

ABSTRACT

1. Introduction

Learning to adapt to the new performance landscape is a crucial organisational capability. Therefore, to be adaptable, every organisational structure needs to be both stable and flexible, and able to respond to unprecedented changes as well as new opportunities. Organisations must cultivate dynamic capabilities in order to adapt their practices in response for changing environmental conditions. One such change recently became an inevitable part of all the economies round the world due to a sudden upsurge in the novel coronavirus spread, which led to social distancing and untimely lockdowns on a large scale. This created an ultimate need for promoting a work environment where functioning could not be interrupted by the disease, helping business houses to survive in the times of pandemic, along with keeping the working class safe and employable. Hereby, the concept of working from home took a hike all round the world making it possible to function from their homes at a distance, still being connected to their workplaces by technology.

The phrase 'work-from-home' is often used synonymously with the terms 'remote work', 'teleworking' or 'telecommuting', and 'virtual work' (ILO, 2020). While there may be slight variations in the definitions, all of these concepts encompass flexible work practices that allow employees to work remotely, such as from home or any location other than the conventional office surroundings. This is made possible through the use of technology for communication and task execution. The global survey by Atlassian Corporation revealed that India underwent the most significant global transition to work from home, the report estimated that approximately 66% of Indian employees wanted to continue working from home, compared to any other country in the survey (Most Indian prefer to work remotely, 2021). Suggesting that remote work may become a permanent feature for majority of the organisations, even after the pandemic diminishes in the near future. This will thereby entail to a significant transformation of the conventional office architecture, as well as the implementation of an entirely innovative work-life balance framework. Therefore, it is crucial to examine how the employees, team leaders or managers are preparing themselves to accept and adapt to this upcoming transformation in the foreseeable future.

This study centres on women in India's IT industry to determine whether widespread remote-working practices enable them to maintain career continuity while meeting

heightened caregiving responsibilities. Women remain society's primary caregivers and, as secondary earners, are often the first to exit paid work when family demands surge. By centering on women, the research highlights opportunities for career continuity through flexible arrangements. The IT sector was selected as it employs a substantial number of women in India, exacerbates their work-life conflicts due to demanding roles, and pioneered large-scale remote work adoption compared to other industries.

2. Literature Review

Existing studies have explored the connections between different work-life programs provided by employers and employees' work-life balance (WLB) and has found favourable effects. Furthermore, it has been established that a heavy workload and extended working hours have a detrimental effect on work-life balance (WLB), whereas trust, work flexibility due to trust, and workplace support are predictors of improved WLB in remote settings. Overall, there is a balanced assortment of articles and studies written regarding the subject of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that a significant amount of scientific editorials and commentary were published on this topic. These publications were either focused on future possibilities or substantially based on previous studies and data. Although there was a large amount of information and data available, majority of these works primarily addressed the individual and organisational levels, with only a small number considering a national viewpoint.

Over and above, for any innovation to be feasibly adopted by the employees and organisation as a whole, managerial attitude plays a vital role. Managers undergo unique challenges while organising and completing tasks through teams, and the rising virtual mode of operations have recently added to the complexities. Relationships are harder to form when team members are scattered. Many conventional monitoring and control methods fail. Moreover, remote work necessitates a greater dependence on technology, which might result in increased surveillance and control, as well as digital fatigue. Previous studies have examined the connection between leadership and organisational effectiveness in a virtual setting, as well as the influence of e-leadership skills on employee well-being. However, there is a lack of research on managerial well-being in the virtual context, as well as on various aspects of developing managerial concerns, trust, productivity, tool assessment, and training in response to the growing use of AI software.

3. Research Gap

- I. Lack of post pandemic studies on the effect of remote working practices, with no sole focus on the effect of remote working on women employees. Also not considering the benefits it can reap towards women employment in the long run.
- II. The modus operandi and perspective of managers have not been considered for rating the work experience of new WFH/remote working setup. Studies also do not include variables from the point of view of the managers and team leaders about the effect of team-building challenges on their productivity, which in turn is just an important assignment. There is much information found for offline teams in comparison to online, thus creating a gap to be attended.
- III. There still exists a gap in the field of virtual management including peoples manager during the normal market scenario while adapting to the innovative technologies like AI to function on daily basis.
- IV. Finally, there is a deficiency of integrating mixed method techniques of data analysis, which hinders the ability to provide a thorough and explanatory depiction of the phenomena being studied.

4. Objectives

The goal of this study is;

1. To identify the relationship between remote working and work-life balance of non-managerial women employees in the IT sector.
 - (a) To determine the role of trust-flexibility, e-wellbeing and effectiveness in predicting work-life balance of non managerial women employees during remote work.
2. To analyse employee feedback on the availability of e-working facilities and examine its effect on the relationship between remote work and work-life balance.
3. To investigate managerial attitude towards adopting virtual management practices; the challenges encountered in this process and its impact on managerial productivity.

5. Research Methodology

The study has adopted both exploratory as well as conclusive research designs to fulfil the objectives of this study. Primary data has been collected by adopting both qualitative (interviews conducted with the women managers/team leaders) as well as quantitative research methods (survey conducted with the non-managerial employees). The selection of IT organisations are based on the list obtained from the website of the National Stock Exchange of India. A total of 446 non-managerial and 20 managerial employees participated in the survey from across 17 companies. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, which consisted of various demographic variables along with multiple constructs of remote working, items of work-life balance, and e-working facilities which were measured using a five-point agreement scale. Further, the sample distribution for all the demographic variables is considered adequate keeping the total population characteristics in mind. The acquired data was further examined for assumptions such as normality, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and common method bias. Before conducting any statistical analysis, the sample data's reliability and validity were evaluated. The acquired data was evaluated using several descriptive analyses, correlation, and multiple regression, as well as a regression model intended to meet the study's key objectives. The secondary objectives involved analysing data using process analysis to check for moderating effects, and the third target was met using thematic analysis.

6. Key Observations

Inferential Findings (Objective 1, 1a and 2)

- A. Firstly, the overall association between remote working and work life balance is found to be strong and significant. Later, the remote working dimensions like, trust and flexibility, work effectiveness and e-wellbeing were also seen to be highly correlated with the outcome variable work life balance. This association was positive and significant at p value $<.05$ for all the constructs, meaning that an increase in any of the constructs will lead to a positive increase in the non-managerial women employees work life balance when remote working.
- B. Multiple regression analysis adopted for determining the prediction capability of each remote working construct on work-life balance of non-managerial women employees revealed that, work effectiveness and e-wellbeing during remote work setup were the

highest predictions of work life balance followed by trust and flexibility. Nevertheless, all these constructs can be held as a good predictor of the outcome variable for explaining a total of 64.8% of the variance.

- C. Results for independent samples t-test revealed that there is a significant difference in the work-life balance mean scores of married and single women employees ($P = .005$). Descriptives show that, married women experience increased work-life balance in remote settings compared to that of unmarried working women. However, no significant difference in the mean work life balance of women employees have been noticed at permanent and contractual positions ($P = .082$) and for both the study areas of Delhi/NCR and Bangalore at 95% level of significance ($P = .053$).
- D. Observed ANOVA outcomes indicated that the mean work-life balance of non-managerial women employees during remote working are highest for the operations department employees ($M = 46.07$, $SD = 8.17001$), followed by admin ($Mean = 44.9$, $SD = 7.90506$), engineering ($Mean = 44.9$, $SD = 7.0029$) IT services ($Mean = 44.8$, $SD = 8.56753$) and HR department ($Mean = 43.7$, $SD = 7.94743$). The lowest mean score witnessed was from the accounts & finance department ($Mean = 42.0$, $SD = 6.50148$) in comparison to other departments. Although these differences detected are not significant at 95% level of significance as per the ANOVA test results ($p = 0.11$).
- E. Results of descriptive statistic showed that the employees operating from staycations had highest mean score ($M = 46.41$, $SD = 7.02539$) for work-life balance while working remotely¹. Followed by those women employees working from home ($Mean = 44.58$, $SD = 7.5968$) and then cafes ($Mean = 42.59$, $SD = 7.25494$). Additionally women employees who tend to work both from home and staycations have a lower mean value ($Mean = 39.75$, $SD = 5.7373$) in comparison to the groups above and the lowest among all is witnessed to be for women employee working from home and cafeterias ($M = 34$, $SD = 0$). Although these differences detected are not significant at 0.05 level as per the ANOVA test statistic conducted ($p = 0.222$).
- F. Findings from the second objective revealed that employees had all the necessary hardware tools and internet connection followed by the software and innovative technology for working smoothly from remote locations. Availability of these facilities added to the increased positive effects of remote working on work life

¹ Staycations recently became an opportunity to experience something different and recreational from employees everyday life under the impact of COVID19 pandemic.

balance. This showed that presence of e-working facilities positively moderated the relationship between remote working and work-life balance of women employees at non-managerial positions. Slope analysis revealed that decrease in availability of e-working facilities might result in weakening the relationship between the predictor and outcome variable, whereas increase in it led to strengthening of this relationship.

7. Qualitative findings: The third objective is framed with a motive of investigating the managerial attitude towards remote working preferences and adaption of agile tools for managing the virtually distributed workforce.

Findings revealed that, though in the beginning managers were hesitant to adapt to this work culture due to its continuous innovative demand and increased use of modern management methods. Because keeping themselves updated to the newly introducing technologies in IT companies did bring struggles for women in managing home, work as well as striving regularly for up-skilling their current skills. Later, they did become accustomed to such work practices as a part of the new normal era of job demands. As a matter of fact, with or without remote working practices, the adaption of new technologies in the field of IT was inevitable. Therefore, women had to upgrade themselves continuously in order to survive in the work market and climb the ladder of leadership positions. Further, the regular availability of managers through easy access to work via technology did create a blurred boundary, but with time managers learnt to either accept it as a part of the work or framed strategies to maintain the work life balance shifts. Finally managers believed that 24*7 online supervision may result into micro-management which can never be treated as a viable option for supervising the team or get quality deliveries. They believe this work culture can survive if trust is built among the team and with the managers in order to avoid miscommunication and unhealthy competition. Also not denying the fact that increasing remote work popularity will continue to impose more challenges on the HR fraternity and specially those acting as people managers of teams who need direct supervision, keeping the managers bereft of their desired work settings, because all the jobs cannot be converted into remote mode, creating extra burden on managers and HR professionals to manage both online and offline workforces.

8. Contribution

Current study provides valuable contributions to the field of both practical applications and theoretical understanding by examining the rising phenomenon of digital work transformation, which is not very new but got prompted by an extraordinary external event of the worldwide pandemic lockdown.

Finally, the study addresses recent calls to undergo research exploring on how organisations can contribute to increase inclusive workspace by managing the diverse set of employees and knowing how individual's perception of remote working has been influenced in the light of current post pandemic scenario and in the work-from- anywhere (WFA) context as a thought for future of work (FOW). As a result, this research adds to such ideas by including work-life balance literature, for demonstrating the fact that behaviour of IT professionals is associated with their quality of work-life harmony. Contributing to which the study findings explain how different remote working factors can be influencing work life balance of women who work at non-managerial positions. It further shares the understanding on managerial attitudes of women in the IT firms towards adapting to this changing work force scenario with their new set of challenges and opportunities. Also including the effects of this new era job expectations on managerial functioning, productivity and wellbeing at large.

9. Theoretical Implications

- I. Contribution to the body of research: Enhances understanding of work-life balance differences in the context of working women in remote work, particularly within the Indian context.
- II. Multidimensional understanding: Adds to the discourse on gender, sector, and employee categories, and post pandemic time frame enriching scholarly works on these topics.
- III. Development of a framework: Encourages the development of existing managerial frameworks within the changing work dynamics of managing remote teams.

10. Managerial Implications

- I. Supportive policies: Highlights the need for organisations and policymakers to establish effective remote working policies that foster a positive work environment even when performing outside the boundaries of the traditional office setups. The introduction of work policies allowing access to their employees to work from anywhere will reduce the relevance to physical boundaries and rather allow more importance to global collaboration and interconnectedness.
- II. E-work resources: It also stresses the importance of providing employees with the necessary resources to facilitate effective remote work practices and increase its positive effect on work outcomes.
- III. Creation of dynamic leaders: The new era jobs require new era managers in current times. Hence, this study is useful in learning the fact that, creation of targeted training programs designed to build resilience and support skills among the managers are equally crucial.

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