

EFFECTS OF REMOTE WORK ON THE WORKPLACE AND WORKERS

How quality of life and work are affected by being away from the office and what can managers and supervisors do about it

Abstract

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Effects of remote work on the workplace and workers How quality of life and work are affected by being away from the office and what can managers and supervisors do about it		
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This thesis is a research on effects of remote work on workers and the workplace and how workers react to a switch to remote work. The research was carried out in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that started in the beginning of 2020 and forced companies to switch to remote work in order to reduce the spread of the virus. Business literature on workplace management, including the works on digital or remote workplace, was used in this thesis, combined with articles related to remote work and workplace health. Qualitative interviews were conducted with people, who were affected by the remote work switch.</p> <p>Research for this thesis showed how the management and workflow of the remote workplace is different, but still shares numerous things, how the remote work environment affects the productivity and motivation of the workers. Lastly, through the research it was discovered that having an existing remote work framework is important for any company even when the remote work is not a mandatory solution imposed by the factors outside of business</p> <p>The main conclusion of the research was that while having differences, remote workplace management is not that different from an office workplace management. It still requires understanding of the nature of human motivation and behavior, and with the different workflow, a change of some of the usual practices is of need.</p>		
<p>Keywords</p> <p>Remote, management, motivation, health.</p>		

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1 INTRODUCTION

Remote work - a situation in which an employee works mainly from home and communicates with the company by email and telephone, as per Cambridge Dictionary. This term, which is broader nowadays, was a popular topic even before the pandemic situation of 2020, which quickly and steadily forced every CEO, Boss and Team Lead to adapt their employees to working from home away from the office to avoid unnecessary contact, risking a spread of the virus among the workforce. After the start of the pandemic, all businesses were in a rush to learn how to keep their business afloat through remote work. Numerous solutions were available on the market, some of them already heavily in commercial and private use, and more started to appear in a high demand market created by COVID-19.

While remote work's popularity was on the rise even before COVID (Herring, B.B. flexjobs.com), a large number of business were hoarded with work of preparing to move the working place to everyone's homes.

“Most of the companies (39%) started implementation of the abovementioned actions as of 16th of March, other companies (32%) were in the implementation process at the moment of the survey, and only 17% had started the implementation of such actions from the beginning of March.” – Deloitte Legal

The surveyed listed the following as the main challenges they faced when preparing for the quarantine (Deloitte Digital, 2020):

1. Updating the employee sickness policy – 17.4%
2. Provision of remote work (work from home (WFH)) option – 15.9%
3. Employees' psychological stress – 11.6%
4. Provision of up-to-date information and advices – 10.1%
5. Provision of suitable office security – 10.1%
6. Provision of remote work measures and optimization of already established ones. – 8.7%
7. Other – 26.0%

While the most important action needed to take was related directly to the health concerns over the pandemic, the remote work, while definitely related to health and safety of employees as well, came in second. Not all businesses were in favor of remote work before

2020. The main concern raised by the surveyed when talking about remote work were the means to implement in a way that allowed coordination and communication between the employees and also the concerns over the productivity when working from home. According to Zapier's Remote Work Study of November 2019, "31 percent of U.S. knowledge workers don't currently work remotely because their company doesn't allow it.". Of course, it is not clear whether these companies where 31% of knowledge workers work were preparing to allow remote work or not. You could come to a conclusion after looking at number of companies who had to prepare to switch to remote work, but you would need to consider the scale: because of the pandemic all workers who did not need to be physically present at the workplace to do their work had to be switched to working from home. If the company had already adopted remote work, it would definitely be easier for them to raise the scale. Companies that were against remote work had to put in a lot of hours to adapt.

With the stress levels rising for both employers and employees, the shift to remote work was not painless for everyone whether they were used to remote work or not. Before the global pandemic happened, workers were ready to take pay cuts just to be able to work remotely (Bernazzani, S. 2019). Remote employees reported being happier than on-site workers; "those who do work remotely say they're happy in their jobs 29% more than on-site workers." (Bernazzani, S. 2019). Needs to be noted, that this figure is from 2019 (was posted in December 2019, really close to the start of the pandemic), and with large quantities of employees being forced to work from home, reduces any kind of happiness gain and only raises stress levels accordingly all around.

Before everyone was forced to shift to remote work, companies that were against working from home were worried about productivity of workers who work remotely. Because of the sudden shift caused by the pandemic, stress levels were on the rise, which, unsurprisingly, reduces productivity and motivation, the thing employers were afraid of in the first place. Since unproductive and unmotivated workers bring less money or even lose money for the company, addressing the remote workers' stress is one of the things managers were interested in, as shown previously in the Deloitte study. Fighting the issue of stress during remote work is one of the problems all businesses will almost definitely face.

Dealing with stress of employees and even of your own is not the last barrier to overcome when dealing with sudden shift to working from home. Cooperation becomes more difficult, mostly thanks to not being used to working on projects or something else entirely from home without taking a foot into the office. While surely everyone knows how to use e-mail, voice and video calls, it takes time to get used to using those as the sole method of communication with fellow co-workers. Again, as with stress, productivity levels would

drop. If everyone feels that they are not as productive as before, it could greatly affect motivation for work as well, and cause aforementioned stress.

A question would rise, after reading the previous two paragraphs: how do you fight drops of productivity and motivation among workers? This is one of the topics of this work. The topic is about the effects of remote work on the worker, and stress is definitely one of those. It is a negative effect, so it needs to be eliminated or, at the very least, minimized. Numerous tools and methods were invented by psychologists all over the world. Main cause of concern towards stressed workers is their productivity and motivation for work. But it would be good to know, is a happy worker productive, or a productive worker happy?

In this thesis, main question is How to manage a remote workplace? After delving deep into the main question, several sub-questions pop up, such as:

- How does remote work affect workers? How is their motivation and productivity in the workplace is affected?
- What do managers need to do when having to switch the entire workplace to remote work?

The target audience for this thesis would be managers, but other workers in other positions would be able to find knowledge of interest, related to remote work and work in general.

2 HUMAN MOTIVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

The first sub question of this thesis is about the effects of remote work on human productivity and motivation. To resolve this question, basic research on motivation and productivity of workers in general should be done.

Since 1995 (data as of 2008), in United States worker productivity increased by more than 33%. Would not this mean that the US workers were getting increasingly happier and motivated as the time goes? According to P. Robbins, S. (2008) and A. DeCenzo, D. (2008), it is not necessarily the case. They say there are many factors that affect the situation but provide the main two ones: salary and benefits.

While the productivity increased by 33%, salaries increased by 11% (P. Robbins, S. and A. DeCenzo, D. 2008). Still, it is an increase in salary and workers should be happy, but it turns out that the number of workers on the payroll decreased during this period of increase in productivity. Downsizing and outsourcing reduced the number of jobs and single employees started to work that often took two or three employees to do.

In remote work / WFH environment, employees could face the same problem. Because of the financial problems like reduced number of sales and clients, that we could notice in the aforementioned survey results, the companies would start downsizing and workload on the employees that avoided getting laid off would increase. Looking at the numbers, it might show that their productivity increased, but in reality, they could be really stressed by the increased workload and deliver subpar results. And because of the financial troubles, there may even not be an increase in salary.

We are yet to define what is motivation. First of all, the word 'motivation' comes from Latin 'movere', which is a verb that means 'to move'. Alan Cutler (2014) in his book "Leadership Psychology" defines motive as "having a stimulus to take action". He continues to define 'stimulus' as "an inner need – conscious, semi-conscious, or even unconscious – that leads to action in some form or other".

Jones and George (2004) define motivation as "psychological forces that direct a person's behavior in an organization, a person's level of effort, and a person's level of persistence in the face of obstacles"

There are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is dependent on the person itself, from his personal enjoyment of work. It is purely derived from the worker and is not from external sources such as reward or punishment for the job.

Personal achievements and responsibility greatly affect intrinsic motivation (McGregor, D. 1960).

Extrinsic motivation consists of actions that are performed with the purpose of motivating the target. Competition is extrinsic motivation, as it forces employees to work harder to outperform their co-workers, rather than derive peaceful personal enjoyment from the process of work itself. Rewards such as salary increase, employee benefits or even status are all extrinsic motivators. Less positive extrinsic motivators like 'punishment' can be used to, surprisingly as punishment is opposite of a reward, to motivate workforce.

2.1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

When talking about motivation, one of probably most known theories of motivation is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. According to this theory, a person first of all is motivated by his intrinsic needs rather than extrinsic phenomena.

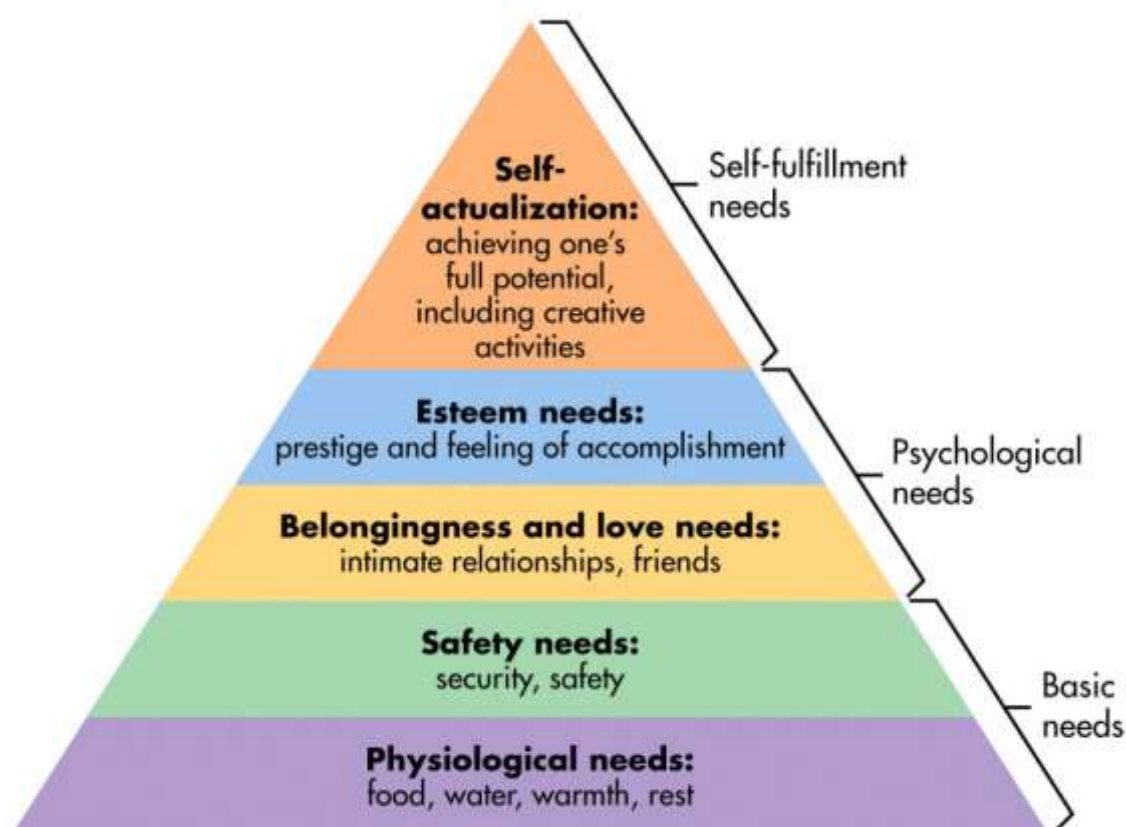


Figure 1 – Maslow's hierarchy of needs – *simplypsychology.org*

The lower the need is, the more basic and stronger it is. As it can be seen on Figure 1, the five needs are split into three categories: basic, psychological, self-fulfillment. Basic needs

are, arguably, the strongest motivator for anyone as they are required for the humans to function. With each level of needs satisfied, the higher one comes into play.

According to Maslow, if you want to motivate someone, you should first determine where that someone is on the hierarchy and work towards solving their needs at that level or above. Sounds simple at first, but how do you actually realize those needs as a manager?

Let's not forget that we are talking about remote working situations. Physiological needs therefore are covered, unless the worker cannot afford them, but it is a more complicated topic best saved for another work.

It is not so simple with safety needs. Employees would feel vulnerable, because of the pandemic and other sources of stress. That puts the manager on the known topic of remote work stress. Which is not necessarily caused by forcing to switch to working from home/remote work as by the outside situation. People are filled with uncertainty for the times to come. If workers don't feel safe, it is not guaranteed they will work at their fullest. Although, it is dependent on each worker individually, as some would use this as motivation to work harder, a good example of a non-positive extrinsic motivator. But for those, who only feel demotivated with the things that are happening in the world, how could a manager help them?

2.2 X and Y theory

In 1960, Douglas McGregor published his book titled "The Human Side of Enterprise", in which he challenged the views of businesses and managers on workers' human behavior. In the book he proposes two theories: theory X and theory Y.

Theory X is assumption that people dislike work and responsibility and desire to avoid it. X assumes that workers need constant supervision and should be motivated with rewards and/or punishment by supervisors. Theory X is the authoritarian management style that was widespread in the 60s.

"The human side of economic enterprise today is fashioned from propositions and beliefs such as these." – Douglas McGregor on his theory X, "The Human Side of Enterprise" p.2

As an alternative, theory Y was coined. Y manager, unlike a X manager who seems like a un-friendly person who would feel like a prison warden overseeing prisoners sweating away in a quarry, is a supporting person who wants to organize the enterprise in a way that allows employees to pursue their goals by directing them. Y manager creates opportunities for his underlings, fostering their potential and allowing self-growth. They trust

their workers and encourage them, respecting their dignity and supporting their hopes and understanding their fears. Y theory assumes that motivation, desire for work and undertaking responsibility are all qualities of a worker, creating a positive workplace experience for both workers and managers.

It is noticeable that McGregor's theory Y is partly inspired by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In "The Human Side of Enterprise" McGregor spends several paragraphs discussing the needs and how they can be met in an actual workplace. So, with McGregor's theory Y and Maslow's theory, how can modern managers utilize these with unexpected change caused by outside factors, such as a pandemic?

2.3 Hygiene theory

Mental health awareness has been on the rise in the recent years thanks to the progress made in the field of psychology. Frederick Herzberg (1923-2000) was an American psychologist, who was known for his study of human motivation. He viewed job satisfaction (motivation) as "an outgrowth of achievement, recognition (verbal), the work itself (challenging), responsibility, and advancement (promotion)". Another set of factors form dissatisfaction and describe how the work is performed. They are "company policy and administrative practices, supervision (technical quality), interpersonal relations (especially with supervision), physical working conditions, job security, benefits, and salary". These dissatisfiers or "hygiene factors", when present, provide a reduction in dissatisfaction and stress in a workplace.

You cannot rely on the hygiene factors alone as they are short term motivators that do not bode well for the company, as the workers that rely on hygiene will not perform as well as workers who are more motivated by other factors other than hygiene. Herzberg's solution to this problem was separating the industrial relations into departments into two formal division, one to deal with motivators and the other one to deal with hygiene. With the primary focus on the motivators, the first division would re-educate the workforce from focusing on welfare (hygiene) based motivation to a motivator-based motivation. (Miner, John B. *Organizational Behavior 4: From Theory to Practice*, p.48, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007)

2.4 Psychological safety in the workplace

By changing the tasks and organizational structure, the companies would achieve greater performance. In a situation where the everyone is forced to work from home, structural changes are one of the things to rely upon, as the old way of office work where everyone physically interacts with everyone and has easy access to all workers is not easy in a

remote situation. Another part of work that would welcome a change during the forced switch to remote work is workplace (remote) environment.

In the book “Toyota Culture: The Heart and Soul of the Toyota Way”, Michael Houseus and Jeffrey K. Liker describe how Toyota factories manage psychological safety of their workers by setting rules that promote friendly and non-threatening working environment such as “no lewd posters in the locker rooms” or “no cussing”. Creating a safe and comfortable environment is one of the first steps on reducing workplace stress.

“In Toyota culture, there is a concept that a person’s work should be challenging but not stressful; everyone is expected to follow standards, improve their process, and solve problems. This improvement process allows members to tap into creative gifts and unleash the potential of their imaginations.” – Houseus M., Liker K.J., “Toyota Culture: The Heart and Soul of the Toyota Way”, p.280

As we know it, stress usually reduces performance (Imtiaz, S. & Ahmad, M. S. 2009), it is harder to overcome any kind of challenge when a worker cannot concentrate on the task before him for various reasons. It would be especially prevalent in jobs where the workers’ health or even life could be put in danger by subpar performance (Wang, D. & Wang, X. & Xia, N. (2018). A challenge aspect is present to make workers focus on the work, as with the easy mundane jobs it is easy for the mind to wander and lose sight of the task. If the work is challenging, workers will not spend as much time thinking about the outside problems and other sources of stress. (Houseus M., Liker K.J. 2008)

With the economic problems that come with the unexpected crisis, the work becomes more challenging, and with a friendly and supporting environment, the stress and uncertainty in workers’ mind could be negated.

3 MANAGING A REMOTE WORKPLACE

3.1 Working environment. Adapting employees to remote work and creating a safe and clean workspace for them

After covering the topic of motivation and lightly touching the topic of stress management, it is possible to move on to actually managing the remote workplace with the basic knowledge of human motivation. We touched upon the topic of stress and stress-free environment, by using a Toyota factory as an example. As we continue to work with that example, let's continue looking into how working environment is built at Toyota

Cleanliness and orderliness are part of Toyota's fundamental values (Houseus M., Liker K.J. 2008). Toyota breaks down the clean, pleasant and safe environment into four main parts:

1. Physical Work Environment
2. Physically Safe Processes
3. Psychologically Safe
4. Personal Health and Safety

Third point was briefly discussed in the first chapter of this work, as it is the closest to the topic of our research. Nevertheless, the points related to physical work environment and safety are worth checking out. By looking into the concepts of physical cleanliness that Toyota employs, it is in realm of possibility to gain insight into how the work from home environment can be improved upon.

For example, when cost cutting, workers comfort is taken into consideration, because it directly correlates into the quality of the cars rolling of the production line. (Main way you can cut costs in a bad way in a WFH environment is a poorly procured software. Everyone will use it on the day-to-day basis during the work, and it is one of the things you should not save money on, because it directly affects the performance.

While work related injuries are practically nonexistent in a WFH environment in relation to general office work, overworking is a possibility and should be prevented to avoid reducing overall performance and morale. Constant overwork will cause serious mental problems such as anxiety, depression or, in worst cases, suicide (Ross. J. 2015). Not to speak of various physical problems overworking can bring such as heart diseases. Monitoring the time is not an answer to this, as this forces everyone to follow the schedule, contrary to the main pro of working from home – ability to work at the comfortable time and ability

to spread the work out throughout the day. Of course, the company should still have scheduled online meetings to discuss the progress on their work, but otherwise employees should be given freedom in choosing how to spend their working day.

Moving on to the Psychological Safety, the premise of challenging but not stressful work was already mentioned, but since the overwork was just discussed, it should be brought up again. Amount of work each worker receives should not be so high that it would force the worker to overwork themselves to complete it (Houseus M., Liker K.J. 2008) During aforementioned schedules team meetings, work should be equally divided between everyone. Engaging and challenging work will ensure that the worker will take the work seriously and while also providing a possible escapism for those who are stressed by factors outside of work. (Houseus M., Liker K.J. 2008)

One more thing that businesses should focus on is early prevention. While it would be difficult to notice early signs of any kind of psychological issue by untrained personnel, people's behavior still changes and other workers and supervisors could try to look for those changes and maybe try to address them personally with the person showing these behavioral changes in order to determine if there is a problem and if there is one, encourage them to seek help. If the company has a psychological counselor, he should be present during the scheduled team meetings and be available for personal conversations with other workers to provide a feeling of safety to them. Knowing that there is always a person who can listen and is interested in helping you will encourage the workers to seek help and provide them with feeling of safety.

Supervisors should also focus on making sure that the workers are working together in groups as it can make up for the lack of socializing during forced homestay situations. Feeling of belongingness, friends, those are the needs from the Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, A. H. 1943). Providing workers with their needs is one of the basic things to improve workers' motivation and morale.

3.1.1 Workplace counselling

“Workplace counselling may be defined as the provision of brief psychological therapy for employees of an organisation, which is paid for by the employer.” - McLeod, J., & Henderson, M. (2003). Does workplace counselling work?

Workplace counselling can be either 'in-house', such as an employee within the company, or provided by an external source. Workplace counselling is a private and confidential way for employees to share their worries and distress with easy access in a reasonable time. It

helps managers to remove the burden of helping employees in difficult situations which require delicate solutions that can only be offered by trained employees.

Generally, workplace counselling can be deemed effective, as various studies of pre- and post- counselling employees showed, that they were satisfied with the results.

“Those who received counselling were highly satisfied, and believed it had helped them resolve their problem. Clinically significant improvement in levels of anxiety and depression was reported in 60-75% of clients. Counselling was associated with reduction in sickness absence and improvement in other organisational outcomes such as more positive work attitudes, fewer accidents and enhanced work performance.” - McLeod, J., & Henderson, M. (2003). Does workplace counselling work?

But McLeod and Henderson also notify the reader that by nature of being in a commercial climate, any research in the field of workplace counselling is constrained by “commercial considerations”.

But nevertheless, a positive effect is spectated from having an option for employees to receive workplace counselling. By addressing their problems, you could reduce sick leaves and other negatives that can hurt the business. And, once again, keep the workplace morale and motivation high.

3.2 Leadership in a virtual workplace

The topic of teambuilding and leadership of virtual teams is an important one as most companies missed an opportunity to build a foundation for remote work, and virtual team leadership is included in that very foundation.

Main difference in the remote work would be new ‘work ethic’ because remote work brings more individuality into the job, like previously mentioned ability to choose when you work, allowing workers to comfortably spread out the workload throughout the day. Another difference that is related to the ‘work ethic’ is the freedom from the working hours – if in office performance is usually measured by the time a worker spends in office, in a remote work situation, performance is measured by the actual result of work.

Trust factor is another thing, significant number of companies was reluctant to adopt remote work until forced to, one of the reasons being trust factors. When motivation theories were discussed in the introduction chapter, we learned that several decades ago it was believed that humans actively resist work and responsibilities and think it is in their best interest to avoid it, also known as theory X. It is safe to assume that this belief still lives on in some minds, judging by the number of unprepared companies in the Deloitte Digital’s

study. CEOs with that mindset did not want to have remote workers, fearing the lack of control over them, believing that remote workers will just slack at home instead of doing their job. One of the challenges supervisors and the workers themselves may face is trust. Supervisors trusting their employees to do their work honestly and employees trying to gain trust from supervisors that may still not believe in remote work.

Establishing means of communication is one of the first steps of building the remote workplace. Maintaining a constant connection between employees to encourage teamwork and socialization. As it was discovered, one of the human needs is the need for friends and feeling of belongingness and they can be met by making sure that the employees stay connected with each other and work together.

Various tools exist for the purpose of work communication remotely, the topic of those will come in a separate chapter later on, as the sheer number of tools used by businesses worldwide requires so. So, for now, the next point of discussion of virtual team building should be scheduling and teamwork. As stated previously, there should be work meetings for employees and supervisors to get up to speed, and these meetings should be at regular intervals, e.g. once a week, every Thursday etc. Since in a work from home situation it is hard to judge work time, employees should be judged based on their own performance. The point of scheduling your own work that was repeated in this and previous chapters does not mean that there should not be a work plan for a particular project or the work in general. Without setting goals, it is difficult to motivate an employee (see the Introduction chapter about the challenging yet not stressful work at Toyota) and make constant progress. Online Kanban (“a system for monitoring progress in producing goods through the use of an instruction card that accompanies products as they move through the different stages of production” – Oxford Dictionary) boards are a great tool that could be used for setting up and delivering tasks among the workforce, reducing the team meetings to discussing progress and results, instead of spending a significant amount of time telling who needs to do what.

During scheduled team meetings, supervisors should determine whenever the job progresses in an acceptable pace or should changes be made to the workspace or work methodic, including whether worker or workers are having problems adapting or otherwise performing in an unfamiliar working environment. It is important to attempt to detect any problems workers might have early on to minimize effects, so proper discussions about progress and any kind of difficulties should be had during every meeting. With proper management, remote workplace can show same or even higher productivity as office, as shown by various studies, such as Deloitte Digital’s and other cited studies.

Another thing to note about communication is setting boundaries for e-mails. To avoid being cluttered with irrelevant mail, employees should be told to not add everyone to the e-mails but people to whom the information in the letter is important. The important information should also be shared with everyone during the scheduled online meetings. While the workers work mostly in teams, it is important to not decentralize the workers, so work meetings are needed to be attended by every worker to be up to speed with the situation. For conference calls Harvard Business Press recommends creating agenda for each scheduled meeting and distribute it among the participants (Harvard Business Press, 2010). After the main meeting is concluded, it is possible to let some time for personal meeting with teams or separate workers to have discussions related to their performance. These could be conducted by supervisors and the personal talks could be conducted by the workplace's counselor (if such person exists within the company, otherwise the task would lay on the supervisors' shoulders or team leaders').

4 WORKERS' EXPERIENCE WITH FORCED SWITCH TO REMOTE WORK

4.1 Method of research

There are two main types of research: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research is the research method where the data is obtained by personal interaction or observation. Interviews and questionnaires fall under the qualitative research methods and is the chosen method of research in this work. Quantitative research, on the other hand, focuses on the statistical side of things by quantifying data collection.

Quantitative research focuses on the numerical side of things and therefore, in the opinion of the author, is not the best suitable method of research for this thesis. Qualitative research, by nature of being more personal, is better suited for this research, as the personal feelings on remote work of different workers needs to be known.

Therefore, a qualitative interview research is to be conducted with the purpose of learning the experiences of people who were forced to switch to remote work in the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic or other circumstances. Interview is defined as “a meeting at which information is obtained (as by a reporter, television commentator, or pollster) from a person” (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Interview.).

Each interviewee person is an office worker who was working in the same company before the pandemic in the office, being physically present there, a requirement for this study to compare two workspaces and experience of being switched from one to another. Another type of subject is a person who was working full-time remotely before 2020, as the pandemic's remote work situation was arguably different to remote work before the events of COVID-19.

Interviews will be performed either through means of audio/video communications (phone calls, VoIP audio or video calls) or through personal meetings (following the rules of personal hygiene and social distancing).

Main questions raised during the qualitative research for this work are:

- What changes remote workers go through during switch to remote work?
- How job productivity and motivation are affected by the change to remote work?
- How companies handle switch to remote work and what can be done about it in workers' opinions?

- What benefits do workers see in working from home and would they want to switch to full-time remote work?

Based on the studies and literary works cited and referenced in this thesis, a list of questions was formed, which can be found in the Appendices section of the thesis. After gathering qualitative data through interviews, analyzing it should be the next step.

4.2 Analyzing the results of the interviews

The interviewees came from different professional backgrounds, but what unified them is that they are all office workers, whose work does not require them to be on site. All of the interviewees worked remotely before the switch, either full-time or occasionally due to being on sick leave or other circumstances. With the interview results procured, it is now possible to go through them in an attempt to answer the research questions

The interviewees shared their experiences with remote work before and after the switch, and how the companies handled the switch. Various answers were given, different in nature due to difference in experiences with remote work and how companies handled the remote work.

In relation to the research questions, interviews revealed numerous things about their remote work exploits and how their experiences differed and yet share a lot of same points. Research showed that companies having an existing remote work setup helps ease the switch, but external factors still affect it.

4.2.1 What changes do remote workers go through during the switch to remote work?

Every interviewee noted the reduced amount of human interaction, stating that it is hard to get used to, more so if the person is an extrovert (“a gregarious and unreserved person” – Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.)). One of the interviewees told that they missed the action of walking to work, as it was a physical exercise and helped to “wake up in the morning before working”. All of the interviewees agree that lack of social interaction is the most notable change after switching to working from home, especially during the pandemic where you have to stay quarantined at home.

Several interviewees signified the positive aspect of getting to spend more time with their family and the amount of free time that is saved by excluding commuting to work from their daily schedule. All of the interviewees mentioned in one way or another that the home atmosphere affected them, one recounted how their “small and cramped apartment”

negatively affected their mood and heightened their stress when having to work from home.

As it can be seen from the answers, change of the working environment affects workers, and the effect depends entirely on factors outside of work, such as family relationships or living conditions.

4.2.2 How job productivity and motivation are affected by remote work?

Interviewees gave varying answers, greatly related to the workplace and factors outside of work. Every interview, nevertheless, contained common overlapping points in relation to this research question, some of which were present in every single interview.

One of the interviewees told how the older generation workers at their company had a hard time adapting to the remote work workflow and their productivity had dropped significantly, to the point where other, younger employees, had to come back to the office and had their work increased, as they were made to compensate for the workers who could not come back to the office due to being in the risk group for COVID-19.

The same interviewee also stated that they had remote work experience before and did not have any difficulties related to the tools or workflow, but revealed that being at home, it was challenging to focus on work, due to great number of distractions present, a sentiment shared by other interviewees as well. This factor also affected people who worked remotely before the mandatory switch, but “after taking some time getting used to it”, the productivity “reached the office levels if not surpassed”.

Another common thought shared between the interviewees is that absence of face-to-face contact affects efficiency of communication between people when working from home. Interviewees commented that even with the existence of video calls, it is still not the same.

Some of the participants noted that despite being prepared and experienced in remote work, productivity still suffered greatly, because other companies the interviewees relied upon for work were not prepared for remote work and a lot of time was spent waiting for them to catch up. In some sense, the first interviewed had the same problem, where a chunk of the workforce could not adapt to the workflow and the rest of the team’s productivity went down.

As expected, the need to adapt to the remote work workflow affects the initial productivity of the workforce. An interesting observation can be made about the face-to-face contact complaint received from several interviewees. Those who shared this concern were all non-IT workers and had to communicate with other people on a daily basis in one way or

another, especially interviewees who work in law. Significant amount of information is transferred through non-verbal means (Kelly. S 2020) and it is not surprising that people feel less comfortable during video calls compared to real life meetings, because they would feel as they are missing crucial information when interacting with another person through remote means. The comments about distractions at home is another interesting point raised by every single interviewee. Participants who were already working full-time remote or just had remote work experience before the switch happened had already got used to it, as they said. It shows that environment that was not associated with work before, will negatively affect productivity at first, as the workers would get distracted.

4.2.3 How companies handle switch to remote work and what can be done about it in workers' opinions?

Again, interviewees' opinions on this differed. The ones in the IT sector were happy with how the change was handled either because they were already working remote before the switch or were prepared for that and had a smooth start. Outside of IT sector there were participants, that were happy with how the switch turned out. Some interviewees also shared that the company's actions during the switch could see some improvement, such as better and more understandable scheduling, but were overall satisfied.

Interviewees who were not happy say that the preparation of tools and workflow was sub-par and affected the company's workflow resulting in reduced performance of the workforce. One of the interviewed even stated that they had their workload increased to compensate for reduced productivity. This part of the interviewed participants stated that they have not worked remotely before in this company and that the company was not sufficiently prepared for switching their workforce to remote work. These companies returned to office work as soon as it was possible, as remote work negatively affected workers' results due to reduced productivity caused by taking time to adapt.

The dissatisfaction with the switch came only from the interviewees who did not work remotely in their company before due to it not being available. The answers show how an existing remote work framework is unfortunately needed when a switch is happening. Otherwise, productivity and workers' morale drops significantly because of the uncomfortable working conditions in a remote work environment.

4.2.4 What benefits do workers see in working from home and would they want to switch to full-time remote work?

The interviewees were divided when asked whether they would like to continue to work from home fulltime. But all of the participants found various positive points in working from home, which include:

- More free time during the day
- Saved money on work lunches and work commute
- More time to spend with family and relatives
- Not being tied to a specific location

Interviewees that interact with other people state that they would not switch to full-time remote, only when it is “absolutely necessary” as they feel that they do not perform as well when working from home as opposed to working at office. Every IT sector interviewee was happy with working remotely and stated that they either already work full-time remote or would greatly welcome an opportunity to do so.

Despite the negatives, every interviewee was in favor of remote work, due to the positive aspects that overshadow the negatives of remote work. Nevertheless, workers who communicate with other people on the daily basis due to the nature of the job revealed that they would not switch to full-time remote, again because of the lack of face-to-face contact in which the communication is easier and more natural for the interviewees. IT workers’ answers show that remote work is a great option for the IT jobs, with personal scheduling and results-based work that can be done anywhere with an internet connection.

4.3 Research results

While interviewees gave varying answers to the questions, there still were overlapping points in regards of how the interviewed see remote work. Every interviewee has a positive opinion on remote work, while still understanding the negatives of it, but willing to overlook them in favor of the positive parts of working from home. Remote workers who worked in companies with an existing remote work framework were significantly happier with the switch, same can be said about the interviewees who had remote work experience before, but they did feel less satisfied compared to the former, due to colleagues and sponsoring companies they work with having to adapt to remote work, making the productivity go down.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Purpose of this thesis

The purpose of the thesis was to research management methods that would help supervisors and managers to better set up the remote workplace and how to manage a remote workforce. Another purpose of this work was to find out what kind of things workers go through when dealing with a sudden switch to remote work and when working from home in general.

5.1.1 Effects of a sudden switch to remote work on workers. General effects of remote work

With the backing of the cited literature and the personal research, it was discovered that the effects that the sudden switch to mandatory remote work had on the workers was not insignificant. Unexpected change of environment and workflow turned out to affect productivity and performance of workers, as it takes time to get used to either, as many interviewed people noted. Motivation to work is affected by performance at work, but is affected by outside elements, such as personal or global situation. Another point to take from the research is that majority of people enjoy remote work even when it does come with downsides which are overlooked due to positive points working from home provides. Various freedoms that a person receives when they work remotely seem to be the main draw for many workers.

5.1.2 Effects of remote work on worker's productivity and motivation

Research showed that human motivation is a complicated manner and how it can be affected by various things. Same can be said about productivity, which is tied to motivation. Both literature and interviews show that sudden change of working environment coupled with outside stress have negative effects on productivity and motivation.

5.1.3 Managing a remote workplace

This thesis went into detail about various factors and phenomena of the remote workplace. The research showed that it is important to take advantage of things that remote work makes possible such as an ability for workers to schedule their own work and the result-based workflow which is a result of not being able to properly track working hours. With how motivation, and by relation productivity, can be affected by outside sources beyond the scope of work, managers should focus on building a support framework for the

workers, such as personal meetings and workplace counselling services. Scheduled meetings and work assessment are needed for the remote workflow to function otherwise the productivity of remote work will suffer due to not being coordinated and properly guided. This is why setting proper communication channels is a key to remote work, as there is no centralized location such as an office, it is harder to coordinate effort without a good communication framework for workers to use.

5.1.4 What to do during a sudden switch to remote work

As research has shown, having an existing remote work framework is extremely important for the switch to happen “disaster-free”. Workers that were working at a job with existing remote work framework cited that most of the stress came outside of work, therefore stress relief measures such as a welcoming work environment and availability of workplace counselling are must-have. Having a friendly and supporting environment where workers feel welcome will bring the most results to the table.

5.2 Conclusion

As a conclusion to this work, it has been shown that remote workplace management relies on communication and timely preparation. A sudden switch will negatively affect the workforce and the workflow, bringing down the productivity and morale of the workers, and the outside factors that caused the switch in the first place will only worsen the situation. Nevertheless, majority of the workers that were part of the research are still in favor of the remote work either full-time or occasional, as the positive aspects of it heavily outweigh the negatives for them.

The research has also shown that with how intricate human motivation is, it is important to understand its basis, which is provided by various studies of human motivation such as Maslow’s (1948) or Herzberg’s (1960). Understanding the human motivation is the first step to managing not only a remote workplace, but workplace in general. Knowing that workers are humans, which have lives and problems beyond the office is needed to make the correct working environment in which most of the work happens and the results of the work are affected by the environment in which they were made. Building a welcoming environment, understanding what employees need and what can be done to provide them with that, how employees see work and responsibility, all these things are needed to be known by managers that would like to build a successful remote workplace.

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APPENDICES

Interview Questions:

1. What is your current workplace and how long have you been working there?
2. Have you worked remotely before the quarantine measures in your country were enforced? If yes, what type of change did you notice when the whole workplace switched to remote work? Did you feel that your job productivity fell or if it became harder to work?
3. If you have not worked remotely before, what challenges did you face when switching to working from home? Did the change of environment affect your motivation or productivity at work? Did you experience more stress (if any) during the period of time where you worked remotely?
4. Do you feel like the switch to remote work was handled correctly by your company? What do you wish was handled differently during the switch?
5. What were your overall impressions of working from home compared to working from office?
6. Since remote work is no longer mandatory, would you accept an option of going full-time remote, and why?
7. If you are already a full-time remote worker, why did you choose this style of work?