

Understanding The Challenges Of Remote Working And It's Impact To Workers

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Abstract: *This study was undertaken to know and understand the challenges of remote working and it's impact to workers. The research objectives generally aims to determine the following: (1) the media of communication between the company and its remote workers? (2) the important skills needed to be a remote worker? (3) the possible benefits and challenges of working remotely? (4) the difficulties encountered by a remote worker? Further, descriptive method of research was used in this study and the instrument used in gathering data is a researcher-constructed questionnaire. The respondents were 43 remote workers of Pearson People Services selected through the use of random sampling technique for data gathering. Findings revealed that almost all of the respondents used electronic mails as their major instrument in communicating with their co-workers. Most of them find working independently and organizing work tasks as the most important skill in working remotely. Majority of the respondents chose having more flexible hours as the most beneficial factor when working remotely. In contrast, more than half find collaborating/communicating with others as the most challenging contributing factor of remote working and finally, separating work and home life was selected to be the most difficult part of being a remote worker.*

Key words: *Remote workers, telecommuting, digital nomads, home base work, digital technology, data analytics , Virtual workers.*

I. Introduction

The sophisticated advancements of modern technology have been a major player in flourishing the competitive environment of workplaces. With its huge capacity of interconnecting lines across the globe, communication has worked seamlessly, thus, opening more doors of enhancing manpower in the corporate world.

According to Stacey Epstein, CEO of Zinc, "The modern workforce is increasingly mobile, collaborative and dynamic, and comprises multi-generations, all with differing communication preferences. These workers span multiple industries.... All who represent unique challenges when it comes to staying connected while on the job" (Businessnewsdaily.com).

These advances have expanded more opportunities for employees who work especially outside of a traditional office setting or those who work remotely. Further, it is a work arrangement in which employees work from home or convenient locations instead of commuting to a central work location, using information and communication technologies to interact with co-workers and clients. (Gajendran, 2016).

Remote working can be of great advantage specifically to large corporations for it offers more flexible hours of managing productivity. Various studies conducted globally have presented positive feedbacks about it. In fact, several firms have seen its potential as soon as they incorporated working remotely in their respective organizations.

This type of work relatively benefits both the employees and the company they are working with. In the US alone, various companies have resorted to incorporate remote workers as part of their workforce for they contribute more outputs. In addition, integrating remote workforce cut down pertinent costs such as commuting expenses. It also promotes higher rates of efficiency and productivity. In fact, according to a research conducted by Global Workplace Analytics, over two-thirds of employers report increased productivity among their telecommuters.

However, working remotely also tenders negative impact on the workers . One challenge they may face is being isolated. Feelings of isolation may arise for employees due to their lack of interaction with others. An employee may begin to feel lonely and socially isolated due to absence of face-to-face interactions. (Busch, E., Nash, J. and Bell, B. S., 2011).

Aside from that, Global Workplace Analytics reported issues on management mistrust in line with remote working. They found that 75% of manager say that they trust their employees, but a third say they'd like to be able to see them, just to be sure.

This study aims to provide a thorough understanding about what remote working is and its implications in the business sector in general. It also intends to discuss other contributory factors that challenge the working environment of remote workers.

II. Statement of the Problem

This study focuses on the Challenges of Remote Working and It's Impact on the Workers. It is concerned on the case of Pearson People Services.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the media of communication between the company and it's remote workers?
2. What are the important skills needed to be a remote worker?
3. What are the possible benefits and challenges of working remotely?
4. What are the difficulties encountered by a remote worker?

III. Methodology

The descriptive method of research was used in the study to identify the challenges of remote working and how it affects the remote workers of the company. Survey questionnaires were used to connect with the 43 respondents who are remote workers from various departments of Pearson People Services and to gather as much as needed information of the challenges they face on remote working and how it affects them. Furthermore, to have a comprehensive idea of the situation that the remote workers are facing, and acknowledge their recommendations and suggestions to the remote working system in the company

IV. Results

The study "Understanding the Challenges of Remote Working and it's Impact to the Remote Workers", and to achieve this goal, it places the following four objectives: to know the media of communication usually used in remote working, to identify the important skills that are relevant to be a remote worker, to discern the possible benefits and challenges of remote working, and to identify several factors that are considered difficulties to a remote worker.

Within those four objectives and with the data gathered the following were the findings:

1. Emails as a media of communication in remote working ranked first as the most used tool in communication. Telephone Calls and Audio Conferencing was chosen as second medium of communication and third, Instant Messaging was also used as a medium of communication in remote working. The respondents were also using web-based e-meetings to communicate while in remote areas. Lastly, they chose company intranet as the fifth most used tool in communication.
2. Respondents find Working independently and Organizing Work Tasks as the most important skill in working remotely. Second on the list was Balancing Work and Home Life Priorities. Both Setting Personal Goals and Sticking to Them and Troubleshooting Technical Problems shared as the third most important skill. Collaborating in a Remote Environment was considered the fourth most vital skill as per the respondents, while Blocking Out Non-Work Distractions placed fifth.
3. For the benefits: Having More Flexible Hours ranked the most beneficial factor when working remotely. It was followed by Better Work-Life Balance according to the respondents. Thirdly, respondents enjoy the benefits of Greater Responsibility for how they manage their time. Next, Job Productivity/Job Satisfaction come in fourth most beneficial factor. Lastly, the respondents also enjoy the benefits of Better Job Prospects.

For the Challenges: The respondents chose Collaborating/Communicating with Others as the most encountered challenge when working remotely. It was then followed by Making the Technology Work which landed second on the list. Other respondents placed Finding Information as the third-ranked most encountered challenge in remote working. The fourth one was Balancing Work/Life Demands. Lastly, the fifth most encountered challenge as per the respondents was Organizing their time.

- Separating Work and Home Life was the most difficult part when working remotely. Developing Relationship with Work Colleagues was also found to be a difficulty, landing second on the list. Next to it was Having ones Performance Fairly Evaluated. Fourthly, Hearing about Developments and Opportunities within the Company, and Obtaining Guidance on how to Complete your Duties were also included as difficulties in remote working. Lastly, Receiving Feedback from Managers was also considered a difficulty by the respondents.

V. Discussion

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents in terms of Media of Communication Used in Working Remotely

Media of Communication	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Emails	36	83.72 %	1
Telephone Calls and Audio Conferencing	22	51.16 %	2
Meeting with Colleagues in the Office	6	13.95 %	6
Company Intranet	10	23.26 %	5
Instant Messaging	21	48.84 %	3
Meeting Colleagues Socially Outside of the Office	4	9.30 %	7
Web-Based E-Meetings	19	44.19 %	4

This shows the frequency and percentage distribution in terms of the media of communication usually used in remote working. The top five tools were as follows: Emails ranked first as the most frequently used tool for communication with a percentage of 83.72%. Telephone calls and audio conferencing come in second with a percentage of 51.16%. Third on the list was instant messaging with a percentage of 48.84%. The fourth most used tool was the web-based e-meetings with a percentage of 44.19%. Lastly, company intranet was the fifth most used tool in remote working with a percentage of 23.26%

In relation to this, a study conducted by Olgado, J.S. & Sales N.J.R. (2017) , showed the virtual workplace organization setting works as a helping aid to the companies that are experiencing unavoidable human related issues such as technical difficulties, national calamities and any other form of conflict that may cause the employee to cancel their appointment inside the organization.

To add, Rapid Technological Development has shaped and continues to shape the ways of working. As Information and Communications Technology allows people to communicate from all over the world with each other, in many cases, work is no longer tied to a certain location or time. A study conducted by Foldspang et.al. (2014) showed the working environment as a major influence on employee productivity. To reach the best possible productivity rates, companies must pay attention to what kind of working environment supports their company culture and ways of working.

This shows how the company has adapted the usage of information technology in the communication of its remote workers.

Table 2
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents in terms of Skills Most Important When Working Remotely

Skills	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Working Independently and Organizing Work Tasks	37	86.04 %	1
Collaborating in a Remote Environment	19	44.17 %	5
Setting Personal Goals and Sticking to Them	21	48.84 %	3
Balancing Work and Home Life Priorities	34	79.07 %	2
Locating People or Information to Answer Questions	12	27.91 %	6
Troubleshooting Technical Problems	21	48.84 %	3
Blocking Out Non-Work Distractions	18	41.86 %	4

This shows the frequency and percentage distribution in terms of skills that are most important to the respondents of Pearson People Services in working remotely. The top five skills were as follows: First on the list

was Working independently and organizing work tasks with a percentage of 86.04%. Ranked second was Balancing work and life priorities with a percentage of 79.07%. Sharing the third spot were Setting personal goals and sticking to them and Troubleshooting Technical Problems with a frequency of 21 and a percentage of 48.84%. Fourth, Remote Workers consider Collaborating in a Remote Environment as another important skill with a percentage of 44.17 % . Lastly, Blocking Out Non-Work Distractions placed fifth with a percentage of 41.86 %.

As regards to a study conducted by Stanford University in conjunction with CTrip, a discount travel website in China, found surprising productivity increases when they allowed 250 Call Center employees (half of those who volunteered to take part in the experiment) to work from home. Productivity among those employees rose 13 % of that increase was actually attributed to working more hours.

To add, a pivotal aspect of virtual work is work-life balance. Research has explored both the costs and benefits of virtual work for an employee’s personal life. Employees value the time and money savings that virtual work offers, as well as the flexible hours and autonomy.

Furthermore, Virtual Workers are more productive because they were able to work without interruption, which allows them to maximize their time. Additionally, the growing use of technology such as web cams, cell phones and instant messaging enables efficient communication with colleagues. Overall, researchers have found that virtual workers are slightly more satisfied than their in-office counterparts. In general, virtual work leads to higher satisfaction, lower absenteeism and higher retention.

This shows remote working having many forms of benefits that contributes to the efficient and effective performance of the remote worker. It also shows how remote working increases the employee’s satisfaction and a better work-life balance.

Table 3
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents in terms of
Benefits and Challenges of Working Remotely

Benefits			Challenges		
Aspects	%	Rank	Aspects	%	Rank
More Flexible Hours	83.72 %	1	Collaborating/Communicating With Others	53.49 %	1
Greater Responsibility for how you manage your time	69.77 %	3	Making the Technology Work	44.19 %	2
Job Productivity/Job Satisfaction	53.49 %	4	Staying on top of informal Developments	23.26 %	6
Quality of Work	37.21 %	5	Balancing Work/Life Demands	32.88 %	4
Better Work-Life Balance	76.74 %	2	Finding Information	34.88 %	3
Better Job Prospects	18.60 %	6	Organizing my Time	30.23 %	5

Table shows the frequency and percentage distribution in terms of the benefits and challenges encountered by respondents of Pearson People Services while working remotely. For the benefits, the first five on the list were as follows: More flexible hours topped the roster with a percentage of 83.72 % . Garnering a percentage of 76.74 %, Better work life balances garnered the second spot. 69.77 % of the respondents chose having Greater Responsibility for how one manages his/her time as the third most beneficial factor in working remotely. Coming in fourth spot was the Job Productivity/Job Satisfaction with a percentage of 53.49 % . Lastly, a Better Job Prospect was chosen the fifth ranked benefit with a percentage of 37.21 % .

In regard to a research conducted by Stanford University in conjunction with CTrip, a discount travel website in China, found surprising productivity increases when they allowed 250 Call Center employees (half of those who volunteered to take part in the experiment) to work from home. Productivity among those employees rose 13 % - 9.5 % of that increase was actually attributed to working more hours.

To add, a pivotal aspect of virtual work is work-life balance. Research has explored both the costs and benefits of virtual work for an employee’s personal life. Employees value the time and money savings that virtual work offers, as well as the flexible work hours and autonomy.

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This shows remote working having many forms of benefits that contributes to the efficient and effective performance of the remote worker. It also shows how remote working increases the employee's satisfaction and a better work-life balance.

For the challenges, the top five on the list were as follows: The number one challenge encountered by the remote workers was Collaborating/Communicating with others with a percentage 53.49 % . The second challenge they usually encounter was Making the Technology Work with a percentage of 44.19 % . Third place was Finding Information with a percentage of 34.88 % . Ranked fourth challenge encountered was Balancing Work-Life demands with a percentage of 32.55 % . Lastly, Organizing his/her time was the fifth-ranked most encountered challenge by the workers with a percentage of 30.23 % .

In relation to this, a concept by D.G. Allen et. al. (2003) deals with concerns about telecommuting's potential for relational impoverishment at work. The reduction in face-to-face interactions, the lower frequency and richness of communication between telecommuters and other organization members (Daft & Lengel, 1986), and thus, the diminished social presence , Short , Williams & Christie, (1976) telecommuters have weakens the interpersonal bonds they have with their co-workers or supervisors Golden, (2006) : Nardi & Whittaker (2002). These negative consequences are likely to be especially severe for individuals who work away from their central work location for the major portion of their work week.

This shows remote workers encounter challenges in their work, this is because inter connectivity does not translate to collaboration; remote workers still need a time to communicate and interact with others.

VI. Conclusions

Given the stated findings, the author came up with the following conclusions:

1. Information Technology has contributed in the communication of remote workers to transfer and receive information outside of their offices with Emails, Telephone Calls and Audio Conferencing, and Instant Messaging as the top three most used media of communication by the remote workers.
2. Working Independently and Organizing Work Tasks, Balancing Work and Home Life Priorities, and Setting Personal Goals and Sticking to them and Troubleshooting Technical Problems are the primary most important skills needed in a remote worker.
3. Having the ability to control and manage your own time is the primary benefit enjoyed by remote workers, they also benefit from having a better work-life balance and are not bounded by the usual nine to five working hour rather they enjoy a work life in which they are able to choose their time of liking. In contrast, the collaboration/communication with others, making the technology work, and finding information are the common challenges encountered by the remote workers in working remotely.
4. The need of interaction, separation of work and home life, developing relationships with work colleagues and having a fair evaluation are the considered factors making working remotely difficult for remote workers.

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