

10-POINT RECOMMENDATION PACKAGE FOR EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION & PERFORMANCE IN A LEGALISED REMOTE WORKING ENVIRONMENT: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract: As the world went into a compelled lockdown in 2020-21 as a result of the pandemic, remote working (flexibility to work from anywhere, anytime) came as a rescue for the survival of the companies and the employees during unprecedented times but it removed the boundaries between work and family, work and home, professional and personal routine etc (termed widely as 'work boundary conflict') which has created challenges to employees and management alike. Despite the challenges and the fading away of the pandemic in 2022-23, several companies especially the multinationals with work force across the world are considering having remote working as the norm in their 'future of work' model. It is in this context that ensuring motivation and productivity amongst employees in such a work-boundary conflict has become the key focus point for managements across the world. Managers need to quickly adapt to the changing work model and are in a befuddled state as to what is expected from them, how to steer their actions etc. This literature review focusses to identify the key issues faced due to teleworking (time lag in recognition, stress & anxiety for employees, social isolation, skewed appraisals, implementation barriers etc.) and comes up with a recommendation package to the management to ensure motivation and productivity amidst this paradigm shift. Key recommendations include autonomy to workers, use of modern communication tools, management by objectives, focus on emotional intelligence of employees, constant feedback to employees, re-defining training needs etc. Objective of this paper is to act as a ready reckoner for management personnel. This paper also identifies certain gaps in the past researches viz. lack of focus on industry-specific or generation specific attributes of teleworking, limited use of quantitative techniques etc. These raise certain interesting questions and opportunities for future research in this area.

Keywords: Remote working, motivation, productivity.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to remote working

Remote working refers to "any work from a place which is outside of the designated place of job/work". This can be 'Work from Home' (WFH), 'Working from another office within the organization' or even 'Working while commuting'. This is also referred to as 'Telecommuting' or 'Teleworking' and is interchangeably used in this paper.

Any work from a far-off place (distance) or an office which is virtual or an office which has the nature of being mobile or where there is flexibility in the workplace can be used to describe 'teleworking' (Hanne, V., et al, 2015)

Tele working as a concept has been in practice for a few decades now though with a skewed geographical preference. It was initially restricted to the western world, but with COVID-19, this has become the talk of the town as the world was forced into tele working scenario.

Tele working challenges the traditional school of thought that office needs to be separate from home and personal life should not be mixed with professional life. Today, people have got accustomed to work by creating offices within home removing the work-home boundary concept. Daily personal chores are happening simultaneously with professional work in the home setting resulting in a mix-up of both facets of life. Concepts like office timing seem to vanish as people plan the work as per their convenience (subject to timelines on certain deliverables). Even if not from home, they opt to work from the nearest possible office of the organization where they were probably refused to be accommodated earlier, but could not be refused now! This entire gamut of changes bridging several boundaries is termed as the 'work-boundary' conflict in this paper.

This work-boundary conflict has brought a paradigm shift in the way employers and employees view a work setting, work profile, work performance etc. setting up the base for an interesting question - In what ways does tele working and especially the resultant work-boundary conflict impact the motivation and productivity of the employees.

1.2 Introduction to 'Motivation' in organisational behavior

The display of enthusiasm, energy, higher level of inner commitment are all referred to as 'Motivation'. It could also refer to the extent of creativity displayed by the employees at workplace. It is a behavior which not only influences the employee but also the people around him/her.

Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Being motivated from within is often referred to as intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation can be enhanced by a 'pat on the back' or a simple recognition of an employee's contribution in a timely manner.

Extrinsic motivation refers to the process of motivating an employee by external factors like rewards and recognition. These include bonuses, perks, awards, foreign travel, promotions etc.

Motivation is very important for an organization for the following reasons:

- Employee performance is at its best.
- Atmosphere within the organization is very positive and stimulating as well as stimulating.
- Motivation leads to higher productivity i.e. maximum output with minimum input.

Scholars have propagated several theories of motivation and the key ones are Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory and Mc Gregor's Theory X and Theory Y. While Maslow dealt with the sequential order in which people satisfy their needs to derive motivation, Herzberg differentiated between hygiene factors (presence of which does not motivate, but absence of which leads to demotivation) and motivational factors (presence of which motivates). Mc Gregor differentiated employees within an organization into Theory X (laid back, supervision dependent, non-creative people) and Theory Y (self-motivated, proactive, energetic and enthusiastic people).

Motivation is a very subjective concept i.e. what applies to one individual does not apply to another. Given the various aspects and dimensions of motivation, it is a Science and an Art to keep the employees motivated in an organization.

1.3 Introduction to 'Productivity' in organisational behavior

When an employee achieves maximum output with minimal input, it is referred to as Productivity. Output refers to the performance or outcomes while input refers to the efforts, skills and knowledge which direct the output.

Various factors impact productivity of employees.

- Individual factors: Knowledge, skill set, experience, emotional balance are a couple of individual factors, unique to an individual which impact productivity.
- Organisational factors: Steps taken by an organization in managing its people are termed as organizational factors. These broadly include freedom for decision-making, extent of delegation,

leadership, employee policies, remuneration, work culture etc. Every individual in the organization experiences this.

- **Managerial factors:** This factor gains a specific mention amongst the organisational variables since it directly impacts employee psyche and in turn their productivity. The way a manager manages (style), the ability to be a visionary, ability to take the right decisions, compassion quotient of the manager all determine the productivity of the employees under a particular manager.

1.4 Inter-relationship between the topic variables

Tele working is a work style which has redefined the way we work. This automatically means that it impacts the employee psyche and behavior. Psyche and behavior determine motivation and productivity. Nature of work has changed due to tele working which has also changed the fundamental way in which we think about work (**Ling, 2008**) and the collaboration involved (**Smith and McKeen, 2011; Wang and Haggerty, 2011**). Accordingly, this topic intends to study the relationship/impact of the work-boundary conflict created by tele working on motivation and productivity of employees, and lists out recommendation to the management to handle the issue in hand.

There are two reasons for engaging with this conceptual research.

- i) On a review of many past researches, it is observed that they do not directly talk about the simultaneous impact on motivation and productivity in the corporate world.
- ii) Management's role in the era of work boundary conflict is very critical and very few research papers have given a consolidate recipe to the management to adapt to this new challenge.

While this research is conceptual, it reviews past researches and prescribes a 10-point recommendation package to the managements in the corporate landscape as a ready reckoner to enable them adapt to this growing challenge of keeping employees motivated in the world of tele working.

This paper aims to facilitate future researchers on the topic to formulate research questions and hypothesis and focus more on the aspect of management while reviewing this topic.

2. Key issues faced in the world of teleworking

Productivity and efficiency are impacted by employees who constitute one of the key components in an organisation (**Svitlana N. et. al., 2020**). An employee working for his/her success turns into success for the organization as a whole. Sum of the parts adds to the whole (organizational achievement). This makes it important for the management to keep them motivated. However, according to **Svitlana N. et. al. (2020)**, there is a significant time lag between achievement of success by employees and their encouragement by management. This results in employees being insufficiently motivated. That in turn results in low discipline in performance, lack of self-realization amongst employees and higher attrition. Insufficient motivation over a period of time leads to job stress especially when the employees become unable to meet the job demands. Anxiety and depression and their symptoms were directly associated with high demand from job and the related stress (**L.B. Fan et. al., 2015**).

A holistic performance appraisal becomes a difficult proposition in a tele working environment which acts as a detriment to motivation and productivity. 'joi' evaluation is a system used in companies in Japan. It focuses on morale and attitude, not just on the capabilities and abilities as an integral part of the performance appraisal system. In teleworking, employees cannot demonstrate work attitude in the presence of their higher-ups. This makes joi method of evaluation difficult in teleworking (**Akio Sato, 2013**). How do remote workers then gain a good appraisal has become a huge challenge.

Issues with remote working does not begin only with implementation, but the very process of implementation is an issue. Organizations need to take care of various factors prior to introducing remote working as a method. Type of job and the business content determine the extent of barriers to teleworking in an organisation (**Miki N. et. al., 2019**). Authors here conclude this for introduction

within an organization. It can only be imagined how complicated it can get when looked at an industry level or a country level which is what every organization was subjected to i.e. a forced remote working during the peak of pandemic.

One of the biggest pitfalls of teleworking is ‘social isolation’ (Simpson, L., et al, 2001). Many employees look forward to offices to meet their colleagues and have those coffee moments, but removing it from their routine makes them feel isolated. This can impact their motivation and take them to the bottom of the Maslow’s pyramid irrespective of where they are in the pyramid as it deprives them of their security and social needs. As teleworking deviates from the traditional office structures, social networking and friendship formation have been impacted (Christoph W. et. al., 2014).

Authors Christoph et al carried out a post-hoc analysis and revealed that exhaustion due to teleworking is highly influenced by excess workload during teleworking. When social isolation is combined with work overload, it can lead to people locking to themselves which can create a social disorder in institutions.

<i>Challenge area</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>References</i>
Rewards & recognition	Time lag performance and recognition	Svitlana N. et. al., 2020
Mental well-being	High demands and job stress cause symptoms of anxiety and depression.	L.B. Fan et. al., 2015.
Performance appraisal	Morale & attitude of employees gets ignored in appraisals	Akio Sato, 2013
Introduction of teleworking	Several barriers prevail to introduce teleworking depending on the job type and business content	Miki N. et. al., 2019
Social isolation	Socialising amongst employees reduces depriving them of the people element in organisations	Christoph W. et. al., 2014
Burnout	Work overload during teleworking leads to exhaustion	Christoph W. et. al., 2014

Table 1 (Author’s compilation): Key issues faced in the world of teleworking

Issues mentioned above are neither passing clouds nor simple slimes which can be ignored by management. Each one can have a cascading effect on motivation and productivity of the employees and in turn the overall productivity of the organization. It is in this context that managements need to pull their socks and pay attention to the area of remote working and this is irrespective of what extent they have adopted remote working - it can become the norm of life in near future.

Following parts of this paper list out the recommendation to managers to adapt to this changing world of ‘book of work’.

Recommendations to management

No problem in the corporate world can be taken lightly especially if it is related to human resource. This makes the role of management very critical when it comes to handling the issues arising out of remote working. The recommendation or the 10-point package listed here comes from a thorough review of various research papers in this domain.

1. Managers and those who have transformed themselves from managers to leaders have a direct

responsibility to create a sense of autonomy in an organization. Teleworking brings lesser challenges to managers than the evolved leaders (**Francoise C. et. al. 2020**). Leaders should assign tasks in such a way where employees get autonomy to work and perform the tasks correctly (**Svitlana N. et. al., 2020**). This relieves a leader from micro management and can focus on people related activities. More time for people related activities serves as the starting point for people welfare thinking in an organization, eventually leading to motivation of employees.

2. Communication by leaders forms an important part in keeping the employees motivated. Form of communication that is effective on the employees is not static. It varies from category to category and mainly so, based on the generation. Generation Y or the Millennials as well as Generation Z are those who have got accustomed to social media and expect peers and leaders to communicate alike with them in a two-way manner. Leaders in organizations with a higher proportion of Gen Y employees should pay special attention to the latest in communication tools otherwise, communication and motivation of these employees may be subject to trouble (**Pawel Korzynski, 2013**).
3. Work and family were two different terms in the erstwhile world, but with remote working, their gaps are getting bridged. It is not just taking work home, but it can be taking home to work as well that will bridge this work-boundary conflict. If effectively leveraged, this can act as a catalyst to motivation. Flexibility can be offered both by letting employees work at home and by facilitating employees to bring their families closer to their workplace (**Aline D. Masuda et al, 2011**). Authors mention the example of Sierra Atlantic which introduced “take your parents to work” day to encash on parental guidance to employees at work, respecting the Indian culture of seeking advise from parents. This practice seemed to have reduced the turnover rate by 50% amongst freshers.
4. Teleworking cannot be handled in the same way across different industries or even across different organisations in the same industry. This is because of the idiosyncrasies that exists in every organization and industry. Managing and motivating people gets difficult as not every manager is capable of customizing themselves to onsite and offsite employees. Moreover, even for the employees, preference for telework is not uniform. “Out of sight, out of mind” conflict is a key reason why many employees prefer working from offices (**Sewell. G, 2015**). Supporting this view, a study conducted in Australia on teleworking revealed that employees preferred a maximum of 1-3 days away from the office to ensure productivity in a teleworking environment (**Bosua et al., 2017**). In order to establish a standardized approach to this dilemma, “Telework Policy” is recommended.

Telework policy lays out basic framework like the scope of telework, responsible people for quality assurance, eligible employees e.g. volunteers with at least a median rating in their most recent performance review, at least one year’s service and in a measurable output role (**Sewell. G, 2015**). This brings in a standardized approach to teleworking and can give comfort to the management that the practice is not being misused and at the same time, give clarity to the employees as to when, where and who can carry on remote working.

5. Managers need to get used to the practice of defining objectives rather than instruction based style of managing their subordinates. This is because the work place, its timing and pace, way the work is sequenced are out of manager’s sight and control. Telework demands a shift in management style from instruction based management to management by objectives (**Kurland and Cooper, 2002**).
6. Remote working poses multiple challenges to employees. No clarity on where and when employees can engage in work poses challenges to employees (**Svitlana N. et. al., 2020**). The way to overcome such challenges not only lies in the hands of the employees, but the management too. Emotions and intelligence cannot be looked into separately or together but it should be looked at as emotional intelligence. That depicts ability to lead an effective life (**Gagari C et. al., 2018**). Management needs to focus more in developing the Emotional Quotient (EQ) of



the employees rather than focus on technical aspects. Regular EQ honing programs and activities are recommended. These deal with self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social awareness and social skills.

7. Leadership is now being give a new dimension called ‘e-leadership’. This focusses on creating an accountable and efficient team in virtual environments. However, **Roman et al., 2019** opine that e-technological skills are key today. An e-leader should be aware of novel technologies, should be able to keep up with relevant technological developments and take on the challenges of cyber security.

Gone are the days when leaders were considered to be high content oriented but excused for not being tech-savvy. Their knowledge and experience was used to ignore their lack of technological skills. However, in the changing world of remote working, keeping up with technologies and embracing it becomes a key attribute to ensuring motivation and productivity in employees.

8. It is all about constant feedback between the employee and the manager when it comes to teleworking. **Svitlana N. et. al., 2020** bring in this re-defining concept breaking the traditional practice that feedbacks being only during annual appraisal. Authors argue that lack of face-to-face interaction calls for regular feedback from managers to employees as the manager should be able to periodically monitor the teleworking subordinates and make adjustments to their activities.

Not only do the authors bring about the need for a feedback, but they broaden the scope of ‘feedback’ by bringing in the concept of emotional support whereby they argue that manager should give emotional support to the employee in times of teleworking to bridge the distance. Mere feedback without facilitating the employee how to handle the feedback and implement it emotionally does not do justice to the manager’s role. Hence, management needs to focus on giving the emotional support to employees.

9. If managers and employees are not able to handle the stressful stimuli coming out from teleworking, they should resort to traditional work structures (**Christoph W. et. al., 2014**). One of the ways to do this is to overhaul the training function in organizations. Teleworkers need training and other coping mechanisms (**Weinert.C., et al, 2013**).

Training programs need to focus on soft skills, stress management measures, time management effects, emotional intelligence building etc. Traditional approach to training should be revisited to make it more meaningful.

10. **Haas and Mortensen (2016), Caroline. R. et al, (2019)** underline the key focus areas of leaders while supervising teams that are scattered but which are digital and dynamic. These primarily include:

- i) Compelling direction - Leaders establishing clear goals to employees. This is more so important when the teams are widely dispersed.
- ii) Strong structure - Leaders check for right number and mix of people, reporting systems and their effectiveness, accountability of the concerned employees etc. A right structure can take on the demands of teleworking.
- iii) Support - Leaders ensure support being given in the form of resources, information and training. Well supported employees are bound to perform well even if they are not in proximity to their co-workers.
- iv) Shared mindset - Leaders establish a sense of common identity and check if the employees understand each other’s context and constraints. When teams are dispersed, it is that commonness which a leader creates that acts as a binding factor for the team.

Recommendation area	Description	References
Employee empowerment	Tasks to be set in a way which give autonomy to the workers.	Svitlana N. et. al., 2020
Communication	Use modern communication tools especially with Millennials and later.	Pawel Korzynski, 2013
Work-life balance	Integrate family into workplace	Aline D. Masuda et al, 2011
Policies & procedures	Design a telework policy to lay out the eligibility, terms, caveats etc.	Bosua et al., 2017, Sewell. G, 2015
Management by Objectives	Migrate from management by instructions to objectives.	Kurland and Cooper, 2002
Emotional intelligence	Focus not on emotions or intelligence alone or both, but on the concept of Emotional Intelligence.	Gagari C et. al., 2018
e-leadership	Leaders need to hone their e-technological skills and be abreast with novel technologies.	Roman et al., 2019
Feedback	Constant feedback to employees including support systems to take and implement the feedback	Svitlana N. et. al., 2020
Training	Focus training programs on coping mechanisms	Christoph W. et. al., 2014 & Weinert .C., et al, 2013
Key focus areas	Leaders should build a common direction, strong structure, support systems and a shared mindset.	Haas and Mortensen (2016), Caroline. R. et al, (2019)

Table 2 (Author's compilation): Recommendation package to management

Identified gaps in the review

Less emphasis on quantitative analysis and statistical measures were found in many papers. A good use of these will enable a rich study and findings. Also, the analysis of motivation and productivity was at a macro level without getting into the various sub-elements of either of these. An in-depth study should cover the sub-elements too. The geographical coverage of the research was either too wide or too restricted which sometimes restrict the generalization of the findings.

The linkage of job satisfaction to motivation and productivity of employees can be established by future research including generation-wise differences in perceiving teleworking, work boundary conflict and its impact on motivation and productivity.

3. Concluding Discussion

Teleworking has changed the boundaries of work. This has posed challenges to employees as well as the management. This paper aims to contribute to this phenomenon by identifying the key challenges as well as listing out 10 different areas for managements to focus upon to ensure the motivation and productivity of their workforce. The gaps of the past research identified herein can also serve as a reference point for future researchers reviewing this domain.

There are also further possibilities for research to engage in areas not covered by this literature review. For instance, there is a school of thought that there are professions whereby there are clearer boundaries between work and life and less chances of work-life conflict (Hislopp & Axtell, 2007). This review focused on what management needs to do to resolve the work boundary conflict, but leaves aside the advantages that arise from the same viz. ability to manage time effectively, reduced commuting time to workplace, work-life balance, cost savings to organization and employees etc. Future research can work to find a balancing approach offered by work boundary conflict and the cost-benefit analysis of the same.

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