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Carlee Thesier
Indiana State University

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Remote Work: Job Satisfaction and Healthy Work Boundaries

Carlee Thesier

Indiana State University

GH 401-100

Dr. Gregory Bierly

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Abstract

This paper addresses mass remote work as a growing organizational structure. COVID-19 initiated the movement for organizations to have employees work from home, and as workplaces are beginning to reopen, remote work is continuing to grow. The remote work presents many challenges that organizations were not prepared to address when initially moving online. While these challenges are being addressed and evaluated, organizations are not standardized in the structure of remote work and are continuing to perfect the method. This paper analyzes how mental health, job satisfaction, and long-term effects of continued mass remote work. The process of mass remote work is still being developed. There are still many areas that need to be improved to maximize the efficiency of this organizational structure. Mental health is directly linked to job satisfaction and productivity. Remote work limits communication and creates a barrier for workplace relationships, increasing social isolation and stress.

Key Words: Mental health, boundaries, job satisfaction, communication

Remote Work: Job Satisfaction and Healthy Work Boundaries

Introduction

Background

Remote work has been increasingly common since COVID-19. The global pandemic shut down businesses and prevented employees from entering the organization's designated workspace. Prior to the pandemic there were very few instances of telework. Since then, working remotely has continued to grow and has become more common as an organizational structure. Both employees and businesses had to adjust to operating outside of the office. Working from home has provided many advantages for employees and organizations. However, it remains a substantial adjustment, especially at speed required due to the global pandemic.

Working remotely has many advantages, such as more flexibility, comfort, saved expenses, building upkeep and commutes, and access to top global talent. However, switching organizations to exclusive telework was not an easy task, and many companies today are still working on how to perfect this method. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most the average worker had minimal remote working experience, if they had any experience at all (Gashi et al., 2022). The organizations that had to adapt to remote work also did not have the structure or expertise to support complete work across the organization. The quick adjustment had and has continued to have a learning curve, but most organizations have found many benefits in remaining remote, even after it is safe to be in the office. Remote and hybrid (a mixture of remote and in-office) work are becoming the new normal post-pandemic.

It is essential to study remote work and its effects on organizations and employees because remote work trends are still rising. The pandemic provided organizations with a unique opportunity to reevaluate their structure. When organizations were forced to become entirely

remote for the health and safety of all employees, leaders had to determine what was essential to the organization and build up from that point (Gashi et al., 2022). Roles in the organization were eliminated or adapted to the complete virtual workplace. Human interaction, a staple for many job duties, was suddenly taken away, and the organizations and people used to this interaction had to adjust.

The pandemic was a very stressful global phenomenon that had harsh effects, both physically and psychologically. People struggled on multiple fronts, and their adjustments were made out of necessity. While the decision to go remote stemmed from need, it remains while the immediate threat is diminishing. Organizations' decisions to stay remote continue redefining the meaning of work (Donati et al., 2021). Just because remote work has advantages, there are certain behaviors that employees must have and continue to improve. The positives of remote work do not negate organizations' struggles before the pandemic. Many struggles that organizations were facing before the pandemic are back into focus as the pandemic begins to fade away from view. The only difference now is that organizations have completely restructured what the organization looks like and how it functions on every level.

After the initial learning curve, an organization should ideally function as a secure and prosperous unit. However, there are still challenges presented by working remotely that have not had time to fully develop. For example, there are barriers in place that hinder communication within the organization which becomes more prominent when employees are located across the globe (Gashi et al., 2022). The new normal is still being studied and evaluated. Organizations must continually evaluate if remote work is a long-term solution for themselves and their employees.

The Unknown

The long-term effects of remote work on the organization and its employees are unknown. Mass remote work is still new, and there have been advancements and adjustments, but the standardization of what remote work is as a phenomenon is still being developed (Johns et al., 2021). There are ways that organizations can implement remote work that promote strong work ethics among employees. However, because remote work is being used across industries, there is no standardized way to conduct remote work that perfectly meets the needs of all working from the comforts of their home.

COVID-19 has many ways to negatively impact a person, including their job and perspective job duties and satisfaction. While this was not at the forefront of concern, it still impacted organizations full of employees across the globe. Having to stay quarantined within a household while still performing job duties and functioning at the pre-pandemic level created a lot of additional stress on top of what was happening worldwide. Remote work during mass quarantine period and remote work after the world reopened created different work-life imbalances. These imbalances may be different but are still very impactful on the overall success of working remotely. While many factors impact remote work's success, work styles and preferences are very individualistic that it is unknown how to create standards for the most effective remote work that can be monitored and enforced.

Balancing home and work became a different struggle when remote work was introduced. While people were at home and around their families, their presence did not resolve the struggle for balance. Instead, the battle looked different. When people were forced to work remotely because of the pandemic, they were not going anywhere, which made home life look different. Now, that is not the case. People are leaving the house and enrolled in activities and vacations that take them away from the house while still working from home. It is unknown how

much impact working remotely has on employees' overall mental health and job satisfaction over a long period on such a large scale.

Thesis

Although remote work has been successful, the long-term effects on the organization and its employee's success and satisfaction are still unknown; thus, this researcher proposes an in-depth analysis of what remote work is and how to properly balance this work and home life to be an asset to the employee and organization.

How has the rise of remote work impacted organizations financially? As mentioned above, organizations are cutting costs by having employees not come into offices. However, other financial costs account for the economic impact of a new organizational structure. Organizations can now hire globally, allowing them to reach new and better talent than before. Instead of hiring who is geographically available, employers can hire the best of the best (Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual, 2021). However, this global access is multidirectional. People looking in the job market for new positions can be more selective in where they apply.

What are these additional skills are needed for successful remote work, and how do these skills impact the job market? The remote work dynamic is affecting the job market and the financial priorities within organizations. Because remote work has influenced the job market, this researcher wants to look at how much job trends are changing. As the world recovers from COVID-19, the demand for different jobs is changing, and remote work will have a role in what work looks like from this point forward. Various skills are needed for remote work in addition to the skills already required for different positions, which already have to be highly developed in competition from top talent. Across industries, different skill sets are needed, but what skill sets are most common to increase the effectiveness of working remotely? What does developing

these skills look like, and how can employers and organizations ensure that their employees utilize these skills to be the most efficient they can be? Becoming remote affects the skills of employees as well as their satisfaction. Forcing employees to become remote during the height of the pandemic will have a different influence on job satisfaction than those employees who are now choosing to stay home to work after the offices are beginning to open back up.

Having a healthy work-life balance is crucial, but what does effective work-life balance look like, and how does mental health impact the success of remote workers?

Finally, this researcher wants to look at how employees should effectively separate themselves mentally and physically from work after hours. Working from home can create many distractions from both home and work. Without the job site barrier, employees will have to set and enforce boundaries for their stress levels and mental health (Niebuhr et al., 2021).

Introduction Summary

Remote work in recent years has become more prevalent amongst organizations. While there are many advantages to moving organizations to online remote work, there are also challenges and adjustments to be made to make remote work the most efficient that it can be. Due to the pandemic, people were switching to remote employment in never seen before numbers, and careers thought to only work in person found a way to adapt and become remote (Gallacher & Hossain, 2020). The rise in remote work came with challenges that organizations did not have time to deal with properly and prepare effectively. As time progresses, organizations are becoming better suited for remote work. However, there is still a lot to be studied about the long-term effects of this movement on organizational structure. By checking the impact of remote work on the job market, the financial stability of organizations, the skills and demands of employees, and their work-life balance and job satisfaction, remote work can

become more stable than ever. Long-term effects have not been studied, and remote work is still prevalent as a choice instead of a necessity. It is essential to learn all of these aspects to ensure the long-term effectiveness of this job structure.

Literature Review

Healthy Work-Life Boundaries

Healthy work-life balances are necessary for any employee, and finding this balance is no easy task. Whether in the office, working from home, part-time, or full-time, employees will experience needs from home and work that often contradict one another. Time is valuable for all aspects of life, and employees must decide where to spend their time and how to dedicate enough resources to satisfy all their needs efficiently. Working remotely has unique and specific challenges to finding a work-life balance that works for themselves, their employers, and their families. Remote work has made it increasingly harder for employees to set and maintain boundaries between work and home duties (Felstead & Heneseke, 2017). Because these are now occurring within the same space, it is harder to separate these areas of life physically and mentally. Employees can be bothered at work by household chores that need to be done or the families in the next room. Furthermore, while at home, employees may have trouble not thinking about the report that needs to be done in the next room. Work and home life previously had a strong barrier of location that helped employees with this work-life balance, but with remote work, that barrier no longer exists.

Boundaries and Boundary Management

Unlike in the office, at home, employees' partners and children can be at home doing their own work and school activities. The home environment exposes remote workers a to more distractions that pull them away from work duties and functions. These distractions cause

employees have more family-work conflict and imbalances. These imbalances negatively affect job productivity, employee engagement, and employee stress levels (Şentürk et al., 2021).

Employees who work remotely can report more psychological and physical symptoms over employees who remain in the office. (Niebuhr et al., 2022).

However taxing working remotely can be on an individual, certain practices can improve work productivity and focus. A most common and successful way to set and maintain healthy work boundaries is to have a dedicated office (Allen et al., 2021). Employees with a designated area in their home for work have improved the boundaries they set mentally. A positive full-time remote work experience can be related back to the quality of the at-home workspace that employees are able to create for themselves (Galenti et al., 2021). When there is a separate space specifically for work purposes and work-related items, a physical barrier is in place that helps reinforce the mental barrier. This barrier of a dedicated workspace mirrors the rhythm of working at a different location outside the home (Allen et al., 2021).

Productivity and Work Quality

A common challenge for first-time remote workers is having trouble focusing on work duties. Trouble focusing can reduce work productivity and make personal relationships more challenging (Şentürk et al., 2021). A crucial foundation must be built through empowering leadership to achieve a positive, healthy organizational culture for remote work to be successful. Having the exact expectations for remote and in-person employees is unrealistic. (Lange & Kayser, 2022). Employees can experience increased stress due to remote work demands, and managers and supervisors must be skilled in detecting this stress and be able to support employees' needs. When working remotely, employees do not have the identical provided workspace that they would experience in the workplace. Some employees can struggle

establishing a ideal work set-up at home and need different types of help from their employers to ensure the success and productivity of remote work.

When an organization gives their employees the option to work remotely, organizations can create a trustworthy organizational culture. Employees can better approach work and family conflicts at their own pace (Lange & Kayser, 2022). While supervisors cannot look over the shoulders of remote employees to ensure productivity and quality of work, remote workers have to adapt to their surroundings and have self-efficacy to ensure that their job tasks and functions are being met to the organization's standards.

Self- Efficacy

There has been extensive research done on the significance of self-efficacy and stress in traditional work environments, but remote work does not have the same research history. Self-efficacy is essential in balancing stress levels related to work-life balance. One way to maximize the benefits of remote work is to decrease stress and to promote self-efficacy throughout the organization. Unlike the office environment, employers cannot create an atmosphere that increases performance and employee support. At home office spaces are not regulated and often have distractions, isolation, and limited technology. (Lange & Kayser, 2022). Employers have to try different techniques to engage employees and help them from a remote location. When working from home, a lot of work-related support is decreased. Now many factors for organizational setting are outside of the employers' control because they cannot control how to set up and maintain an efficient remote workspace.

Self-efficacy and autonomy are becoming increasingly important in the work setting and these traits are even more important when working remotely (Lang & Kayser 2022). Although remote workers are not provided with the most efficient workspace while at home, they can work

with employers to create a workspace that promotes employee health and productivity.

Autonomy can be both an employee's resource and a work structure that can promote self-efficacy. Remote employees have to manage their workload, while working alone. Remote work allows employees to experience work and family, which can prevent mental overloads and some stress. However, remote work is not easy and without faults. Working remotely can lead to higher stress levels for specific groups (Lange & Kayser, 2022).

Remote Work's Effect on Mental Health

With the massive movement of remote work that stemmed from COVID-19, Mental health awareness is becoming increasingly standardized. There have been many movements to normalize struggling with mental health. Amanda North (2018) addresses that increasing remote work has shown trends in improving mental health disorders and isolation-related substance abuse. Social isolation decreases work satisfaction and can affect the perceived job satisfaction (Şentürk et al., 2021). While many people may in first-world countries have access to smartphones, computers, reliable internet connections, and other technology. A lot of clients that need and use mental health services can reside in low-income areas with limited technology that is needed for virtual mental health services (Bornheimer et al., 2022). If employees are going to be working remotely, there needs to access to mental health care to help deal with the stress and isolation that accompany the perks of working from home.

Stress

Remote work has been praised for allowing a better work-life balance. As an organizational structure, remote work allows employees to have more autonomy and control on where their work occurs, which can shape how employees combine other areas in their life, such as family and personal time. The more independence a teleworker has, the lower the stress

(Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021). Remote work can improve work-life balance. However, with remote work, there are blurred lines that separate work and personal life. These blurred lines create challenges concerning work-life balance. Family responsibilities and roles can shift when someone in the household is working remotely. A person that works remotely is at home all day but is still not available to tend to household responsibilities as can be expected. During the height of the pandemic, one of the outcomes of quarantine were the changes of family duties when everyone was home. Now that the world is opening back up, those responsibilities are being adjusted again to fit the long-term remote work or returning to the office (Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021).

Communication and Isolation (Relationships)

Workplace isolation is another consequence of remote work. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed people to social isolation that resulted in higher levels of loneliness. The social isolation and increased loneliness can correlate with lower work satisfaction and performance with higher levels of stress (Şentürk et al., 2021). Work relationships are essential to employees' work and well-being. Positive work relationships experiences increase an employee's well-being and can increase emotional coping and organizational commitment. Employees with these strong peer relationships at work are more likely to stay at an organization and can decrease organizational turnover (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Remote work can lead to employee isolation by limiting social interactions between coworkers. When working from home there are more barriers for forming work relationships which can lead to feelings of isolation and decreased employee satisfaction (Jämsen et al., 2022).

Building new relationships may be more challenging in remote work. Relationships that with colleagues that were established before the pandemic are harder to maintain once

employees do not come in contact with them at the office anymore. Colleagues have reduced opportunities to ask about coworkers' well-being and to build relationships at work (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021). Relationships are created and maintained through communication, and work relationships are no exception (Jämsen et al., 2022). Interpersonal relationships and trust directly influence employee satisfaction. It is important for organizations to focus on providing a space to promote employee interaction in addition to performance (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021).

Gender Roles and Gaps

The effectiveness of remote work arrangements can heavily depend a lot on if there are dependent children in the household. For parents, remote work during the lockdown could have increased conflicts between home and work needs which would result in a more negative experience (Arntz et al., 2020). However, as childcare facilities and school open again, parents can begin to fully benefit from a remote work. Nevertheless, for some households, the lockdown may strengthen or revive traditional gender roles, which can negatively affect a women's future career prospects (Arntz et al., 2020).

Women can experience more frequent distractions from external factors. Children are more present in the working area of mothers at work, causing more work interruptions (Şentürk et al., 2021). These distractions can negatively affect mental health and overall job satisfaction. Women working remotely were more likely to report mental health issues such as, feeling depressed, anxious, and stressed. Şentürk (2021) determined that the time women spent on household chores and workload increased more than men. Work-life boundaries can be more blurred as women working from home respond to family demands (Bonacini et al., 2021). If

organizational are not intentional in their actions to promote and maintain gender equality within their organization, can induce gender inequality in many dimensions (Şentürk et al., 2021)

Remote Work's Impact

Job Satisfaction

An employees' job satisfaction is closely associated with their mental health. Job satisfaction can be defined as “the degree of employees' fulfillment with their work and is the positive emotional state resulting from the professional experience,” (Niebuhr et al., 2022, p.4). Working remotely for a short period of time can increase job satisfaction by enhancing organizational commitment, relationship quality, and decreasing work-time conflict (Galenti et al., 2021). An employee's positive work environment is positively related to job satisfaction, but distractions can lead to decreased job satisfaction. However, when remote work is examined under the impact of remaining remote long term, job satisfaction has decreased alongside the decrease relationship quality with colleagues due to social interactions significantly influencing job satisfaction (Niebuhr et al., 2022).

At the height of COVID-19, social isolation significantly lowered job satisfaction (Niebuhr et al., 2022). Organizations had to restructure their communication styles and go completely digital. While this was an adjustment, the smaller population that worked remotely before the pandemic were more socially isolated than when mass populations were going online. Remote workers before the pandemic experienced higher levels of social isolation. Remote work occurred, but was not the norm, and the awareness of the psychological toll of remote work was not evaluated at the scale that it is today.

Managerial Styles

As mentioned above, employees must become more autonomous to be successful working from home. This is due to the fact that upper management roles look different when

employees are not in the office. Managers are greeted with new responsibilities and challenges alongside the mass movement to remote work structure. Managers must now find a way to connect with their subordinates and ensure their success without seeing them in person. When an employee is in their own home, it is harder to monitor their progress and work quality before the finished product (Ferreira et al., 2021). Managers also have the challenge to identify what learning style an employee is, and how to appropriately define and oversee capabilities and performance.

Remote work is only made possible because of advanced technology. People are able to use the internet to connect with people across the globe to complete their job duties. However, working over the internet comes with its own risks for the organization. Managers must reiterate the importance and severity of internal projects and take extra precautions when dealing with sensitive material (Ferreira et al., 2021).. Managers can no longer be as hands on with their employees and have to develop a sense of loyalty and trust within the team and the organization. Without meeting in person, communication barriers make it difficult to develop these team skills as quickly and deeply as when all employees were in the same location (Ferreira et al., 2021).

Remote Work's Structural Influence

COVID-19 affected many different aspects of life, including economic stability and the job market. When people were forced to isolate, many economies were suddenly faced with a supply and demand problem. Many items that were being used every day were no longer needed, while other items rose to high demand, which companies could not meet. Nothing was being produced but the necessities, while people were completely living their lives at home, craving entertainment (Pokojiski et al., 2022). Companies save a lot of money by having employees remain online once the organization begins to understand how to facilitate remote work

effectively for their organization. Once organizations paid the initial costs of the newest technology to maintain regular business functions, employers were immediately making a profit from reduced on-site costs (Pokojiski et al., 2022). Utilities at work locations were much lower since no body was in office, but employees were still meeting criteria for the organizations. Companies were able to reevaluate what costs could be completely eliminated by switching to remote work (Aslan et al., 2022). The benefits were not only for the employers. Employees were also experiencing less costs by remaining at home. Time and money were saved by not having to commute to work, and small extra costs like new work clothes and buying lunch at work, were no longer costs.

Conclusion

Remote work is continuing to provide an alternative organizational structure across the globe. While there are many advantages and disadvantages, there is still much to be perfected in the process of working remotely. As employers and employees learn to adapt to this new and progressing work structure, there will be many changes in the future that will affect the overall efficiency of having employees out of office and in their homes.

Mental health is affected by working remotely. Communication is a major factor in an employee's overall work experience. Having coworkers in the office increases job satisfaction because of the overall positive social interaction and its effect on the organizational culture. Even small in-person conversations are impactful. Communication solely online tends to eliminate small-talk and personal sharing within the workplace. While this more concise language is efficient for the organization, socially employees are becoming stunted. While making connections with coworkers online does occur, not seeing them regularly, can negatively impact how an employee feels about their role within the organization.

Employees must have and maintain healthy boundaries to ensure that they are performing to the standards of themselves and their employers. Having a separate workspace specifically for work is a healthy way to maintain a focused mindset when employees are on the job. Employees must have self-efficacy and autonomy to work successfully while remote. By having these qualities, their productivity and quality of work will not suffer.

While there are problems and challenges arising with mass remote work, organizations are still in the process of perfecting this structure. Gender roles and managerial styles will have to continually be evaluated and addressed at the organizational level to ensure that they are upholding their values as an organization. Remote work made organizations reevaluate their structure as well as relearn how to perform at their bare necessities. As the world continues to open up after the height COVID-19, organizations will have to take what they learned from these last couple of years and apply them to their old and changing structures.

Issues Encountered

The main issue encountered throughout this paper is the lack of resources that addressed these topics separated from the pandemic. This topic is very relevant to the world today, but there has not been enough time to adequately research and measure the long-term effects of mass remote work. The mental health of employees working remotely is no longer solely dependent on the pandemic. As life begins to return to normal, remote employees are not in the same position that they originally were in, and their mental health is not the same. More resources that directly discuss post-pandemic mass remote work need to be made available to further research this topic.

Future Research

Mass remote work is still a new phenomenon with many areas for future study. One area of future study includes if mental health and remote work will have a more positive correlation

with more time and further distance from the pandemic. This mass movement having begun with a heavy necessity, the mental health of employees was already being tested without remote work in addition. However, as remote work continues and the pandemic begins to slow, the correlation between mental health and remote work should continue to be studied. Another area that required future research is how long-term remote work effects gender roles. Being at home with family can reinforce old gender norms, and it should continue to be studied how organizations can and will address this. Finally, another area for future research is the longevity of remote work and its effects on job trends. As more time passes, this area should be continued to be addressed.

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