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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INFLUENCE OF WORK FROM HOME ON QUALITY OF WORK LIFE OF EMPLOYEES WORKING IN BPO INDUSTRY, PUNE

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Abstract

Globally, the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector have grown rapidly over the last two decades, driven by the transfer of processes from companies in developed countries to ones in emerging economies. Work from home (WFH) has been 'fruitful' during Covid-19 lockdown as per Government's mandate. As a result, about 90% of employees worked from home with 65% of them from homes in metros and rest 35% from homes in small towns. The main purpose was to study the benefit of work from home help employees enjoy better quality of work life (QWL) and the influence that productivity and promotions have on employee's quality of work life working under work from home model through randomly assigning some employees of BPO companies in Pune. From the study it reported that employees working from home experienced of having a high positive attitude, less stress at work and improved wellbeing were the results of good quality of work life. They were more likely to be happy with work and were also less likely to quit their job than those in the comparison group, but were less likely to be promoted than similar-performing peers working in the office. Further it also suggested that organisations can conduct virtual employee training with best quality of work life initiatives in place will be an added advantage to both employees and employers receiving the full merits of improved workplace productivity and flexibility, strengthen team bonds, increase opportunities for upward mobility and retain employees than those who went into the office on a regular basis.

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Introduction:-

Today, BPO is a multi-billion-dollar industry creating employment for millions of people in developing countries. The global outbreak of the COVID-19 virus had a major impact on international trade, travel, hospitality and communication. Like many other sectors, one industry that was affected much more than others is the business process outsourcing (BPO) sector. Countries like India and the Philippines which have been the giants and major hubs for the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector, were hard hit with the unfolding COVID-19 crisis. When the crisis hit, Clients disallowed transfer to work-from-home model as they had to make decisions on highly important and sensitive areas such as data security, data privacy as well as service obligations. Employees in the BPO sector were also unable to commute to work due to the lockdowns. Comparatively, the BPO sector in India has been in demand from western countries due to the high Quality of Services, Highly Skilled Manpower and

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excellence in business process. Besides, a multilingual talent pool for communicating with clients in a similar time zone/ different time zone (mainly US, UK, Australia, Germany, etc.), good quality of internet available across the country, as well as recent investments in the BPO sector have provided an opportunity to transform the BPO sector by adopting and strengthening new models, such as work-from-home arrangements.

'Work from home' is the new operating model and represents the future of work. Everyone is adjusting to this new style of working and learning to create a smooth quality of work life. Everyone in the position of management understands the relevance of this '**new normal**' and is initiating to create all sorts of better ways to enhance employee productivity in work from home policy.

Every challenge has an inherent opportunity in it. The only questions we need to ask is are we ready to grab this opportunity with both hands. The BPO organizations took steps to ensure a 24/7 seamless service delivery to the clients. It was a logistical nightmare to install corporate desktop computers at the home of the staff spread across the city. With a pre-planned boardroom strategy and a prompt IT workforce, BPO companies eventually managed to organize work-from-home solutions and other business continuity plans for their employees. During the transition, BPO companies were able to maintain zero disruption to their client's processes. The clients have whole heartedly appreciated the efforts of BPO companies to support their business continuity needs.

It is happy to know that some BPOs are keen on implementing the work from home scheme which it is a win-win situation for employers & employees given the benefits it can offer, both tangible and intangible. For example, work from home benefits employers by reducing operating expenses in the form of office leases and utility costs saving on staff transportation, air-conditioning, cafeteria, furnishings etc. Delay, absences, and low productivity can also be restricted, as external factors such as extreme weather, daily commutes, etc., are avoided. Further, the safety of employees on the graveyard shift is safeguarded, as they no longer have to travel during the wee hours of the day thereby improving the employees 'quality of work life' (QWL) and satisfying both the organizational objectives and employee needs.

WFH promotes and facilitates QWL. The most important benefit offered from WFH to employers is communication is far easier with video chats, conference calls, VPN networks, and wireless Internet, so employees constantly stay connected as though they were sitting in office, rather than at home. In fact, opening the talent pool seems to be one of the biggest employer benefits when it comes to a work from home policy. Employers are no longer limited to hiring local talent, which means they have a far greater chance of finding people with the exact skills, experience, and personality to fit best within their organization and also been easy to work with clients from around the globe because they have a team member in a time zone convenient for communicating with most clients.

Working from home alleviates better quality of work life for employees through technology a greatest source. They get to customize their surroundings to suit their personal needs, get comfortable with their preferred outfits and tech setup, and take care of physical and emotional needs as they come up. Work from home enables employees more agility and flexibility in working arrangements. Flexibility of home working helps them meet childcare needs, reduce their commute and enable them to fit their work around their personal life. Being allowed to work from home, employee also feels increased levels of trust from their employer, which can contribute greatly to employee loyalty. Moreover, employees who can't afford to be distracted a number of times a day, having a controlled environment can be key to their productivity. Working from home allows employees to minimize distractions and increase the time they spend focused on work than their office counterparts. It stands to reason that, in the end, organisations yield QWL benefit from this work from home employees by getting work completed faster with fewer mistakes, less breaks and used less sick time than their in-office counterparts.

Objective of the Study:-

1. To study the benefits of work from home help employees enjoy a better quality of work life.
2. To determine the influence of productivity and promotion on employee's quality of work life working from home.
3. To suggest quality of work life initiatives organisations can adopt to keep employees engaged and motivated working from home.

Literature Review:-

QWL is a multi-dimensional term which gives a better quality to the workplace of any organization (Levine, 1983; Carayon, 1997; Prujit, 2002, Bhola 2006). In the literature, a qualitative approach can be found in all models that include QWL, while the productivity and efficiency of an organization can be measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. A level of QWL within an organization depends on the work environment, on the methodology of work, flexible working hours, work from home, telecommunicating, remote working etc. contributes toward greater job satisfaction, adaptability and overall effectiveness of an organization.

As to the efficiency and productivity, they are related to the inputs and outputs of an organization. Therefore, organizations are required to adopt quality of work life initiatives to improve the employees' 'quality of work life' (QWL) to satisfy both the organizational objectives and employee needs. Wienclaw (2019:2) lists the benefits of flexible scheduling option employees enjoy such as being free to sleep in and work late, starting and ending early, working forty hours in four days instead of five or six days a week, scheduling personal appointments (e.g. physician, dentist, hairdresser) during office work-hours and completing the work later in the evening without using vacation days. Furthermore, working from home makes it possible for people living in isolated areas to be employed (Lupu 2017:695), it reduces the chances of getting sick, fatigue and work-related stress (Lupu 2017:695). Swink (2008:862) expressed that employees working from home may enjoy reduced expenses for work attire, less stress, and reduced transportation expenses.

Working from home also provides significant benefits to society, including reduced air pollution, traffic congestion, and energy consumption. Taxpayer benefits include reduced costs of road maintenance and repair and a smaller demand for public transportation. (Grant et al. 2019; Purwanto et al. 2020), emphasis that WFH also impacts the flexibility and work engagement as it allows employees to enjoy more flexible time to complete their work and does not require them to follow office hours. (Birkinshaw J, Cohen J, Stach P 2020), expressed their views that work from home helps people view their work as more worthwhile and spent 12% less time drawn into large meetings and 9% more time interacting with customers and external partners. They took responsibility for own schedules and did 50% more activities through personal choice.

Researchers found that Over 80% employees felt more mentally relaxed working from home (Sun life 2020). Likewise, Grant et al. (2013) stated that e-working would improve QWL, and e-employees found it possible to combine work-life and non-work life. E-employees found that their productivity was improved by e-working (Grant et al. 2019). (Arntz, Sarra, and Berlingieri 2019) indicate that among parents, WFH decreases the gender gap in working hours and monthly earnings, as contractual hours increase more among mothers. Working from home (WFH) has both benefits and challenges for the employees when it is compared to the office working. While some of the researchers, such as Shafizadeh et al. (2000) claim that working from home increases the productivity of the employees, other researchers, such as (Purwanto et al. 2020), claim the opposite that WFH can lose employees' work motivation because they have to bear the cost related to WFH.

Wilson, J. (2021) reveal that organisation must continue to establish such determination by investing in innovative technology, establishing clear working hours, and implementing hybrid work from home options in order to ease the potential disadvantages of working from home. (Eddleston, K. A., & Mulki, J. (2017), shows that working solely from home encourages remote employees to overwork and to allow their work to infringe on their family role. (Lina Vyas and Nantapong Butakhieo 2021), offers unique insight into how well working from home works, and may play a vital role in future policies that reshape the current structure of working hours, possibly allowing for more flexibility.

Research Methodology:-

The researcher designed a randomized evaluation of 56 employees working in BPO companies namely Convergys, Capita India, XanaduTec and Altius Customer Services to examine the influence of productivity and promotions on employee's quality of work life working from home. From a group of 86 employees, 74 volunteered to participate, of which 56 qualified by virtue of having worked at the organisation for 6 months, having broadband internet connection, and having their own workspace in their homes. From this group, employees with even number birthdays (day of birth ending in 0, 2, 4, 6 etc.) were randomly selected to work from home and those employees with odd number birthdays were required to continue work from office which served as the comparison group.

Employees selected to participate in the survey, who worked from home were supervised by their team leader, who also works from home and office, and they maintain flexible hours of work, same pay levels, type of work, and computer and communication equipment.

Data Analysis:

Data was analysed namely on the demographic profile of employees working in BPO industry in Pune, the benefits of work from home help employees enjoy a better quality of work life and the influence of productivity and promotion on employee's quality of work life working from home represented in the table a, b and c.

Attributes	Nos. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	41	73
Female	15	27
Total	56	100
Single	22	39
Married	34	61
Total	56	100

From the above table it can be seen 73% of employees working in BPO industry are male and majority of them are married.

Table (b):-Benefits of work from home help employees enjoy a better quality of work life

Attributes	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Flexible Scheduling option	73%	13%	7%	4%	4%	100
	41	7	4	2	2	56
saves time to commute to work	80%	9%	5%	4%	2%	100
	45	5	3	2	1	56
Parental/Elder Care	86%	5%	4%	4%	2%	100
	48	3	2	2	1	56
Leisure time with family	71%	14%	5%	5%	4%	100
	40	8	3	3	2	56

The above table represents that work from home helps employees enjoy a better quality of work life and it helps organisations become more resilient because the fully distributed nature of work from home is inherently less risky and better suited for business continuity and agility. 73% of employees prefer work from home rather than working at an office because flexible scheduling options. Flexible scheduling enables employees to have a certain autonomy in planning their daily lives, including both employee and family activities according to their needs, such as taking child to a doctor or looking after the kid when other partner is in office. Employees are also able to modify their working schedule daily or even hourly. 80% of employees whole heartedly agreed that another benefit of working from home is saving time in commuting to the office, avoiding rush-hour traffic that eliminates the stress of driving in rush hour traffic and have more free-time to spend with family. Work from home has benefits particularly for new mothers or the physically handicapped who find travel troublesome or are unable to leave the home but need or want to stay in the workforce. 85% employees agreed with the option of providing care to sick children or elders while working from home is another benefit.

Attributes	Answer Choice	Nos. of Respondents	Percentage
Rating score	A grade (Target achieved above 85%)	39	70
	B grade (Target achieved from 75%-84%)	9	16
	C grade (Target achieved from 65%-74%)	5	9
	D grade (Target achieved below 64%)	3	5
	Total	56	100

Greater Autonomy	Strongly Agree	41	73
	Agree	10	18
	Neutral	2	4
	Disagree	2	4
	Strongly Disagree	1	2
	Total	56	100
Errors at work	Many	4	7
	Few	52	93
	Total	56	100
Extra work hours	Yes	51	91
	No	5	9
	Total	56	100
Sick days	Many	4	7
	Few	52	93
	Total	56	100
Accountability at work	Take responsibility for the completion and success of tasks that is involved at work	15	27
	Voluntarily extend support to team members to ensure efficiency of work	10	18
	Achieve targets on time without compromising on quality or efficiency	20	36
	Resolve conflicts directly with the concerned person rather than complaining or grieving over it	11	20
	Total	56	100
Promotion opportunity	Yes	3	5
	No	53	95
	Total	56	100

The above table highlights that employees working from home performed notably better than those who work in a typical office environment on the basis of rating they received every month. Employees achieving targets above 85% were rated in A grade, target achieved from 75% to 84% were rated in B grade, target achieved from 65% to 74% were rated in C grade and target achieved below 65% were rated in D grade and not eligible for any incentive. Majority of the employees have received their rating in A & B grade and there were very few employees who received the rating in D grade due to the technical problems.

73% of employees enjoy greater autonomy at work to be self-starters, giving stewardship over their work and their environment, and provided support when needed. Faced fewer interruptions and was able to focus on the work, but were less likely to be promoted than similar-performing peers working in the office. Employees working from home made fewer errors relative to comparison employees. They attributed this difference to have more comfortable work environment at home. They also worked 9.4 per cent more minutes per day than the comparing group because they did not have to commute to office, took short break time and less sick days. There is another interesting fact that majority of the employees took responsibility for the completion and success of tasks involved at work on time without compromising on quality or efficiency and also voluntarily extends support to team members to ensure efficiency of work. This reveals employees accountability and output have in fact grown better given an impression about productivity has not gone down, as was feared by many managers and department while working from home. However, work from home had a negative impact on promotion opportunities. Conditional on performance, employees working from office were more likely to be promoted than comparing employees working from home. This was mainly due to next training level opportunities and more face-to-face contact with team leaders.

Suggestions of quality of work life initiatives organisations can adopt to keep employees engaged and motivated when working from home

As work continues to transition to work from home, keeping things interesting and engaging is even more important for organisations. It goes with saying that 'professional training and development matter to employees'. In fact, majority of employees consider job training access to be a primary motivator when determining whether or not

they'll retain with an organisation. Quality of work life initiatives when thought out carefully and executed properly through virtual employee trainings can be an incredibly effective way to keep employees skills sharp while fitting into their workflows seamlessly. It offer easier access to everyone, more flexibility and convenience when it comes to scheduling, a more consistent experience, and an overall more adaptable process no matter where employees are joining from. The following suggestions can help organisations launch virtual employee training initiatives which deliver results to keep employees engaged and motivated when working from home.

Make Training an Integral Part of Organisation Culture

To stay competitive, organisations should cultivate an in house culture of learning to motivate employees to proactively improve their skills and become experts in their roles by:

1. Providing remote employees with the time and resources to pursue training opportunities.
2. Encouraging employees to share their expertise across teams and departments.

Host Post Debriefing a Training

Following a training session for remote employees, leaders should host a debrief to review and simplify training highlights, answer questions, outline directives going forward, and establish opportunities for follow-up and continued learning. Solidifying the important takeaways will facilitate opportunities for reflection, confirm employees and managers are united in their objectives, determine how teams will apply training knowledge, and create benchmarks to measure performance.

Track Training Productivity and Progress

Organisations and training leaders need to stay organized while planning, executing and reviewing training sessions. Tracking employee training not only helps organization, but also is essential for ensuring actual program implementation and understanding how to fill knowledge gaps.

Ask Training Feedback from Employees

Asking employees for feedback on training initiatives will yield benefits beyond the conclusion of training. In fact, 60% of employees who have been asked for feedback are engaged at work, compared with 40% employee engagement in workplaces with no feedback avenues.

Evaluate and Evolve Training Methods

Although remaining innovative while also delivering training programs on a consistent basis can be challenging for organisations and managers, innovation is essential to retain employee interest and enthusiasm. Some of the practices can help remote leaders regularly evaluate and evolve their company's training methods such as

Use a wide variety of workforce training styles to accommodate the greatest amount of remote workers. Popular training methods include instructor led coaching, self-guided e-courses, roleplaying or gamification, video lectures, required reading including quarterly or annual reports as well as case studies, and peer-to-peer mentoring.

Provide employees an access to online professional development programs, continued education websites, and skills-building resources like LinkedIn Learning, Stanford Online and Udemy, so they have ample of opportunities to learn at their own pace.

Motivate Managerial Buy-in

Remote employee training programs will have a bigger impact if company executives and managers buy in to training programmes and goals. From upper level administrators to department heads and team leaders, all managerial staff should be enthusiastic about marketing training initiatives to their employees. Where appropriate, business leaders can help shore up training ROI by offering incentives, like performance bonuses, charitable giving awards, care packages, company swag and equipment upgrades, to reward managers who volunteer to host professional development seminars or produce training materials.

Conducting virtual employee training with these best Quality of work life initiatives in place will be a key to employees and employers both receiving the full merits of improved workplace productivity and flexibility, strengthen team bonds, and increase opportunities for upward mobility.

Conclusion:-

Organisations are certainly catching onto the trend, and most have the flexibility to work from home. Today, offices are constantly on, it isn't the same as it was decades ago, when you left the office and work actually ended. Today, most of us work at any hour wherever we are located, so it makes sense that the line is starting to blur between work and life. But it stands to reason that working from home can help redefine or rebalance quality of work life if organisations can successfully enact a work from home policy. At its best, working from home can leverage QWL both employers and employees as they remain connected and positive. Organisations can retain employees and work efficiently by conducting virtual employee training with best quality of work life initiatives in place receiving the full merits of improved workplace productivity and flexibility, fulfilling home life all without the stress of a daily commute than those who went into the office on a regular basis.

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