WORKING FROM HOME - A TRANSITION IN THE CONCEPT OF WORKPLACE

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Abstract:

Office is any place of work designated by the employer for the purpose of executing any work usually white collar jobs. Working in office carries formal practices such as working in specific group, in specific location, for long. As such it has its own disadvantages of rigidity, formality, mounting boredom and stressful competition. The physical structure of the workplace has great influence on the employee's thinking. Spending a large part of the time sharing, cooperating and collaborating creates cordial social relationships which often goes beyond the confines of the work and develop trust and mutual help. Discipline, punctuality, hierarchy, loyalty, transparency etc. are all wishful products of this influence. The psychological implications of peer support are enormous in the life of an employee. Contrary to this is the concept working from home which is designed to consider work not as a burden but a responsibility to be carried out at one's own pace. With the growth of computers and information technology networking from home indicates a sound proposition where the employee can finish their work in their own premises with less supervision and stressful surroundings without compromising output and efficiency. The rigors of a work place are far less felt if the office transform into a 'Home of Work' or still further 'Working from Home'. In the context of increased women in present day work force, this model affords flexibility in timings, adjustment with pressures of work, better coordination with domestic chores, performance of gender roles and responsibilities, and compliance to gender demands such as pregnancy, maternity and happy family without compromising the output and efficiency. With this changed outlook towards office, it could be envisaged that the next century women would be working from home and the sectors which demand them out would shrink and ultimately would be the domain of men.

1. Introduction:

As observed from the history, the nature of human being is to continuously improve the comfortability in living place. In such effort, he is continuously innovating the various processes essential in his day to day life. Before industrialization, people were living in family structure villages where their farms were located and working in their farms and rearing animals for milk and meat. Most of their day today activities in life were confined to the villages. All family members worked at productive tasks were differentiated by sex and age. Family structure consisted of male head of the family, his wife and children, and his aging parents (who will have passed on the farm). Together they worked as a productive unit producing the things needed to sustain the family's survival. The obligation of every member of the family is of carrying on working on the farm for the family's survival. Social relations were confined mostly to the primary group – the family, kin and kindred ones. The kinship character of the society was significant for its cooperative functional character, for the economic support it provided to the dependent and needy. Because of the large family size and dependency between various family members, each member had a designated job in the family depending on their gender and age. Depending on social status and economic need, some family members were working in other farms nearby in the name of labourers, which

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supported barter based exchange of commodities during pre-industrialization. In order to increase the food grain production along with increase in family size, the family members were encroaching the forests and converting them into farm lands. Hence during pre-industrialization era, members of most of the families were working in their own farms during day time and living together in home with family members during night. Thus, prior to the Industrial Revolution most of the workforce was employed in agriculture, either as self-employed farmers as land owners or tenants, or as landless agricultural labourers and skilled artisans. Family members worked together in agriculture or small house (cottage industries) and their home and work were not separated.

2. Industrialization and Conventional Work Centres:

The Industrial Revolution changed the above social model. There was the transition to new manufacturing processes in the period from about 1760 to sometime between 1820 and 1840. This transition included going from hand production methods to machines, new chemical manufacturing and iron production processes, improved efficiency of water power, the increasing use of steam power, the development of machine tools and the rise of the factory system [2]. Textiles were the dominant industry of the Industrial Revolution in terms of employment, value of output and capital invested; the textile industry was also the first to use modern production methods. The advent of the Industrial Revolution is closely linked to a small number of innovations happened in the second half of the 18th century [3]. By the 1830s the following gains had been made in important technologies: textile manufacturing, metallurgy, Steam power, Machine tools, Large scale production of chemicals, Cement and concrete, Gas lighting, Glass making, Paper machine, Mechanizing agricultural processes, Coal and other mining, other development in transportation etc. lead to evolution of Factory system. The factory system contributed to the growth of urban areas, as large numbers of workers migrated into the cities in search of work in the factories. The populations of the cities were increased to the larger extent which affected the quality of life due to enhanced opportunities as well as degraded environment. Due to various socialist movements, some industrialists themselves tried to improve factory and living conditions for their workers. Housing was provided for workers on site. The growth of modern industry since the late 18th century led to massive urbanisation and the rise of new great cities, as new opportunities brought huge numbers of migrants from rural communities into urban areas. In 1800, only 3% of the world's population lived in cities, compared to nearly 50% during the beginning of the 21st century. During the process of industrialization, the model of working changed from home-based to factory/office based working. Employees of the factories were staying either nearby company colonies or travelling from distant private housing colonies using private or public transportation facilities respectively. Industrialization led to growth of large number of industries which changed the working in home model to working in factory model. Eventually their home and work were separated.

During the second half of 20th century, the service industries got importance. The service sector consists of the "soft" parts of the economy, i.e. activities where people offer their knowledge and time to improve productivity, performance, potential, and sustainability, which is termed as affective labour. The basic characteristic of this sector is the production of services instead of end products. Services (also known as "intangible goods") include attention, advice, access, experience, and discussion. The service sector of industry involves the provision of services to other businesses as well as final consumers. Services may involve the transport, distribution and sale of goods

from producer to a consumer, as may happen in wholesaling and retailing, or may involve the provision of a service, such as in pest control or entertainment. The goods may be transformed in the process of providing the service, as happens in the restaurant industry. However, the focus is on people interacting with people and serving the customer rather than transforming physical goods. The service sector is now the largest sector of the economy in the entire world, and is also the fastest-growing sector. The major growth in this sector also involves the transfer of funds from the governmental to the contractual profit, non-profit and hybrid sectors of the economy. The workforce in the service sector is mainly working from their office and providing the required service to the customers. Hence growth in service sector supported "Working from office" model. Office is any place of work designated by the employer for the purpose of executing any work usually white color jobs. Working in office carries formal practices such as working in specific group, in specific location, for long. As such it has its own disadvantages of rigidity, formality, mounting boredom and stressful competition. The physical structure of the workplace has great influence on the employee's thinking. Spending a large part of the time sharing, cooperating and collaborating creates cordial social relationships which often goes beyond the confines of the work and develop trust and mutual help. Discipline, punctuality, hierarchy, loyalty, transparency etc. are all wishful products of this influence. The psychological implications of peer support are enormous in the life of an employee. Contrary to this is the concept working from home which is designed to consider work not as a burden but a responsibility to be carried out at one's own pace.

As the information communication technology improved and the invention of internet supported online e-business and further advents in wireless communication supported new model of online business called mobile business, the service sector found drastically changes in quality of service rendered and there are further opportunities to improve the service models. The mobile business model is considered as ideal business model for intangible products and services, is expected to be ubiquitous business model and providing opportunity to use wireless technology to provide ubiquitous services to the customers. The mobile business model in service sector not only providing advantage to the customers to avail services from anywhere, any amount, and any time, it also creates an innovative opportunity to service provider to provide services from his/her home through automated internet based computer systems. This reappearance of "working from home" model for the employees from pre-industrialization era to post-industrialization era based on support of automated technology poses many opportunities and challenges. "Working from Home" model sounds attractive and has expected solutions to many problems of the employees and society but realizing it in various service sectors has its own difficulties.

3. Problems and Challenges of Working from Home Model:

In the context of increased women in present day work force, this model affords flexibility in timings, adjustment with pressures of work, better coordination with domestic chores, performance of gender roles and responsibilities, and compliance to gender demands such as pregnancy, maternity and happy family without compromising the output and efficiency. Seemingly a noble idea, it pauses great challenges both to the employer and employee. A manager is used to seeing his employees working in front of him under his direction. Supervision of an employee especially large and complex work force physically 'in absentia' is indeed difficult. The present day managers are not equipped with techniques and tools of managing large and complex workforce from distance. Similarly given a lot of freedom many employees may not be able structure

their time to their advantage and often work may suffer due to postponement or pushed back to low priority. The home atmosphere involves a lot of mood swinging when compared to that of office and employees may find difficult to concentrate on work constantly. Besides the capacity of an average employee to work with broader and general guidance is arguable although expanded bureaucracy and increased hierarchy the prospects of an ordinary employee contributing to the planning is much less when compared to executing the work. Working from home is no hindrance to this in any way.

4. How Advents in Technology Supports Working from Home Concept:

The improvements in transportation technology, from locomotives to high speed airplanes, decreased the virtual size of the world as a global village, as the increase in speed and decrease in cost of transportation, the Governments of different countries opened up their boarder for international business which supported phenomena called globalization. The globalization had two components as globalization of production and globalization of markets. As the technology is developed, the life style of the people is also improved in such a way that they could able to use computer technology, information communication technology and internet effectively for doing business. With the growth of computers and information technology networking from home indicates a sound proposition where the employee can finish their work in their own premises with less supervision and stressful surroundings without compromising output and efficiency. The rigors of a work place are far less felt if the office transform into a 'Home of Work' or still further 'Working from Home'. The advent of technology has greatly helped in the following:

- Widespread adoption of technology through innovation and transfer of technology.
- Skilled and talented work force was created to handle the complexities posed by technology
- Indirect but effective mode of communication has become popular.
- Physical proximity has been substituted by overcoming access to time and distance with 'speed'.
- Information the world over has come to finger tips and ways of processing huge volume of data were developed
- Alternative ways of structuring organisation and administration have been developed.
- Work force became multi-cultural and multi-lingual
- Gender specific barriers in occupation have decreased
- The philosophy of management of people at work has been changing from close supervision to job enrichment, job rotation and flexi working hours.
- Employees attitude have changed. The desire for less difficult and faster ways of performing work has contributed to better adoption of technology.

5. Home as an Alternative Work Place:

In the changing scenario of present day workplace boundaries, our notion of office is also undergoing radical change. Huge investment on creating infrastructure like building, transport, housing, health care and educational facilities is conveniently overcome through working in home which is an affordable example in developing countries. Manpower intensive countries like India and China can absorb a large chunk of white color labour force docked in their yard by introducing this model. While the

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concept is founded in developed economy, the paradox of superimposing it on a developing economy would merit careful consideration.

Table 1: Merits of Working from Home compared to existing office system

S. No	Areas of function	Existing System	Advantages of Working from home
1.	Organisational	1. High financial investment in building & equipment 2.Manpower intensive 3.Pressure on timings 4. Right talents are missed 5.Motivation is a deliberate effort through purposeful measures 6.Brand building and public relations are costly exercise	1. Financial viability through low investment in infra-structure 2. Utilisation of talent through increased opportunity 3.Flexi timings and work can be broken at piece rates 4.Attract and integrate talent 5. Attract and retain employees without being required to waste effort on motivation 6. Reputation and self esteem
2.	Operational	1. Conventional mode of operation 2.Quality and efficiency stagnation 3.Speed and output related to many other factors 4.Communication gaps	1.Online and computer networking 2.Maintained through adjusting work to own pace 3.Regulated by target factor 4.Free and consistent
3.	Technological	1.Routine and stereo type waste of technology advantages and often duplication of work 2.Obsolete style of functioning 3.Rigid timings	1.Less complicated, friendly and superior 2. Cheap, affordable, easier and safer 3. Elimination of absence and late coming
4.	Employer - employee relations	1.Rigid organisational structure leading hierarchical governance 2.Close Supervision 3. Chances of strained relations, hostility and gossip 4. Snow balling work and target pressures	1.Functionally flat structures with reduced hierarchical effects 2. Indirect but effective supervision 3.Reduced friction and tension free work life 4.Well reconciled employees
5.	Customer relations	1.Direct contacts with clients leading to corruption and discrimination 2. Adjustmental and behavioural irritancies	1.Nondiscriminatory and corruption free 2.Matching expectations and better adjustment
6	Social/Environmental Issues	1.Heavy rush on roads at peak hours, heavy traffic and pollution 2. Human and gender specific problems	1.Keeps environment green 2.Issues addressed through restructuring leisure and redesigning effort. Happy family

6. Conclusion:

Rapid industrialization has rendered agriculture as an occupation unattractive for the youth who wanted to encash the potentials of becoming industrial labour. Greater earnings and abundant freedom offered by the industrial centres intensified the collapse of the traditional concept of life and work. Large scale mechanized production brought the downfall of cottage and household industries. The demand for greater skills to perform a new job expanded educational opportunities. With increasing education and liberal thinking, women in large number entered the workforce. As a consequence new work centres emerged replacing family centric work habit. New ways of looking at work as different from part of natural life created problems of adjustment. Technology too has tremendously influenced attitude towards work and

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social life. The entry of women into employment in a large way gave a different profile to the work force. Today's employee is seeking to overcome the bane of industrialization by setting one's own pace in work, reduced supervision, more creativity, opportunity for innovation, personal satisfaction and recognition, self responsibility, gender identity and self respect, and working from home would be a major change in the mindset of the employee of next century. The human resource managers should start anticipating this and overhaul their management tools and techniques so that they should not loose their relevance. Doomed with criticism, the prospects far outreach challenges and hence it is a glorious proposition. With the changed outlook towards office, it could be envisaged that the next century women would be working from home and sectors which demand them out would shrink and ultimately be the domain of men.

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