CHAPTER-I

Introduction

The reader is introduced to the study's theme in this chapter. This chapter presents the concepts and provides a background to the development and unexpected rise of remote working. It presents an overview and explains the main goal of this research. There are four broad categories in this chapter, beginning from the background of the study to the number of chapters entailed for attaining the research objectives.

1.1 Background

A health hazard (COVID19) forced change to millions of lives around the world. Due to this, various sectors of the economy were pushed to wind up their functioning or limiting it to their home offices, if the work characteristics permitted them to do so, without getting into any kind of physical contacts with their colleagues and work places (Xie et al., 2020). This sudden surge in the pandemic crisis during late 2019 in Wuhan China or early 2020 in the whole world, led to profound and influential changes. One of such adjustments being "Work From Home" or "Remote Working" practices, which was adopted by more than 80% of the employees in approximately half of the sectors, expecting a significant long term growth in remote working (Baker, 2020). Employees especially from IT organisations embraced this concept of working from home (WFH) on a continuous scale owing to significant improvements made in connectivity and communication technology in this sector (Gupta et al., 2022).

Pertaining to these sudden changes, studies in the area of remote working revealed Work-Life Balance (WLB) of employees to be one of the critical concerns for the researchers, due to the overlapping of work-life boundaries. Specially, when working from home (Hyman and Baldry, 2010; Tietze & Musson, 2005), citing the extensive impact of mostly home-based remote work on work-life balance of employees (Sullivan, 2012) and later from places like airports, cafeterias, client locations and work-cations (Eurofound and the International Labour Office, 2017). Similarly, Hill et al. (2003) when conducted a comparison of work-life balance found that, teleworkers reported to have varying working hours at home, at the office and in other locations. These studies also revealed that, home-based teleworkers who had spent most of their working hours at home, were more likely

to have a higher work-life balance rating, compared to office-based workers. Due to the flexible working arrangements (Sullivan, 2012) increased effective communication, and job autonomy adding to enhanced well being (Ter Hoeven & Van Zoonen, 2015). Nevertheless, benefits of working from home differed depending on the individual's personal situation (Aguilera et al., 2016; Bloom et al. 2015). Therefore, working from home also presented certain challenges, which included less organisational visibility, because work was done in a less official setting. (Maruyama and Tietze, 2012) Work obligations coupled with everyday home affairs (Allen et al., 2015) affected individuals ability to manage their work and personal lives well, making the work-life balance seem a-bit stressful, especially for women (Palumbo, 2020), who would also need relevant training and up gradation of their skills to sync with their roles, in order to provide to the demands of a wholly new vocation. Eventually, catering to labour mobility and networks for becoming competent enough in the new era jobs (Madgavkar et al., 2019).

These job practices also prioritised technology and technical support to ensure smooth operations, making it heavily reliant on the managerial attitude towards embracing this work form and addressing the telework challenges (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Since this work culture provided employees with new options, it also increased the responsibilities of managers. They now have to handle a greater deal of managerial responsibilities including, conflict resolution, meaningful mentorship and 24*7 online availability, in order to oversee teams that are working remotely and not under their direct supervision. Hence, this work type shall undoubtedly bring new set of virtual management challenges to the table, which will require adequate strategies to deal with and function smoothly. Therefore, a positive managerial approach towards accommodating the remote working culture and management of geographically dispersed workforce is vital in motivating organisations to adopt telework as a crucial element, for successfully implementing remote work solutions. This can be in the form of assistance provided by managers and supervisors to their teams through training, supervision and consistent communication (Haines et al., 2002 ; Urbaniec et al. 2022; Yap & Tng, 1990).

The remote working adapted by many as a new normal form of work impacted both non-managerial and managerial roles, but in different ways. On one hand where it was vital to see how it turned out for managing the work-life balance aspects of women at non-managerial posts, it seemed equally important to investigate the virtual management

aspects of women managers in this new era work based on their differed roles in the organisation. Hence, the present study contributes to the larger discussion on the impact of remote work/management on women employees' work/life balance and the managerial attitude towards the acceptance of this new work arrangement. Leading to enhanced use of digital tools, as well as its implications on managerial performance beyond the COVID-19 epidemic in IT firms.

1.2. Definitions and Concepts

1.2.1. Remote Work

The most widely recognised form of distributed work, which became a prevalent practice, was referred to as telecommuting, sometimes known as telework or remote work (Davis & Polonko, 2001). Initially coined as "telecommuting" by Nilles and then widely adopted in the United States together with the term"telework" (Madsen, 2011), to encompass all forms of work conducted beyond a central office yet connected to it by way of ICT's (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Golden & Veiga, 2005). However, the phrase "e-work" was widely employed for referring to these jobs which were carried out in a virtual setting within Europe. Therefore, Kirk and Belovics (2006) provided a definition for e-workers as individuals who work from home full-time and mostly use electronic means to work and communicate. These individuals had minimal in-person engagement with their workplace or coworkers and superiors. The explanation to this e-working concept can be applied in diverse formats and have been designated by various terminologies, including "telework", "telecommuting", "ICT-based mobile work", "mobile e-work", "mobile virtual work", "home-working", or "home-based work" and "remote working".

Remote work, together with the idea of "telework" and "telecommuting", have been variedly explained by different ways in end number of studies, with certain critical features appearing in many of them. Finally, working from the surroundings other than the traditional office environment, such as from home, a satellite office or a client's location, permanently, frequently, or in rare circumstances, is also regarded as remote work (Jämsen et al., 2022). Hence, "Remote e-working" made up to a broader term used, for referring "work being completed anywhere and at any time regardless of location and to the widening use of technology to aid flexible working practices" (Grant et al., 2013). Urbaniec et al. (2022) describe remote working to be a flexible work engagement that

enables the performance and delivery of work output from distance. Also, operating remotely intensely relies on the information technology and its use at work, consisting of remote work definitions mostly referring to the use of technology to conduct business.

Therefore, terms like 'work from home, "remote working,' 'flexible working,' and 'e-working' are used interchangeably in this study which includes any employee who primarily is carrying out the job at a distance from the conventional workplace and utilises ICTs to access work.z

1.2.2. Work-Life Balance

"Eight hours to work, Eight hours to play, Eight hours to sleep, Eight bob a day. A fair day's work, for a fair day's pay." In 1856, stonemasons recited this mantra as they left their work site at Melbourne University. Franklin (2011) said that these trained workers were some of the first in the world to be able to work 8 hours a day.

Accordingly, the assumption of work/life balance was positioned on the understanding that, the diverse life roles of an individual could impact their well-being and productivity at work. This acknowledgement stems from the confession that non-work responsibilities, such as family or personal demands, can spill over into the workday and have a negative effect on an individual's health and job performance (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Therefore Kirchmeyer (2000) provided a definition of work-life balance as 'the achievement of fulfilling experiences in all areas of life, which necessitates the equitable allocation of personal resources, including energy, time and commitment, across these domains'. While, Clark's 'work/family border theory' emphasised individual satisfaction and defined work-life balance as 'the achievement of satisfaction and optimal functioning both at work and at home, while minimising conflicts between different roles' (Clark 2000: 751).

However, Kanter (1989) disputed the idea of separating distinct aspects of workers' lives, arguing that these categories were transparent and interrelated. As a result, organisational psychologists have developed a particular interest in the interface linking to work and non-work activities of the individuals. Researchers have also made efforts to offer a more comprehensive understanding of relationship amidst the work and family in the past two decades. This interface has been first characterised in relation to interference of work into non-work or vice versa, often addressed to as "conflict" (Carlson et al., 2000). On the other

hand, different authors have taken on a role amplification or enlargement approach, proposing that engaging in numerous life roles can result in benefits, satisfaction, increased energy and personal development (Marks 1977; Sieber 1974). From this perspective, the connection between job and personal life responsibilities have been referred to as "enrichment" (Brough et al. 2014; Carlson et al. 2006) and "enhancement" (Voydanoff 2002). Hence, work-life balance in this study is regarded as the appropriate balance amidst "work" i.e. career and aspirations on one end and "life" i.e, contentment, leisure and family on the other. This notion of work/life balance have emerged as a prominent idea that embodies the given outlook. Therefore, the study will be focusing on finding out the work-life balance outcomes after the integration of work and life roles due to the rise in remote work culture.

1.2.3. Work-Life Balance of Women in Remote Working

The impression of work-life balance, which was once clear-cut when the labour-force used to include males predominantly, have now proven to seem difficult in defining and implementing (Kalliath & Brough 2008). Theories suggest that the allocation of time across various domains such as job, family and social life determines the balance. The societal shifts resulting from the greater involvement of women in the employment sector is another factor that have subsequently brought about alterations in conventional gender norms dictated by society, further increasing the significance of the connection between career and home life. Organisation's in need to achieve productivity enhancements have driven these adjustments of valuing work over personal time, as per a thorough evaluation conducted by Lappegård et al. (2017) and Brough et al. (2007) in this matter.

Studies conducted prior to the COVID scenario have mostly demonstrated that women face challenges, when trying to balance the demands of childcare, household chores and paid work obligations simultaneously (Duxbury et al., 1994). They claim that working from home leads to increased stress for many individuals, particularly women, due to two specific factors. Firstly, women need to navigate to the time constraints imposed by their family members' schedules. Secondly, they face the challenge of not having a clear physical distinction between their professional responsibilities and domestic duties, resulting in constant availability to both family members and coworkers. In addition, the researchers argue that telework itself does not inherently bring about a shift in gender roles, rather the home continues to be a setting, where activities are divided along gender lines

(Gurstein, 2007; Hilbrecht et al., 2008). Similarly, on March 2020, when the World Health Organisation (WHO) issued certain guidelines in compliance with social distancing measures for COVID19 and individuals were asked to stay-at-home, women were the one to report an increase in care burden with declining access to necessities. Particularly married and unemployed women witnessed a hike in unpaid work during that time in country like India (Chauhan, 2020).

It was therefore witnessed that women were the most prone to sudden changes caused during the introduction of this work culture which affected their work-life boundaries and responsibilities, because the pandemic introduced a compulsion of absolute lockdown, where the household chores along with their paid jobs were needed to be performed in lieu of the working women's multiple roles of a wife, mother, daughter- in-law and a professional (Collins et al., 2021; Sevilla et al., 2020). In contrast to this, scholarly articles also reported that work from home have been fairly liked by working women compared to their male counterparts at workplaces around the world, because flexible working arrangements offered them greater control over the amount of working hours. Also, the location of work served as an important element in providing employment opportunities to those individuals who might otherwise be excluded from the labour market, due to their inability of functioning from the traditional office setups (Chaudhary et al, 2022; Hochschild, 1996; Hoque & Bacon, 2021; Observer, 2003). Nevertheless, these positive attitudes toward remote working or work from home differs across age, regions, financial backgrounds, marital and employment status of the individuals included in different studies (Dey et al., 2020; Mason et al., 2020 ; Monthly Labour Review 2020).

1.2.4. Virtual Team Management and e- leadership

The concept of e-leadership might be new in terminology but its application started back in the 90's when companies transformed into virtual organisations with geographically dispersed workforce round the world and its smaller version, the virtual teams. Just like teleworking, virtual management is also a part of the managerial history but in different aspects. Teleworking which is now famously known as remote working, distant working, WFH or flexible working etc. Virtual teams or distant/ remote workforce now were formerly known by the name of global virtual teams (GVT's) which functioned at different locations round the globe and were led by virtual managers, but not necessarily out of the office premises (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002), which is not the case in recent times.

The term "virtual team" generally covers a wide range of activities comprising of team members located in more than one physical location using forms of computer-mediated communication to coordinate their individual efforts and inputs. Often utilising modern computer- driven technologies are to overcome geographical or temporal separations, work across boundaries of time and space. However, the definition of virtual has been complicated to define across different organisational context (Ale Ebrahim et al., 2009). Past studies stated that virtual teams were made up of geographically distributed experts, supported by ICT, formed on a temporary basis for rapidly dealing with urgent projects, which when completed the teams were disbanded and employees were redeployed to other projects (Alge et al., 2004, Potter et al., 2000). Though not in sync with the currently evolving meaning of distant workforce or virtual teams which are somewhat permanent in nature, the managerial functioning did match to the current times remote workforce management expectations (Depoo & Hyršlová, 2022) which included managing team boundaries, external communication, providing tech support systems, training for softwares (Cascio, 2000) and identifying characteristics of effective virtual teams (Gifford, 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). However, when compared to in-person teams, researchers have demonstrated that virtual teams present end number of challenges in the areas of mutual trust, employee wellbeing and productivity (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Highlighting the importance of having positive leadership in any organisation to create an environment of trust and effectiveness, as witnessed by Kantyka and Maciąg (2023) in the recent research. As per which, leadership along with autonomy alone had a positive impact on productivity and work engagement of participants involved in the study. Despite the fact that many advantages are associated with virtual teams. The challenges in interaction and collaboration, along-with the complications in managing and monitoring virtual workforces, are some of the drawbacks that are associated with virtually working teams. As a consequence of which, these shortcomings associated with managing virtual workforces have garnered a significant amount of attention in scholarly and industry publications (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Raghuram et al., 2019). According to Wood et al. (2018), distinct policymakers and organisations in lower-middle-income countries such as India, Morocco, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Vietnam looking forth to economic advancement, have expressed their approval for the growing trend of employed individuals working from a remote location. Nevertheless, this remote teams would heavily rely on the use of virtual aids for supporting the management of remote teams in long run, leading to shifting focus on investigating

innovative disruptions happening in current times. However, a vast majority of research in the field of innovation is still seen to be devoted to the developed economies (Walker et al., 2015) whereas, very little is known about how employees and organisations in the budding economies react to state-of-the-art technologies (Trenerry et al., 2021).

1.3 Motivation for the Study

Many countries lack the presence of women at workplace, especially at specific managerial positions and in the senior management, mostly during the prime working ages of 25–54 years. Family obligations and inequitable distribution of unpaid household responsibilities impede women's ability to join the work force, contributing to the most significant gender gap in labour market participation. This has somewhat remained consistent since 1995, as observed, by The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics (UN). Apart from this, countries, especially developing and under developed ones, also witness a lack of female's participation in the overall work force on one hand, followed by high levels of attrition on the other (Kamdar, 2020). Regardless of increased women education into the field of Science Technology Engineering Management (STEM) and various higher educational degrees (Limani, 2024; Social Infrastructure, Employment and Human Development, 2020). Hence, positive policies framed in the field of women's empowerment, still lack from making women an integral part of the working economy in many countries. Which seems to be in opposition with the future growth and development policies of the countries involved (Bhadra, 2017). Thus, countries need to find ways to sustain women at the workplace and reduce the growing gender gap at the ground level.

Reasons for women's absence in the workforce might be many. Both at work and home along with the age-old societal pressures and cultural ties that women need to deal with at every aspect of their lives; including gender bias in assigning such types of work that are usually presumed to be male dominated. Judging women's ability on the basis of her gender has been a long run norm in the history of many low income countries. India, as well needs to work on these leaking pipeline concerns of women from the working class (Jasrotia & Meena, 2021). The current study is therefore motivated to deal with one of these vital issues of balancing work and life, failing at which many women unwillingly opt out from their careers having no option to choose from. This issue needs to be dealt with bringing in effective ground level changes to attain gender equity at workplaces. One such measure could be providing flexible work opportunities to cater for the needs of both

work and family. Research indicates that teleworkers with specific demographic traits or who work a given number of hours at home have distinct WLB experiences (Maruyama et al., 2009).

Authors from countries like US and UK are seen conducting compelling researches on vibrant aspects of remote working and the future face of work, that is seen to be accepted as a first choice for the working cohorts and some organisations as well (Makridis, 2024; Yang et al., 2023). These countries along with other developed nations have shown an uprise in the inclusion of flexible working conditions via their ground breaking researches in area of policy making and employee well being studies (for e.g., Grant et al., 2013; Henry et al., 2021; Paul et al., 2021).The growing interest for remote work during the pandemic has heightened the necessity to comprehend how companies and managers can effectively and remotely lead hybrid work to promote the psychological well-being of their personnel (Giurge & Bohns, 2021).

Remote working which existed during the pre-covid era in different forms like teleworking, telecommunication etc got a sudden spike to it during COVID 19 in the form of WFH, when immediate shutdown of the economies led to reimagining of the working conditions round the world (Stoker et al., 2021; Subbarao & Kadali, 2021). This work practice which started as a forceful activity to avoid pandemic affects, turned out to be a new way of working for employees and business houses round the globe (Barhate et al., 2022; Cho & Saki, 2021). Consequently, leading to new research prospects for the scholars and academicians in collaboration with the industry experts to gain more valuable insights on the overall impact of these work culture on both worker and management along with the surroundings at large (Ahmad et al., 2022).

1.4 Chapter Sequence

Chapter 1 includes the introductory part of the study, with an historical and present overview of the study area along with the definitions and concepts of terms included in the research.

Chapter 2 explains the research industry and current emerging trends and development in the area of concern.

Chapter 3 caters into the review of past literatures and explaining the research gap in the existing field of study.

Chapter 4 includes the need, objectives and scope of the study and explaining the methods applied and analytical framework adapted for achieving the objectives of the study.

Chapter 5 describes the socio- technical profile of the study elements and factors involved

Chapter 6 investigates the relationship between remote working and work-life balance of non-managerial women along with analysing the process of conducting interviews on managerial attitude towards remote workforce management

Chapter 7 entail with the discussion on the results of the analysis and researchers personal view point.

Chapter 8 presents the contribution and limitation of the study, reciting the future scope and policy implications of the study.