

# Work from Home: Meeting the Change in Workplace



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## Abstract

*With the continuous growth of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work is taking a continuous upsurge with almost every job taking to distant working or working from home for its millions of employees around the world. The advanced technology has allowed employees to virtually access the information and communicate with their co-employees and clients. Companies small and big have given homeworking facilities to their employees to assist the company and the employees equally. Though Work from Home (WFH) is a good measure to get things done, it comes with its own pros and cons. The change in the workplace, timing, availability of equipment and proper communication with the staff in office needs to be taken into consideration along with the interaction and involvement in the family. This paper is based on a survey conducted on the employees working from home for reputed IT (Information Technology, refers to software oriented) companies in India since the lockdown imposed due to the pandemic. The study looks at the contentment of the employees working from home and the challenges faced along with the management of work while staying at home. Results include happiness of employees with the facility combined with communication, timing and workplace difficulties.*

**Keywords:** WFH, COVID-19 Pandemic, Workplace, Technology, Management

## Introduction

This research aims to discover how the WFH facility is met by the employees working in reputed IT companies, their happiness with the arrangement and what problems they are facing in the background of the lockdown imposed all over India due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has took over the world. It looks up to whether the respondents are able to manage work while staying at home. The study shows that along with the complete change in workplace, network communication is a big hindrance in work commitment of the employees. Also, communication barrier with co-employees lays impact on the work efficiency of the respondents.

WFH refers to the working of an employee from his home where he lives instead of the office where normally the job is done. Various

companies have a scheme of WFH for their employees either permanent, part-time or as per their convenience. Technology provides the facility of being in touch, connecting with co-employees and working comfortably, irrespective of the area one is located in. Meanwhile many companies were already allowing distant work to their staffs, the recent spread of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic has increased the popularity of the term significantly.

The employees regularly working from home very often have a definite workspace meant to focus and attentively work with sufficient productivity. Homeworking is beneficial in a way that it reduces the time, rush and money needed to travel to and from office every day. Though WFH is an effective tool in getting tasks done, it is made possible through the use of mobile phone,

laptop and access to the internet. It helps in virtually attending meetings and communicating with the co-employees through the use of video conferencing and combined superior technology. Working in home is different from working in office as there is a complete transformation in the workplace. The office environment comprises of everything that is needed to work in a smooth way, unlike the environment at home where interaction with the family and indulgence in the household tasks cannot be ignored.<sup>1</sup> Offices are the bodies meant to provide an environment to the employees to efficiently work and grow professionally. But when office comes home, it may definitely interrupt the relaxation and freedom that can be found only at home, may create a confusion regarding how to handle the home and office responsibilities equally and lead to the negotiation of the work-home boundaries.<sup>2</sup> The use of Information Technology ensures the working of people away from the office and hence is an essential feature of WFH. The employees working in an IT company have tasks related to both hardware and software parts of computer and networking. In the present study, the employees who perform the software tasks have been included as this work can be completely done from home, only with the help of a little equipment that can be provided or paid for by the company.

This paper proposes to answer the following questions-

1. Do employees find WFH better than work at office?
2. Is WFH easily manageable?
3. What are the challenges faced by the employees in WFH?

These questions aim to highlight whether or not it is possible to WFH and discover the issues faced while working from home.

In this paper, first an outline of the notion of WFH is given. Subsequently, a study of active IT professionals working from home, which aims to answer the questions above, is described. Finally, the results of the study are discussed.

## **Work and Home Boundaries**

Distant working involves the division of time and space which regulates the provision of work and rest. Boundaries or “fine lines” separate different realms, avoid anarchy and sustain order in the society, though the division cannot be clear.<sup>3</sup> The work done by Nippert on the association of work and home is a turning point in this study.<sup>4</sup> The association between work and home can be ranged from drawing the boundaries between home and work life to the integration of the two. She has examined the ways by which people define the boundaries of work and home while continuously moving to and from between the two realms<sup>5</sup>, highlighting the everyday attempts of individuals in managing their privacy and relationships while drawing boundaries between the private and public spaces.<sup>6</sup> Clark defines individuals regularly moving between the two realms as border-crossers, who seek to achieve balance between work and family by dealing and negotiating the two spheres and the borders between them. He defines balance as satisfaction and good functioning in both the spheres along with minimal conflict of roles.<sup>7</sup> According to him, individuals thrive to attain better stability between work and family as these lay impact on each other’s scope of functioning. Also, he links the flexibility of work to the increase in the satisfaction at work and family well-being.<sup>8</sup> The borders of home and work have become blur and easily penetrable, with the reversing roles where home is more demanding than work and work seems to be easier than household chores and responsibilities.<sup>9</sup> A broad literature on the balance of work and home and management of the boundaries of both illustrate the need of research on the topic.

## **A Descriptive Study of Employed IT Professionals**

A survey study of professionals working in reputed IT companies currently full-time working from home was done in order to understand their liking for the WFH arrangement, their productivity during this period and the problems faced by them while working from home.

An outline of people who work for various Multi-National Companies (MNCs) in the IT sector was made in terms of duration of employment irrespective of position, age and gender. The employees working from home are the full-time working employees of IT companies currently working from home since the lockdown imposed by the government. These employees have a fixed pay along with benefits, conveniences in the office with flexible schedules and manageable work time, the facility of WFH and at every position are managed by their supervisors. These employees are bound to WFH until the company reopens and they start going to office.

### Respondents

Thirty IT professionals currently working full-time from home for reputed MNCs were asked to fill out a pre-designed questionnaire.

All the subjects were contacted personally by email and were either already known to the author or were recommended by the other subjects. The study comprised of an equal number of fresh (less than five years) as well as long term (more than five years) working employees. All of these respondents were working from home during the study (in early June of the year 2020) since the first lockdown imposed due to coronavirus in India, with no further notice from their respective companies to resume work at office. Thirty percent of the respondents were those who never took the facility of WFH before the current situation.

### Survey Research

A pre-designed questionnaire was mailed to all the respondents via e-mail and continuous follow-up was taken. A total of thirty respondents was selected through snowball sampling. Information about numerous topics was collected. The respondents were asked about the duration of their employment and whether they took the WFH facility before the lockdown to know their familiarity and likeness for the concept.

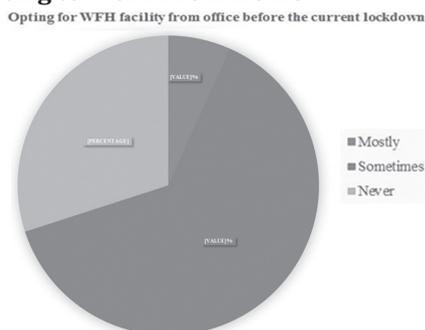
Information was collected about the change in work time at home in comparison to office and the efficiency of work done. Subjects were also asked

about the frequency of negotiating their work schedule at home, their happiness in working from home, the problems they have been facing during the process and whether they would like to continue with the present arrangement even after the lockdown is over.

### Results

The main results of the survey were the convenience and suitability with the WFH facility, satisfaction with the arrangement in spite of work-time being increased in comparison to office, negotiation of work schedule at home and likeliness to continue WFH if given a chance. Though a significantly low percentage (27 per cent) of subjects were found to face problems, the major problems faced were network connection issues, workspace, overtime working and communication with the co-employees.

#### 1. Opting to Work From Home:



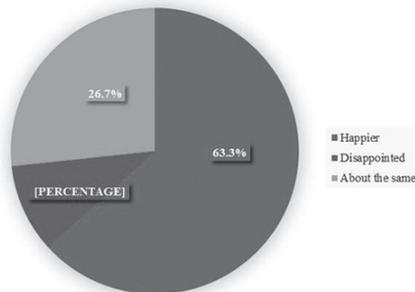
**Fig. 1: Opting for WFH facility from office before the current lockdown**

It was found that about 70 per cent of the subjects took WFH leaves on a frequent or rare basis while the remaining 30 per cent admitted to never taking the facility before the currently imposed lockdown. People having a habit of taking such leaves shows the early interest and liking for the arrangement and easy management of work at home but the disinterestedness and disliking for the concept can be shown in not opting for this arrangement. For such people, it might prove difficult in handling work-life balance. While it might be easy to cope up with the arrangement for those who are familiar with it but those who have never took WFH leave may not ever know

how to WFH.

**2. Contentment of the Employees:**

Feeling in WFH in comparison to work from office

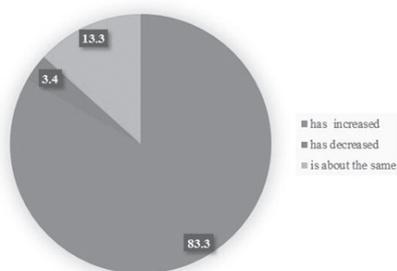


**Fig. II: Feeling in WFH in comparison to work from office**

A significant proportion (63.3 per cent) was found to be happier working from home in comparison to office. It shows that the surroundings play an important role in the satisfaction of employees. It can be highlighted that in adverse conditions such as the time of a pandemic people are working from homes with greater satisfaction than that in the office. A comparatively low percentage (10 per cent) of the subjects who were found to be disappointed shows the issues arising in working from home laying an impact on the happiness of the employees. The remaining subjects (26.7 per cent) felt the same as in office which shows their adaptation with the environment at home. However, a greater proportion of contented employees shows the approval of the arrangement among them which would ultimately lead to greater job satisfaction along with efficiency and greater productivity.

**3. Increase in Working Hours:**

Total work time in WFH vs work from office

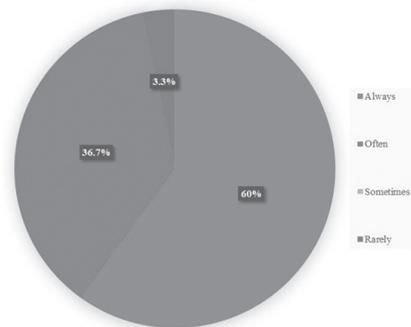


**Fig. III: Total work time in WFH vs work from office**

Office hours include chats with the colleagues, tea breaks, lunch and many other daily activities. But with the facility of WFH the focus has shifted solely on work. While the equipment needed are just a mobile phone, a laptop and a network connection- in a good working condition, pressure of task completion takes hours of continuous work without recognising the time limits. Since there is no opening and closure of office, there is no check on time and hence more time is invested. Just a call away are the colleagues, everyone needs to finish task as early as possible to spend time at home the way they wish to-with the family, friends or some lone time. With no watch on how the work is done, it can be done in a room, on the table, bed, or anywhere in the house with no restrictions on clothing, single seated or accompanying anyone. The formality of office has been put to some rest focusing only on the efficiency and timely completion of work. While a significantly large proportion (83.3 per cent) was found to be overworking, for a very small proportion (13.3 per cent) the work time remains about the same as in office which can prove to be a good sign as increased or decreased work hours might lay an impact on the productivity and ultimately the health of the worker.

**4. Productivity of the Employees:**

Meeting of deadlines by the team



**Fig. IV: Meeting of deadlines by the team**

Productivity defines the efficiency of the work done by the employees which includes the amount of output given by the employees in a particular amount of time, the quality of

the output and the amount of time spent in completion of tasks. Productivity is essential in work as it helps in the success of the company, motivation of the employees and provision of better working environment in the company. The incentives provided to the employees also play an important role in determining their productivity. In the present study, 60 per cent of the subjects admitted their team always met deadlines, while 36.7 per cent confessed to often meeting deadlines which shows on time work and good efficiency on the part of the employees. A significantly small proportion (3.3%) committed their deadlines at work to be met rarely showing low level of productivity.

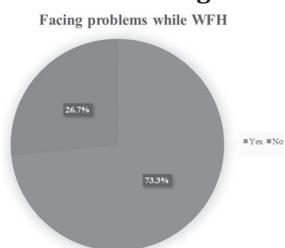
**5. Handling Work Schedule at Home:**



**Fig. V: Managing regular working schedule**

The biggest chore in working from home is keeping work-life balance. The management of working area, meeting work deadlines, having proper equipment to work and balancing between work and home responsibilities while staying at home is a big challenge for the employees working from home. The subjects were asked how often they managed to handle work schedule at home. About 93 per cent were found to manage anyway while remaining admitted to never being able to manage their WFH.

**6. Facing Problems Working from Home:**



**Fig. VI: Facing problems while WFH**

A significantly large proportion (73.3 per cent) of the subjects was found to face no problem in working from home which shows the acceptability of the concept by the employees. This shows that the employees are facing less problems. When asked about facing problems in work, a large number denied but when asked about the challenges faced some of these subjects mentioned the problems met by them. This shows that the subjects were not ready to commit to facing problems even when actually facing which shows their fondness of the concept of WFH.

**7. Challenges in WFH:** Home-based telework is a growing phenomenon with great potential to affect employees' psychological well-being.<sup>10</sup> While on the one hand the implications of WFH are found to be contributing to high motivation and discipline among the employees<sup>11</sup>, its reception as a substitute for work in office is not met easily by the supervisors who prefer on-site work by their employees.<sup>12</sup> It is also found to lay a negative impact on the individual and team performance of the workers,<sup>13</sup> communication problems with co-workers and interference between work and family domains.<sup>14</sup>

The task of managing work for the employees working from home is a big challenge in itself. While working at office isn't untouched by the problems faced by the employees, a complete change in the workspace is sure to have problems associated with it.<sup>15</sup> The employees were asked about the biggest challenges they had been facing working from home. The major problems faced by the subjects have been outlined below-

**i. Network Connection:** In telecommuting work is done entirely with the use of internet connection. This lays an impact on the speed and efficiency of the work as the whole work depends on the internet connectivity which is crucial to maintain. More the speed of internet, swifter is the work. Establishing a good network connection was found to be the biggest problem occurring to the subjects while working from home. This shows the huge dependency on internet which is found to be lacking at home.

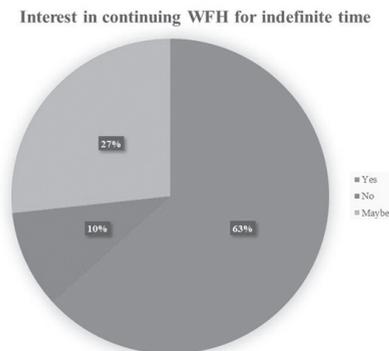
**ii. Workspace Issue:** Shifting office at home changes the whole workspace and environment of work though the work remains the main highpoint. A good network connection, constant electricity, easy communication with the colleagues, instant problem solving, team work and regular check on the employees by the supervisors define the work at office. Now when there is a sudden shift of work from office to home, the second biggest problem the subjects have been facing is the workspace problem. The environment needed to do the office chores is difficult to be found at home where family commitments, household chores and the continuous activities going around in the home are a big reason of distraction.

**iii. Communication Difficulty:** While communication with the co-employees is quite easy when they are working around in the office, with the commencement of telework the communication no more remains physical. The virtual communication via technology depends wholly on the network which connects everyone at work and the availability of the fellow employees. The subjects under the study revealed a big difficulty in forming connection with the colleagues at work, the communication problem was found to be the third major problem in working from home professionals.

**iv. Incentives for Work:** Problems related to gadgets like computer, laptop, modems for internet connection and mobile phones are common in the IT sector. High quality equipment is needed for greater efficiency of work and progress which can be lacking at home. Lack of proper incentives was found to be a major problem along with the difficulty in communication with colleagues. Problems including laptop working, phone problem and network speed was a common issue.

**v. Other Problems:** Apart from the abovementioned problems which were most mentioned, the other challenges faced by the employees include more time consumption in working, work efficiency, access to information, household work, less communication, frequent power cut offs and continuous noise in the house.

## 8. Interest in the Concept of WFH:



**Fig. VII: Interest in continuing WFH for indefinite time**

When asked if the subjects would like to continue with WFH for indefinite time, 63 per cent responded in affirmation which shows an interest of the employees in the concept of WFH and their adaptation to it. This is a positive sign for the easy continuation of work in the time of a pandemic. It also shows the readiness of the subjects to face sudden problems at work. A significantly small 10 per cent of the subject answered in negation while the remaining answered in possibility which is also a sign of negotiation. This willingness can prove to be a good gesture in adjustment in hard times like the current pandemic.

## Conclusion

The transformation of workplace in office work is associated with many other changes as mentioned in figure VIII. The changes observed in WFH can be broadly categorised in four categories namely Time, Space, Technological and Communication. The changes related to time in WFH include the rise in office hours, reduction in the speed of work and requirement of more time than usual to manage work. The spatial change or change in space includes the transformation of location of working i.e. home, infrastructure or set-up of the working area and recurrent power fluctuations, added to which are family intervention, household chores, and interaction with the family as the work is done in the premises of home. The technological change

includes the low bandwidth of Internet which is an issue that is not found when work is done in the office but only at home, and frequent call drops due to the communication over mobile phones and internet which do not have stable connection and do not always function smoothly. Lastly, as the office has become purely virtual with no physical presence of the supervisors, colleagues or clients, communication is done solely through Internet and over phone calls due to which the communication has become slower and lesser in comparison to that in the office.

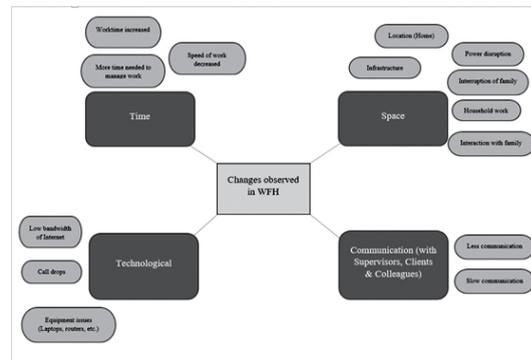
The study aimed to discover the contentment and satisfaction of the employees with the WFH arrangement during the pandemic, change in working hours, and the productivity of the employees. The study also sought to find out the problems faced by the employees working from home.

The results showed the early familiarity of the employees with the WFH facility available at office, the contentment of the employees in working from home in spite of increased working hours and an effective maintenance of work schedule even though problems faced. The readiness of the subjects to continue WFH for indefinite time is a sign of their acceptance of the facility, showing the possibility of work being done from home, though with problems associated with it like communication barriers, network connection, less incentives and several workplace difficulties.

The outcomes of the research help us realise that during the ongoing lockdown in India, a significant number of employees working for reputed MNCs on various positions are happier working from their homes in comparison to office in spite of various problems related to workspace. WFH which was once an option to the employees working full-time in offices has now become a necessity during the pandemic. This facility can be called a blessing in disguise helping employees to work in a safe environment along with the comfort of home.

This study suggests that the WFH arrangement has a bright future in the upcoming years

providing more safety, security and happiness to the individuals, adding more freedom and flexibility in the work culture, giving more chances of socializing and spending time with the family and rendering satisfaction to the individuals.



**Fig. VIII: Changes observed in WFH**

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