five recommended steps to maximize the efficiency of remote workplaces and improve the performance virtual teams: upgrade leadership style and communication tools for informed virtual team; encourage leadership among team members; build and sustain a culture of mutual trust; establish and explain new realities; and create and regularly perform consistency audits to ensure that virtual employees conform to the organizational objectives and cultural values.

Zhong et al. (2021) carried out a systematic review of emerging research in the field of management and human resource to explore the issues and approaches arising during the period of pandemic. The results of this study show that the pandemic strongly impacted traditional human resource management. The proposition of the research nominates relevant strategies and practices to deal with emerging HR issues.

RATIONALE & OBJECTIVES

Although there is a large amount of research indicating the biomedical impact of Covid-19 on the safety, welfare, health, and wellbeing of employees (Casafont et al., 2021), there is a scarcity of research on employment practices that organizations must consider for long-term success in the post-Covid situation. In

addition, as businesses continue to become more technology-dependent and globalized in nature, there exists a need to enhance virtual employment experiences. As such, more research is needed to understand what arrangements can be successful in the post-Covid scenario, along with their long-term impacts (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). In the above-stated context, the present article is an attempt to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the emerging HR trends that are likely to impact the future of work.
2. To explore the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on virtual employment practices.
3. To identify the factors that enhances employment experiences in a virtual workplace.

Therefore, this research aims to help companies understand the techniques and methods that can be used to better support their virtual employment experiences.

METHODOLOGY

There is a lack of research studies to gain an insight of the influence of Covid-19 pandemic on employees' virtual practices. Keeping this in mind, the researcher based her current study on recent research on the impact of the pandemic on Human resource policies and practices. As classified by Grant & Booth (2009), the research methodology adopted in this article is of the nature of general literature review that systematically and comprehensively examines recent and relevant literature. This article is characterized by the narrative form of its review.

The search for articles was manually carried out in international electronic databases including Semantic scholar and Web of Sciences, as these are academically considered to be the most recognized and widely used databases, covering of high-quality peer-reviewed management journals (DeJesus et al., 2018). The researcher used a set of keywords like “coronavirus” or “Covid-19” or “pandemic” and “virtual employment practices” or “trending HR strategy” or “remote work”, combining them to search for various articles.

Articles relevant to current research topic providing studies regarding the influence of Covid-19 on virtual employment practices were chosen, focusing on articles published recently between October 2020 and September 2021. The search initially returned 48 articles. Keeping in mind the purpose of the current

research, the researchers analyzed articles that help build bridges between management, business, human resources, and employment practices. In the process of selection, articles concerning bio-medical impact of the pandemic were ignored; non-English and duplicate articles were excluded. Finally, 9 articles were reviewed and included in this article.

The researcher must admit that either due non reflection of searched keywords in the title or keywords of the articles or due to the unavailability of the database, or due to oversight, the search process might not have succeeded in analyzing all articles published on the current topic. However, the researcher is confident to have covered most of the relevant articles published during the research period, which allows her to outline the existing literature, theories, trends, and research gaps.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The support for virtual work practices seems to accelerate abruptly in the post pandemic world. As compared to working together in a normal physical workplace, a successful virtual work practice requires an understanding of the differences in personal experience. In order to avoid affecting team performance, employees need to react to differences and find alternative operating methods with the support of their managers and employers. Therefore, human resource managers need to be challenged to rethink their approaches to recruit and manage skilled workforce.

The research identified certain human resources trends that are likely to impact the future of work in the post pandemic scenario. First, the future of work seems to be flexible, and the virtual work environment will continue to exist. Second, organizations are expanding data collection to increase passive tracking of their employees. Third, a new class of top-tier employers is emerging in the post-pandemic world, desiring to balance currently, the future concerns about the long-term impact on their brands. Fourth, organizations are expanding the use of contingent workers to provide greater flexibility in workforce management.

Virtual employment practices provide each member of the virtual team with an opportunity to become a leader by successfully responding to transformative management style. This includes creating a strong team hierarchy, empowering and mentoring the team, involving them to participate in setting team goals and decision-making, and supporting them to actively reflect on results. Virtual practices can be more challenging for employees with less

experience, shorter tenure, and jobs that involve a lot of coordination and collaboration.

Virtual work practices affects team dynamics and social interaction, the degree of harmony and disputes, and the quality of communication and coordination. All these factors affect employee performance and the results collectively achieved by them. The effectiveness of virtual work practices depends on various factors, such as the degree of the social cohesion of the workforce, the extent of communication and coordination among the members, the level of mutual trust, and the degree of knowledge, experience, and skill sharing. When people work in a virtual environment, these factors seem to be the most vulnerable and thus, are needed to be consciously understood and actively managed.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to help organizations get an insight of the emerging HR trends that are likely to impact the future of work (i.e., increasing adoption of virtual & remote work, increased tracking of employees, emergence of top-tier employers, and use of contingent workforce) and to identify the factors that enhance employment experiences in a virtual workplace (i.e., social cohesion, communication and coordination, mutual trust, and knowledge and experience, and skill sharing among the members). The research findings evidenced challenges for less experienced employees in implementing virtual employment practices that provides scope to future research to search for measures to resolve those challenges. Further, this study indicates the need to develop strategies, training programs, and HR policies to give greater emphasis to interpersonal interactions during implementing virtual work practices, to take measures to improve effectiveness of virtual communication, and to train workforce to schedule their work at home more efficiently.

REFERENCES

- Adamovic, M., Gahan, P., Olsen, J., Gulyas, A., Shallcross, D. and Mendoza, A. (2021). Exploring the adoption of virtual work: the role of virtual work self-efficacy and virtual work climate. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2021.1913623
- Ahmed, A. and Bedawy, R. (2015). Core Practices for Managing Virtual Employees in Public Organizations. *Journal of Business and Economics*, 6:113-120.
- Ahuja, M.K. and Carley, K.M. (1999). Network structure in virtual organizations. *Organization Science*, 10(6):741–757.
- Bennett, A.M. (2021). The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on the Future of Human Resource Management. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 9(3):58-63.
- Brynjolfsson, E., Horton, J.J., Ozimek, A., Rock, D., Sharma, G. and TuYe, H.Y. (2020). Covid-19 and remote work: An early look at US data (No. w27344). *National Bureau of Economic Research*. Retrieved from: https://john-josephhorton.com/papers/remote_work.pdf
- Casafont, C., Fabrellas, N., Rivera, P., Olivé-Ferrer, M.C., Querol, E., Venturas, M., Prats, J., Cuzco, C., Frías, C.E. and Pérez-Ortega, S. (2021). Experiences of nursing students as healthcare aid during the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain: A phenomenological research study. *Nurse Education Today*, 97:104711.
- Cascio, W.F. (2000). Managing a virtual workplace. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 14(3):81-90.
- Choudhury, P., Foroughi, C. and Larson, B. (2018). Work-from-Anywhere: The Productivity Effects of Geographic Flexibility. Retrieved from: https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Publication%20Files/19-054_2ecb5287-d0bd-4aa0b3d8-36fb44b757b4.pdf
- DeJesus, A., Paula, A., Rui, S. and Sandro, M. (2018). Eco-innovation in the transition to a circular economy: An analytical literature review. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 172:2999–3018.
- Emanuel, N. and Harrington, E. (2021). Working Remotely? Working Paper, *Department of Economics, Harvard University*.

- Gibbs, M., Mengel, F. and Siemroth, C. (2021). Work from Home & Productivity: Evidence from Personnel & Analytics Data on IT Professionals. Working Paper No. 2021-56, *Becker Friedman Institute, Chicago*.
- Grant, M.J. and Booth, A. (2009). A typology of reviews: an analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information Library Journal*, 26(2):91–108.
- Jooss, S., McDonnell, A. and Conroy, K. (2020). Flexible global working arrangements: An integrative review and future research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review*, 31(4):100780.
- Lund, S., Madgavkar, A., Manyika, J., Smit, S., Ellingrud, K., Meaney, M. and Robinson, O. (2021). The future of work after COVID-19. McKinsey Global Institute Report. Available at: www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19
- Minbaeva, D. (2020). Disrupted HR? *Human Resource Management Review*, 31(4):100820.
- Newman, S.A. and Ford, R.C. (2021). Five Steps to Leading Your Team in the Virtual COVID-19 Workplace. *Organizational Dynamics*, 50(1):100802.
- Rock, D. and Smith, K. (2020). The science of virtual work and how it can make life easier for everyone. Forbes. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidrock/2020/03/17/the-science-of-virtual-workand-how-it-can-make-life-easier-for-everyone/#419aec774003>
- Victor, G.A., Pedro, P.S. and Mariano, A.C. (2021). Virtual Teams in Times of Pandemic: Factors That Influence Performance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12:624637.
- Zhong, Y., Li, Y., Ding, J. and Liao, Y.Y. (2021). Risk Management: Exploring Emerging Human Resource Issues during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 14:228.