



HYBRID WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: ADAPTING TO THE CHANGES OF FUTURE WORKPLACE IN MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Modern times means adjusting to the changing business environment for employees. With the development of technology and the progress in the dynamics of the business environment; certain adjustments had to be made. Over the past couple of years, many multinational organizations have changed their business strategies to the modern aspect of hybridization. The concept of hybridization is relatively new with very few models that have been designed to understand the concept. Grasping the concept of a hybrid workplace has been a transitional phase for employees. The paper intends to explore the necessity of a hybrid workplace, how employees are engaging and adapting to the changes, hence looking towards the aspects of its impact on employee productivity. The research will investigate a number of multinational organizations that have transitioned into this change and highlight the problems and issues that are of concern. As the topic is still thriving, quantifiable data will be collected from secondary sources and will be presented and discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Change, Hybrid Working Environment, Transition, Multinational Organizations, Employee Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are constantly changing. Change is taking place more frequently than expected. As organizations are expanding, ways of working as well the need to adaptation and adjustment is also required. Moreover, in recent times, organizational setup has immensely been compromised. In the light of the economic climate prevailing as well the impact of the Covid-19 organizational setup has also changed.

National and international organizations across the world have made changes in operational activities. Employees have been given the opportunity to explore the option of working from home. The concept of working from home has given employees to complete their work at their own will with flexible working hours. Another aspect of the change is the introduction of the method of Hybrid working environment. The concept of hybrid working environment entails both working from home and also in office. The week is divided accordingly in coordination with the setup decided by management.

Hybrid working environment is a relatively new approach adopted by organizations. With the rapid digitization and rapidly progressing technology, communication has become simpler than before. It is possible to hold meetings, classes and also communicate with colleagues from different countries without the hassle of travelling back and forth. Moreover, hybrid environment has also opened options for organizations to cost optimization. Organizations employing thousands of people are always looking for alternative methods to optimize and reduce their CAPEX and OPEX costs.

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The paper intends to discuss the different aspects of hybrid working environment as well the different opinions in respect to advantages and disadvantages of this approach. The paper will also explore the different scenarios of a number of organizations that are using this method. A number of scholars have also presented their opinions and acknowledged certain aspects of this approach. Each of the different aspects will be discussed in this paper with a number of statistical and graphical representations from already carried out surveys and studies. The paper is based mostly on secondary data and review of different articles published.

1. Defining Hybrid Organizational Environment

Organizational environment is dependent on the type of organization and its setup. The traditional environment in short defines the regular process of working, it complies with the aspects of each person with each desk and individual workstation. On the other hand, hybrid workplace environment setup is different. Hybrid working environment by definition implies a mixer of home and office environment. Employees are given the opportunity to Work from Home (WFH) and sometimes come to office. The concept of hybrid environment has been represented in a number of different ways. In recent times, ever since the wake of the pandemic, it has been considered as an infusion and inquisition of technology in our normal day to day activities.

The concept of hybrid working environment has been considered even before the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was first mentioned by Nilles (1988) using the terms more commonly known as

“Telecommuting” and “Telework” This is a part of the technological evolution and also the concrete foundation of the new industrial revolution. As the 4th Industrial revolution looms in the wake of digital integration of work, home and even lifestyle, it is not possible to back away from this; rather move with the tide and explore different ways to use this opportunity and devise our businesses, lifestyles and also accommodate as much as possible (La Porta, 2021)

With the organizations adopting new technologies every day, the need for employing people physically has become less of a concern. With the evolution of the hybrid and WFH opportunities it is possible to use resources from different countries at the same time with the same set of skills and potential resources can be evaluated in a short time. Moreover, the need to explore and implore the concern of cost optimization can also be devised using this method.

As organizations are looking for using the latest technology, we have to be more concerned about adapting to the new technology. It cannot be denied that this phase of change has been embedded in our lives voluntarily (Gajendran and Harrison 2007; Grant et al. 2019).

2. Impact of Organizational Culture on Hybrid Working Environment

With the ever-changing working environment, ways of working have changed tremendously. It has become a challenge to really adapt to the new changes. Employees are often accustomed to the ways of working in a different or more clearly stated; in the traditional way. The approaches of working in the office and following a certain routine from 9 to 5 has changed. With the changes in the design and setup of organizations specially the multinational organizations, organizational culture has also taken a diversion from the traditional approach.

Organizational culture is known to be the values, approach, norms, policies etc. With the changing working environment, organizational culture has also changed. Management has become adamant to

really explore the options to make the changes more apparent and communicate them to the employees. One of the greatest challenges for management is the communication channel. Creating awareness of the changes in the culture is something that has to be explained in black and white.

Organizations e.g., Amazon, Google, Meta and Twitter have brought about changes in ways of working. Most of the changes are visible in the technology industry as it is evolving with the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Again, the question remains on how culture is really affected with the introduction of the new ways of working. Answer to the question is not that difficult. It is noticeable; adaptation and adoption of new methods and approaches takes time. Employees' who are accustomed to working in office and spending long hours and people who has rediscovered the comfort of WFH are struggling. It is difficult to really adopt both methods of working.

Culture as we know it grows from within the organization and its people. It is often seen that working from home hinders organizational culture and it may cause some disparity among the peers. In order to avoid such conflicting issues, attachment to office environment is important to move forward with the changes taking place. Adjusting to culture demands extreme psychological pressure. An employee must be willing to accept the changes in organizational culture.

3.Benefits and Concerns of Hybrid Working Environment

Organizational environment plays a major role in the development and progress of an organization as well as employees. There are a number of factors that comply with a sound working environment. According to a report published by Zippa (2021), a number major factors have been identified as the benefits to adopting the hybrid working environment. As presented in graph 1 below, the conclusive result from the survey shows that employees are happier that they do not have to commute long distances and also it an opportunity for cost saving options. Employees are always concerned with as prospect of commutation and also ways to minimize their expenses.

On the contrary, organizational management are always trying to look for ways to minimize costs and resource optimization. With the introduction of this method of working, organizations especially working in multi-cultural and diversifies organizations are seizing this opportunity to downsize their offices as well as minimize cost of utilities.

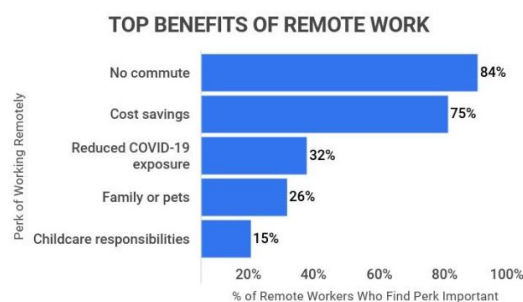


Fig.1 : Top Benefits of Remote Work

Another survey conducted attempted to look into employee mental health, and productivity issues as well the economic factors of the organizations. With the evolution of the hybrid organizational set up, mental health as well as productivity is a growing concern.

It can be seen that with the introduction of this approach, employees feel more productive in their own homes, health and wellness seems to be what employees are more concerned about. In respect to the productivity has also seen a remarkable growth.

Although the setup has a number of benefits, there are also a number of concerns in regard to security of information being circulated. Multinational organizations working in different areas such as the financial industry are faced with challenges in restricting information sharing and formulating measures to secure information from being leaked to potential competitors. One other concern is the adaptation of employees to both types of working environment. This has been considered as grey area for management. Is it really possible to work in two different setups? How does this really impact the productivity as well as the cultural shocks that precludes all factors in enjoying the hybrid working environment. A graphical representation of the issues is presented in graphs 2 and 3 below.

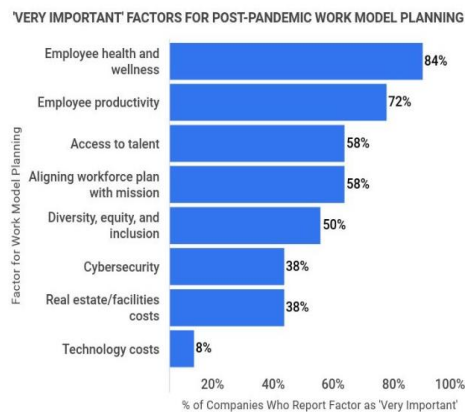


Fig.2 : Very important factors for post-pandemic work model planning

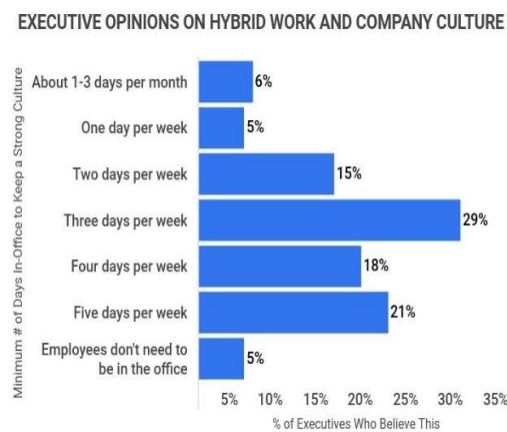


Fig.3 : Executive opinions on hybrid work and company culture

Hybrid environment was considered as an illusion prior to the covid-19 pandemic. Reality for the business environment has changed extensively. Before the pandemic clouded the business environment, short working hours and hybrid working only accommodated about 20% of the total work force. The matter has been addressed in recent times as it has now moved up to 70% of the work force as companies are implementing technology in their day-to-day work. According to Better up (2022) the rise in this method of working will be more noticeable in the future. It is thought to be the new business environment, with the rise in competition and the ever-volatile environment, multinational companies are reluctantly moving towards this set up mainly to reduce costs and working with minimum workforce.

Organizations consider this as a long-term solution and bring about positive results in the future.

The evolution of hybrid and remote working environment has led to fewer scopes for social interactions. In the traditional approach to working physically in office, socialization and cultural exchange is much higher in respect to the new ways of working. Understanding any level of conflict cannot be determined, the influence of each other is not possible to monitor. Social and cultural conflict can also bring about negative perceptions, in order to avoid this, minimal presence in office is acceptable. As Moen et.al. (2016) in his research observed the influence of organizational management intervention and persuasion has direct impact on the psychological health and productivity of work force.

4.Economic Impact of Hybrid Workplace Environment

As the future of the business environment continues to evolve, the economic impact is also a concern. It is evident that there are remarkable and noticeable changes in the mode of work, the relationship between employees and organization shows proportional change. On the other hand, the economic impact is surprisingly shown changes. As the number of business travels has declined, in person interviews, also face to face interaction has become minimum, advancement of technology has become a intermittent part of our daily lives. Organizations are investing much of their resources to develop their technological platform.

From corporate retail, medicine and even education, the use of technology as well as use of devices are remarkable. Having technology shape the future means there will be less interaction face to face, the psychological affect is yet to be assessed.

Becoming dependent on use of technology and the reality of the new way of working with hybrid workplace has brought about remarkable changes amid the challenges of coping with economic and trade wars prevailing across the globe. However, the long-term economic benefits and concerns have to be looked into.

5.Direction of Future Research

Changing business environment is partly what is going on today. Change is constant. Moreover, with the new approach to ways of working, there are concerns on how this process will really evolve in years to come. As such, the concept is still developing, the number of challenges and obstacles are there. The scope of conducting future is immense and the data for any type of research is also possible to gather from various sources.

CONCLUSION

Changing business environment and adaptation to new ways of working has paved a pathway for exploring new methods of developing a sound and suitable working environment.

As this concept of hybrid working environment is coming into light and it is considered to be the future of the business world, the scope to explore new possibilities, challenges as well as develop a more adoptive model is there. Therefore, scope of research is immense considering the significance of the method.

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