

Employees' Differential Perception of Work from Home (WFH) During and Post COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought dramatic changes in one's life making the mankind to face unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The situation has forced majority of the employees to adopt working from home. The current study is aimed at exploring the preference of employees towards work from home after COVID-19 based on their experience during COVID-19. For this purpose, a survey is done with the variables such as the work-home interface and productivity that are likely to have an impact on the preference of employees towards WFH after COVID-19. In addition, the feeling of employees towards WFH such as excitement, boring and stressed have been used as moderators. It is found that the moderating variables influence the relationship between the experience of WFH during COVID-19 and the preference towards WFH after COVID-19.

Keywords: Work from Home, work-home interface, employees' productivity, COVID-19, feeling of employees.

Introduction

Easily observable economic shock have been noticed due to COVID-19 pandemic creating an impact in the lives of many individuals. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions in the functioning of business have been created forcing many organizations to adopt work from home (WFH) culture. The concept of work from home is the hardest hit by the pandemic created due to the necessity of social distancing among the working professionals.

One of the important challenges of WFH is its impact on productivity and the existing work home interface (WHI). WHI is the union of work and life at home. Work may interfere in the personal life

of employees at home or home affairs may interfere in the official work. It is also difficult to segregate time spent on domestic and official work during WFH. However, this has become a new normal life and might have created both positive and negative perception among employees towards WFH. Also, WFH is considered a better option for organizations to protect health and security of the job for employees (Brynjolfsson et. al.2020). Since the pandemic forces employees to work from home, the difference in perceptions towards preference to WFH even after COVID-19 is deemed important to be researched.

Research studies have shown that IT and ITES organizations initially feared that WFH might have varied impacts on productivity (Meyer et. al. 2017). There are evidences which proved that WFH had shown positive as well as negative impact towards the productivity of software developer employees during COVID-19 (Bao et. al. 2019). Few more studies have also identified the positive and negative impact on productivity due to WFH (Laihonen et al. 2012; Coenen and Kok 2014; Campbell 2015; Kazekami 2020).

Though there are many studies which have researched the impact of WFH on the overall productivity of employees, very few have explored whether employees will be willing to continue WFH even after the COVID-19 pandemic based on the self-assessed present level of productivity and WHI. Hence, the present study is aimed to investigate the willingness of employees to WFH even after the COVID-19 based on the employee's self-assessed level of productivity and the experience of WHI.

Hence, the current study is aimed to investigate the following objectives:

- 1 Feeling of employees towards WFH – excited, stressed or boring
- 2 Preference of employees towards WFH even after COVID-19
- 3 Relationship between the self-assessed feeling of productivity while working at home and preference to continue WFH after COVID-19
- 4 Relationship between WHI and preference to continue WFH after COVID-19
- 5 Difference in perceptions towards preference to WFH after COVID-19 due to the moderating effect of the feelings of employees towards WFH

Research Methodology

Out of 151 responses collected from private, government and self-employed individuals, 52.7% were female and 51.3% of the respondents were married. Majority of the respondents (58%) were between the age group of 25 to 30 years. Most of the respondents were having less than 1 year of experience in their present organization (48.7%), 31.3 % of the respondents worked less than 5 years in the same organization while very few (10%) have worked for more than 10 years in the same organization. 54.7 % of the participants have never worked from home before the COVID-19 pandemic. Majority were private employees (64.7%) while very few were Government employees (8%) and 27.4% of the respondents were self-employed. The data were collected from the Southern part of India. The responses were collected during this COVID-19 from May 2020 to September 2020 through online mode. The present study adopted descriptive analysis and inferential analysis such as correlation and multiple regressions to investigate the proposed objectives.

Results and Discussion

The responses were assessed in four levels: current state of employees towards the feelings of WFH; differences in perceptions towards preference to continue WFH even after COVID-19; relationship between WHI and feeling of productivity while working at home with preference to continue WFH even after COVID-19; moderating role of feelings towards WFH in the relationship between WHI and feeling of productivity while working at home with preference to continue WFH even after COVID-19.

WHI factor (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$) comprised of 4 items and rated on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Productivity was measured using 3 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$) based on the rating in five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example of a response representing productivity was "I feel more productive when working from home". Only 8% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed for the higher productivity at WFH than working at office. 26.7 % of the respondents were unable to judge the differences in the productivity level.

Preference to WFH after COVID-19 was measured using five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (not at all prefer) to 5 (strongly prefer). The mean score of the preference to WFH after COVID-19 was found to be 2.69. Only 25.3% of the respondents preferred to continue WFH even after COVID-19. Majority of the respondents (33.3%) were unable to decide about their preference of WFH after COVID-19.

Respondents were of three categories based on the choices of Feeling of employees towards WFH after COVID-19. Feelings were categorized into excited, stressed and boring. Though majority of them felt excited (35.3%) about working from home, however, 34.7 % of the respondents felt bored and 30% felt really stressed working from home.

TABLE 1 Results of Correlation

EXCITED		
	WHI	Productivity
I would prefer to WFH after COVID-19	0.276*	0.171*
BORING		
	WHI	Productivity
I would prefer to WFH after COVID-19	-0.414**	-0.153*
STRESSED		
	WHI	Productivity
I would prefer to WFH after COVID-19	-0.540**	-0.403**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 1 represents the correlations among the adopted variables. The data pertaining to correlation found that there is a significant positive relationship emerged between productivity and preference

towards WFH after COVID-19 for the excited category of employees. While, significant negative relationship is observed between the WHI and the productivity while working at home for boring and stressed employees.

Table 2 Results of Regression: WHI & Productivity on preference to WFH after COVID-19 for employees who feel excited, boring & stressed in WFH

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F value	P value
EXCITED					
1	0.290 ^a	0.198	0.191	4.206	<0.05*
BORING					
2	0.434 ^a	0.288	0.255	8.674	<0.05*
STRESSED					
3	0.605 ^a	0.366	0.336	12.129	<0.001**

** significant at 0.01 *significant at 0.05

a Predictors: Productivity & WHI

Table 3 β coefficient, t value and significance value for the analysis between WHI & Productivity on preference to WFH after COVID-19 for employees who feel excited, boring & stressed in WFH

Model	Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard. Coeff.	t-value	Sig.
		Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
EXCITED						
1	(Constant)	2.609	0.799	-	3.265	<0.05*
	Productivity	0.552	0.149	0.552	0.652	<0.05*
	WHI	0.488	0.222	0.459	0.497	<0.05*
BORING						
2	(Constant)	0.952	0.734	-	1.297	<0.05*
	Productivity	-0.720	0.215	-0.473	-3.344	<0.05*
	WHI	-0.146	0.144	-0.143	-1.012	<0.05*
STRESSED						
3	(Constant)	6.193	0.697		8.881	<0.001**
	WHI	-0.689	0.188	-0.047	-3.674	<0.001**
	Productivity	-.284	0.128	0.282	-2.220	<0.05*

** significant at 0.01 *significant at 0.05

Dependent Variable: Preference to WFH after COVID-19

Based on the Table 2, the R value (correlation co-efficient value) is found to be 0.290 for excited, 0.434 for boring and 0.605 for stressed indicating the strength of relationship between WHI (X_1) & Productivity (X_2) and Preference to WFH after COVID_19 (Y). The unstandardized coefficient beta value signifies the positive relationship for excited employees while negative relationship for bored and stressed employees.

For excited employees, the R square value is found to be 0.198 which explains that WHI & Productivity contributes (19.8%) to preference to WFH after COVID-19 and the R square is also found to be significant at 5% level. While for boring employees, the R square value is found to be 0.288 which explains that WHI & Productivity contributes (28.8%) to preference to WFH after COVID-19 and the R square is also found to be significant at 5% level. And for stressed employees, the R square value is found to be 0.366 which explains that WHI & Productivity contributes (36.6%) to preference to WFH after COVID-19 and the R square is also found to be significant at 1% level.

The equation derived after multiple regression is given below

Excited Employees

$$Y = 2.609 + (0.552X_1) + (0.488X_2)$$

Boring Employees

$$Y = 0.952 + (-0.720X_1) + (-0.146X_2)$$

Stressed Employees

$$Y = 6.193 + (-0.689X_1) + (-0.284X_2)$$

For employees who feel excited, the effect of WHI & Productivity on Preference to WFH after COVID-19 was assessed using linear regression model. The value of β coefficient was found to be indicating a positive relationship between WHI ($X_1=0.552$) and productivity ($X_2=0.488$) with preference to WFH after COVID-1954 (Y). For employees who feel boring, the effect of WHI & Productivity on Preference to WFH after COVID-19 was assessed using linear regression model. The value of β coefficient was found to be indicating a negative relationship between WHI ($X_1=-0.720$) and productivity ($X_2=-0.146$) with preference to WFH after COVID-1954 (Y).

For employees who feel stressed, the effect of WHI & Productivity on Preference to WFH after COVID-19 was assessed using linear regression model. The value of β coefficient was found to be indicating a negative relationship between WHI ($X_1=-0.689$) and productivity ($X_2=-0.284$) with preference to WFH after COVID-1954 (Y). Thus, it is identified using the β coefficient value that, among the two predictor variables WHI predicts maximum to preference to WFH after COVID-19 in a positive way for excited employees. While, WHI predicts maximum to preference to WFH after COVID-19 in a negative way for boring employees and WHI predicts maximum to preference to WFH after COVID-19 in a negative way for stressed employees.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the future preference of employees to continue WFH even after the COVID-19 pandemic. And the results of the study explained four key areas. 1) The relationship between the feelings towards WFH at present such as excited, boring and stressed with the

preference to WFH even after COVID-19. 2) Self-assessed level of productivity with the preference to WFH even after COVID-19. 3) WHI with the preference to WFH even after COVID-19. 4) The moderating effect of the feelings towards WFH at present such as excited, boring and stressed in the relationship between productivity and preference towards WFH after COVID-19; and in the relationship between WHI and preference towards WFH. The results of the research highlighted the difference in relationship of WHI & self-assessed productivity with the preference to WFH even after COVID-19 moderated by the present feelings of WFH.

The reason for majority of the respondents feeling bored (34.7 %) and stressed (30%) working from home could be the compulsion to WFH due to pandemic. Though earlier researchers have explored many benefits for adopting WFH, however it was conducted during the phase when situation did not compel one to WFH. The most prominent reasons for adopting WFH is to create flexibility among employees to balance work and life and also to motivate employees.

Based on the descriptive analysis, majority of the respondents were below 30 years, having less than 1 year experience and mostly single. Such category of employees might have lesser commitment to personal life unlike the other age groups of employees. Previous studies indicated that majority of the White-collar workers choose to work from home to reduce work/family conflicts (Ammons & Markham, 2004). This gave an avenue for future study to conduct the preference of WFH based on the profession and status of work. Based on the reviewed literature, the outcome of WFH is multifaceted having both benefits and challenges (Aguilera et. al., 2016; Felstead and Henseke, 2017). However, COVID-19 pandemic forced most of the organizations compelling their employees to WFH. The result for the forced WFH might be the reason for having very few respondents preferring to WFH even after COVID-19.

The results of multiple regression highlights that the present feelings of employees towards WFH moderated the relationship between WHI & productivity with preference to WFH after COVID-19. The current research study added to the existing literature about the future expectations of employees regarding their preference to WFH even after COVID-19. Further study could be explored identifying the other factors which might influence the preference to WFH after COVID-19.

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