

### (IJ-3) Remote Work Analysis Pre-COVID-19 and During COVID-19

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#### **Introduction**

With the global pandemic working remotely has become very popular to keep moving the business forward while ensuring employment for personnel. Prior to March of 2020 when the Covid-19 Global Pandemic began, 44% of companies around the world did not allow remote work, but during the stay-at-home orders and social distancing phase, a lot of people were working from home to keep the business operating (Bernazzani, 2019). In the United States before the Global Pandemic, only 2.9% of people worked remotely (Wang et.al., 2020). Many organizations did not have the infrastructure in place to support remote work such as remote network access or laptop computers for their employees along with policies, processes, and requirements.

When COVID-19 started, employees were forced to change their work environment from a professional office setting to a virtual/remote environment. Working from home might mean working from a dining room table, a bedroom or a shared location which can impact a person's productivity, morale, job satisfaction and the amount of time required to complete their job. Before the pandemic, working remotely was offered as a benefit by some companies. The pandemic has caused many companies to move their employees to remote workspaces as the United States tries to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus and up to half of Americans were working from home at the height of the lockdowns in April 2020. Even though research has shown employees are more productive in the virtual environment (Birkenshaw et. al., 2020), there are concerns that during the pandemic and in the virtual work space employees are having to homeschool their children, or not having a quiet workspace that could negatively influence productivity or contribute to stress (Saunders, 2021).

#### **Research Problem**

An important topic to understand in the pandemic era is how employees could shift their work location from an office setting to a virtual/remote environment in a non-traditional setting without any formal planning or training during a global pandemic and are expected to complete their jobs productively. It is important to understand the definitions of Remote work which can be used to describe flexible work arrangements, telework and telecommute, but the key thing

is that with Remote work there is no requirement for where the work takes place (Rodgers, 2020). Some companies might say Working from home which means the work is required to be performed at one's residence (Rodgers, 2020). With people working remotely there are external factors that could influence productivity such as trying to watch children and assist them with their school work or not having a strong enough internet connection all of which could contribute to productivity issues on the job. A person might have new stress that comes from these adaptations during the pandemic but how does it influence their level of job satisfaction.

Employees have increased their productivity by using various technologies that were available to them at their on-site locations while now working remotely. Companies have previously used conference calls for in person meetings and at the start of the pandemic, a lot of organizations switched to video calls such as Microsoft Teams or Skype. New technologies have emerged with virtual workspace tasks such as Virbela and as people adjusted to working from home. For workers to access the tools needed organizations had to implement additional Virtual Private Network connections as to not overload the organizational infrastructure. By utilizing virtual reality or augmented reality instead of video it does not have the same effects on productivity that are associated with Zoom video calls. Experts are now asking whether employees can maintain efficiency by working from home while the companies enjoy reduced cost savings for travel (Barbour, 2020).

This study is applicable for all people working in a business setting that have had to switch to remote work or manage people who work remotely. There are some statistics showing people do not plan to return to the office and will find a new job if they are required to return (Davidson, 2021).

### **Research Questions**

The main research question is to understand if there is a difference in job satisfaction for those who work remotely versus those who work onsite? The following research questions will be explored as part of the study.

- Does employee productivity vary based on location (onsite vs. offsite)?
  - Does employee job satisfaction vary based on location (onsite vs. offsite)?
  - Is there a difference in job satisfaction for people who work remotely based on whether they live in a city,
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rural, or travel?

- To what extent does a worker's decision to work remotely differ, by gender and age category?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding how an employee's job satisfaction and productivity changed due to working remotely and the shift in the number of people working in virtual workplace by conducting a data analysis of changes pre-COVID-19 pandemic and during COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of the study is to find out what methods did the people utilize to help them complete their jobs and identify several variables that could be measured using predictive modeling on ways to improve the remote work situations for people. The study will explore how the shift of Organizational Behavior has impacted the percentage of people who can continue to work remotely once things return to the status quo and what tools Organizations have utilized to make the transition successful as it relates to the new normal with regards to a sense of purpose/belonging while working remotely.

Understanding the impacts of adjusting to working remotely during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. The topic of working remotely is important to me as I have wanted others to be able to have the freedom that comes from being able to work from anywhere with an internet connection. Before the global pandemic working remotely was viewed as a privilege and not a necessity. We are not at the end of the pandemic, but it is important to study how people feel working remotely which can impact their levels of job satisfaction and motivation. When COVID started people were suddenly thrust into a work environment from an external location outside the office which is not conducive to productivity or free of distractions.

The deficiencies in the literature research are lacking formal academic studies of relating to working remotely during the Pandemic of COVID-19 and Post COVID-19. There are a lot of statistics that have been published within the Business Industries, but not much relates to business personnel. When it comes to working remotely productivity is one the terms that companies use to measure how successful an employee is and with regards to working remotely there can be a lot of distractions. Various software tools can help account for idle time, breaks, amount of work produced, but it is hard to understand the impacts that working professionals had of working remotely during the pandemic. When it comes to measuring productivity, some tasks are done offline by reviewing documents, drawings,

or communicating with people on the telephone that might not be tracked with a software system. Another deficiency in the literature is how do people feel about belonging to a team when working remotely versus feelings of isolation and what can companies do to help bridge this level of connectedness.

It is important to understand how companies adapted to the new challenges and what tools they used to embrace the opportunities in front of them. As we start to get to a “new normal” will people be required to return to the office 100% or will they be allowed to work remotely? It will be interesting to see what the studies show and people’s preferences once things re-open.

### **Review of Literature**

This review of the literature will examine the history of working remotely, the Pros and Cons of working remotely, research models that were used in analyzing data for remote work, and the research gaps that exist. By understanding the history of remote work, it will help show the shifts that occurred during the 2020 pandemic and the similarities and differences to past adjustments in the remote business sector.

The importance of working remotely is the benefits it provides to employees and the organization. When an organization agrees to let people work remotely there has to be a win-win situation. Employees have to show that they can be trusted to complete their job and the organization needs to feel as though they are getting an honest day’s work from the employee. The workplace around the globe has been shifting to a remote workforce in varying capacities ranging from part-time to full-time. Organizations are finding that having people who are competent to do the job is not always available where the office is located so they are missing out on good talent. By allowing people to work remotely the benefits to the company are exponential in terms of not having to pay for brick-and-mortar locations while still having people to keep the business operational. Before COVID-19 a lot of people have never had the opportunity to work remotely for a brief time, but now they were thrust into 100% remote work from home.

### **History**

Throughout Europe, in the 1980s the labor market experienced some new forms of employment statuses related to working from home and the changing market conditions had debates about what was standard, typical, or normal

employment contracts (Hakim, 1990). As society adapts and changes the norms shift and a demographic group might rise-up, Felstead & Henseke (2017) address the shift in the working mother role with regards to feminism by offering work that meets the employee's domestic and personal circumstances.

The way people work has evolved over the years with the Industrial Revolution bringing people together, but still being able to increase the number of workers in a global fashion (Morens et. al., 2009). Some economic crises impacted working from home and how each country adjusted in Europe was analyzed (Hakim, 1990). Atkinson (1984) suggests that responses to shifts in economic situations are likely pragmatic or empirical with common themes being Market Stagnation, Job Loss, Uncertainty, Technological Change, and working time. The previous employment models relate to this study based on people who were able to complete their job remotely during a global pandemic versus those who were laid off during the pandemic. Some people are classifying the remote workforce as a “Knowledge Economy” which relies on educated professionals to add value with their heads, not their hands (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

### **Pros and Cons of Working Remotely**

When it comes to working remotely there is no one size fits all approach that organizations can implement for their employees, and it requires people to use several different types of skills to ensure a successful outcome for the employee and organization. There are various factors for management styles such as internal factors (employee morale, motivation, company culture) and external factors (labor market, health crisis, employment laws) that can impact which style to use with employees (Kelly, 2020). Some skills that will be utilized are problem-solving of how organizations move forward with working remotely, creative thinking to identify new ideas, collaboration for teamwork, and time management to ensure work is still being completed when it is needed.

Some people want to return to the office and others do not want to return for various reasons. If management has information on how employees feel about certain topics it can guide them through their strategic planning and potentially increase revenues and decrease costs. The results of underperforming personnel can impact the company's revenue due to their performance (Amerine, 2011). Employers need to establish performance expectations for employees otherwise it can lead to costly turnover issues for the organization (Amerine, 2011). If people prefer to

work remotely a company doesn't need as large of a facility which reduces the overhead cost which would save the company on average 11,000 per employee and each employee would save between 2,000 – 7,000 (Kelly, 2019).

Several potential management issues are now necessary to adjust to employees working remotely such as Management Methods for a split workforce of onsite personnel and remote personnel to ensure communication is the same for both groups. There are cost impacts of having offsite personnel in terms of tax structures for the business, overhead costs and not needing as large of a brick-and-mortar building. When it comes to costs Courtney (2020) estimates that half of the American people work remotely so where they live do not impact commute time which is another benefit to employers with regards to real estate costs and people able to start their day versus drive time and stress of a commute.

Zoom fatigue is occurring when people need to be participating in video conferences all day. (Stanford News, 2021) When people work remotely some employees might start underperforming depending on situational adjustments in their offsite work environment. Some employees might choose to leave which will take time to find a replacement and train a new person which can be a cost impact on the organization.

### **Research Theories and Models**

The detachment of work from a single place is a growing trend (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Flexible working hours are becoming a norm in workplaces and provide benefits such a work-life balance, stress, and well-being in addition to benefits for the employer and employees (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014). Emerson's social Exchange theory is used as a framework for the study on workplace isolation which can impact customer service (Hickman, 2019). Environmental surroundings can impact a remote worker's performance in various ways such as physical and mental (Choi, 2017).

There are several models for work Atkinson's Model of the flexible Firm and Loveridge's Model for firm-specific labor markets (Hakim, 1990). Atkinson (1984) suggests that firms are looking for three kinds of flexibility: Functional, numerical, and financial. While Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard (2014) identify three types of flexible working hours: flexi-time with regards to scheduling hours, Tele-homeworking with regards to location, and part-time with regards to the number of hours worked. In Hickman's (2019) workplace isolation study common themes were social interaction, manager communication, peer to peer interaction that influenced job performance. Social changes by International Journal of Business Research and Management Practices in Global Environments (ISSN: 2473-4047)

creating policies and strategies to improve engagement, performance, and well-being for remote workers who may feel isolated (Hickman, 2019).

For remote work studies, there have been qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods used to analyze the influences of being co-located or virtually. Several conceptual frameworks can be applied to working remotely based on the literature such as Work Design, Work Engagement, Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Burnout. There are several challenges when implementing remote working that pertains to structural components based on the company's infrastructure and tools the organization has to offer their employees (Belgium, 2020). Employees need to be able to balance their work and private life while still being successful contributors to their job (Belgium, 2020).

The concept of virtual communities for conducting business can be utilized to develop relationships with people or communication channels. Having a virtual presence, allows people to feel part of a community versus just isolated by being remote. When it comes to Remote Worker Isolation there are theories about the Social Exchange and Well-Being of an employee that extends beyond the work environment or connections (Hickman, 2019). Four variables contribute to a remote employee's well-being: Sensation, Rumination, Openness to experience, and social connectedness outside of work (Hickman, 2019, Anderson et.al., 2014).

Another theory could be self-efficacy and how people choose to conduct their behavior depends on the situation they are in which can contribute to productivity (Staples et. al., 2006). Based on studies that have been published there is a strong relationship between a person's self-efficacy and an employee's view of their remote work situation (Staples et. al., 2006). Although a person's manager can influence their work results based on their management style (Staples et. al., 2006).

### **Research Gap**

When it comes to working remotely there is a large gap between the academic literature and studies that consulting companies are conducting for the business personnel. On a google search for peer-reviewed articles for dealing with stress and burnout during COVID, there were a few results and it varied for Emergency Personnel, Mental Health, but there was no research on employees in corporate settings who have worked the entire time during the pandemic. The

organization needs to offer higher flexibility and agile methods when it comes to personnel working remotely that can be based on data-driven analysis for new patterns and employee feedback (Belgium, 2020).

There are a lot of quantitative measures that have shown productivity increases via working remotely, but there could be a burn-out occurring that is not being addressed by organizations to ensure employees do not leave for a less stressful position. Managers need to adjust their style to ensure that employees are doing okay and not feeling neglected (Hertel et. al, 2005).

Wang et. al. (2020) identifies a limitation of their COVID remote study was only based in China which is new versus a country like the United States that has had remote workers previously. It is suggested to compare remote work between developing countries and developed countries for flexible work arrangements to see if they are influenced by cultural factors (Wang et. al., 2020).

### **Summary**

The research that I will be conducting will be a relatively new area since before 2020 there was not a global pandemic where people worked remotely. With regards to post-pandemic work remote practices, there are a few countries that have re-opened, but the United States still has the majority of states shut down with social distancing measures in place. There is not much research that has been conducted with regards to working remotely in Corporate Business Environments during the pandemic. There is not much to debate about in the literature for the agreement or disagreement with regards to working remotely during the global pandemic has been a benefit or hindrance to the company. Some of the countries that research has been conducted in did not have many people working remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic versus the United States had people who did not have any changes to their work location if they worked remotely prior. With the results of my research study, I will be able to add to best practices and provide recommendations for organizations that are looking to implement permanent procedures for work from home.



## Research Framework and Methodology

The main research questions this research will address is whether there is a difference in job satisfaction and productivity for those who work remotely versus those who work onsite? The following research questions will be explored as part of the study:

**RQ1:** Does worker productivity vary based on location (onsite vs. offsite)?

**HA1:** There will be a significant difference in productivity for those who work remotely versus those who work onsite. Bloom (2015) cited a productivity increase of 20-30% and savings of approximately 2,000 a year per employee.

The dependent variable is employee productivity, and the independent variable will be the employee work location during COVID (onsite/ offsite).

**RQ2:** Does worker job satisfaction vary based on location (onsite vs. offsite)?

**HA2:** There will be a significant difference for increased job satisfaction for those who work remotely versus those who work onsite. 73% of workers said that working from home improved their work-life balance (Spiggle, 2020).

The dependent variable is employee job satisfaction, and the independent variable will be the employee work location during COVID (onsite/ offsite).

**RQ3:** Is there a difference in job satisfaction for people who work remotely based on whether they live in a city, rural, or travel?

**HA3:** There will be a significant difference in job satisfaction for those who work remotely based on where they live (city, rural, or travel). Approximately 1/3 of participants in a recent survey spent two or more hours each day commuting and now with people not having to commute they have more time to get their work done (Spiggle, 2020).

**HA4:** Employees who are digital nomads will have higher job satisfaction

The dependent variable is employee job satisfaction, and the independent variable will be the employee living location during COVID (city, rural, or travel).

**RQ4:** To what extent does a worker's decision to choose to work remotely differ, by gender and age category versus people who returned to the office?

**HA5:** There will be a significant difference in the choice to work remotely based on a person's age and gender versus those who chose to return to the office. Telecommuting has been shown to be good for mothers to juggle household duties and childcare (Cummings, 2020).

**HA6:** Younger people will be more likely to choose remote work.

**HA7:** There will not be a significant difference based on gender.

The dependent variable is employee's choice (yes/no) to work remotely, and the independent variables will be the employee age and gender.

### **Methodology**

This research study will utilize a Mixed methods approach for the data collection procedures to assess the individual's job changes as it relates to working remotely when it comes to the global pandemic time frame. Questions will be asked about work experiences pre-covid and during Covid. Analyzing the data comparatively for pre and during Covid will allow for a comparison of groups for some of the independent variables to see how the various shifts occurred for employees. The mixed methods approach to the survey will allow participants to explain a survey answer or provide insight on an experience they might have had working remotely prior to Covid or during Covid. The survey includes open-ended questions for participants to include recommendations for items that worked or feedback on things they wish were different. If the research only used closed-ended questions, there is a lot of valuable qualitative data that could be assessed when providing recommendations for work remote best practices.

### **Instrumentation**

The source of data collection in this research will be through an original survey that is distributed online through Qualtrics and available in Appendix A. The methodology is planned and will be pilot tested before the study with input from the Institutional Review Board.

**Participants**

The sample will consist of people from around the United States who work remotely and who are over the age of 18. The probability sample include various industries and job roles. The participants will be invited to participate via email, LinkedIn, Professional Groups, and Virtual Online Platforms. The participants will respond to some screening questions to verify they are eligible to participate in the research and to screen out people who do not work remotely.

The study will be reviewed by the Alliant Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. When it comes ethical issues there are no foreseen ethical issues as participants will be asked to voluntarily participate by providing information regarding their experiences and opinion of working remotely during the Covid Pandemic. Each participant will complete the Informed Consent prior to answering any questions and participating in the survey. Participant information and responses will be held in confidential files and personally identifiable information such as contact information will be password protected and destroyed upon completion.

**Pilot Study Data Collection Procedures**

The pilot study data was collected using an original survey (see Appendix A for a copy of the survey) which was completed individually at a time that was convenient for the participant. The study will assess employees' thoughts on working remotely and how the global health pandemic of COVID-19 impacted their job productivity and levels of job satisfaction.

**Analysis of Pilot Study Findings**

The survey data in this study was analyzed in various methods depending on the research question. Using statistical analysis to measure the trends, relationships, and see if any other significant results were obtained. The first analysis would involve ANOVA calculations for pre-COVID and during COVID. The next calculation will be if there are any significant correlations between some of the variables to answer the research questions and identify any best practices. Descriptive Statistics were calculated to compare the means and understand the sample participants characteristics such as gender and age. The qualitative data from the open-ended questions was content analyzed to see what keywords or phrases the participants use when the answers are provided as it pertains to the questions. There was a

spot if people would be willing to do a follow-up interview for further exploration, they can leave their contact information. An analysis was completed of the individual's experience with working remotely before COVID-19 and during COVID-19, along with what tools were helpful while not being able to interact with others on a regular basis.

For the sample, there was a request posted on two social media platforms: LinkedIn and Facebook asking for volunteers to complete the survey. The researcher had 14 people who expressed interest in participating and 10 people completed the survey. For the descriptive statistics there was 9 females who participated and 1 male. The age range of participants in the sample is between 30-59 years old. 10% of participants were laid off or furloughed during the pandemic and 10% of the participants retired during the pandemic. 50% of participants could work remotely prior to the pandemic and during the pandemic 90% of participants could work remotely. The main research question was to understand if there was a difference in job satisfaction and productivity for those who work remotely versus those who work onsite. In this sample 30% of participants were involved in education which is typically performed onsite, so the data did not provide any significant results.

For **Research Question 1** based on self-reported measures of productivity there was not a significant difference between those who work onsite or remotely, and we would fail to reject the null hypothesis. There is a moderate negative correlation  $-.671$  and the mean is  $3.33$  for how people self-report on the measure of productivity whether they are working onsite or offsite.

**Research Question 2** involved measuring job satisfaction for onsite/offsite and there was not a significant difference between groups. H2 was not confirmed.

**Research Question 3** there was not a significant difference in the sample group for job satisfaction based on where people live. H4 was not confirmed due to the survey design not including the appropriate response rate for identifying travel and will be addressed in the next revision of the survey.

**Research Question 4** with H5 involved gender differences and we would fail to reject the null hypothesis due to no significant results being found between genders. There was only 1 male who participated so this was not an accurate representation of the population who works remotely. H6 was not confirmed as the age range of people who

participated in study is 30-59 and not a large enough sample size to draw conclusions about the population. H7 was not confirmed, since only 1 participant in the sample was Male the data is skewed towards female preferences.

The qualitative research had several common themes: have a dedicated work space for focus, set working hours and do not work past them to avoid burn out, and communicate with the employer for ergonomic needs.

### **Conclusion**

Using the findings of this study, researchers will be able to build on the issues that have arisen with regards to working remotely during the pandemic pertaining to productivity and job satisfaction. There were insights on best practices, suggestions on how to improve the work remote experience and communicate with the employer.

With this new knowledge practitioners can help design work remote situations to set their employees up for success that contribute to job satisfaction and productivity. When it comes to the statistical conclusions there were some issues with the small sample size the data did not represent the population due to the gender issues that were previously identified in the analysis of findings area. For future research I would recommend excluding people who work in the education industry as that is typically an onsite job and this group of people wants to return to the workforce to interact with their students face to face. I would recommend for future research to include a validated tool that can assess people's productivity not just go off of self-reported measures based on the survey questions.

The current study, as designed, will probably not provide information to help solve the problem. The survey tool has some questions that need clarifications based on answers not being fully encompassing of participants situations to understand their unique needs as it pertains to completing their job so these will be revised if this tool is to be re-used for future studies. Overall, the study is on the right track and given a larger sample size with some of the recommendations for gender balance of participants and removing educational personnel the research will be stronger for those who are working remote during the pandemic.

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