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A Study on work culture during Covid-19 Pandemic: Special Reference to the concept of Virtual Fatigue in academia

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KEYWORDS

Virtual fatigue, work culture, pandemic, work from home.

ABSTRACT

The broke-out of 2019 pandemic which had a huge impact on the work and work culture across the educational institutions in the world, has emphasized for more innovative work methods, to overview the academic processes. This study aims to evaluate the influence of work culture and effects of new adopted work process during the COVID-19 pandemic on academia. As, the work procedure i.e., Work from home widely accepted by most of the organizations during lockdown was not as easy as it was predicted, whereas the workforce had to pass through various challenges during this very process, one as such is zoom fatigue. This paper mainly focuses over the work-cultures embraced by the organizations during pandemic and the methods adopted to accompany the work process as like the virtual platforms which were chosen by the organizations.

Introduction

Work culture is called has organizational management concept which deals with the attitudes, beliefs, values, ethics, workflow, collaboration, task & time management, and perceptions of employees relative to the principles and practices adhered to by the institution. In a nutshell, work culture is the mindset of employees which further decides the impression of the organization. Culture is something which will be inculcated by men through this regularly practices. Edward B. Tylor defined “culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871)^[1].

The work culture plays a crucial role in extracting the best in the employees and it helps them stick – on to the institution for a longer duration. On the flip side, organizations should provide a positive ambiance for better productivity and the least disruptions in their work. The work culture is important factor because it determined how well a person fit to their organization and it gives a scope to build rapport to their colleagues for better results. A person’s attitude, growth, performance, and job satisfaction will be based on work culture of the organization, and it encourages person to perform efficiently. Values shared by organizational members and manifested in their behavior are also a component of organizational culture (Keyton, 2008)^[2]. Suddenly, human community comes across challenges most of the countries called for the lockdown to break-chain Covid-19 pandemic. Globally workforce interrupted this has hugely impacted on working patterns in organizations by adapting & bringing changes. One as such is Work From Home (WFH), is a working arrangement in which a worker fulfills the essential responsibilities of his/her job while remaining at home, using information and communications technology (ICT). (Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)/ AIMS, n.d.)^[3]. If we see the journey of the work culture from conventional way to modern way there is huge change had taken place. This era had greater impact at academia levels.

Research problem & question

Work from home widely accepted by academia like most the

organizations during pandemic lockdown. Many online meeting platforms were used to achieve this purpose effectively. On the other hand, this process brought new challenges to the academic work culture and issues multiplied as time passed. In the of context of this research problem, current research focuses on the research question, ‘what influences the negative fallout in academic work culture in relation to virtual platforms?’

Hypothesis

Virtual fatigue is the major reason behind negative fallout in academic work culture.

Objectives

1. To understand the change in the work culture during the pandemic.
2. To evaluate the role of virtual communication in the work during the pandemic.
3. To analyze the challenges faced by academia with the new work culture.
4. To design possible policy choices to the problem of virtual fatigue.

Scope

This study aims to evaluate the influence of work culture and the effects of the newly adopted work process in the academic circle during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study limits its scope to the challenges and issues faced by academic stake holders.

Methodology

This research is a doctrinal paper, developed based on various secondary data. The study uses analytical and logical tools to verify the hypothesis and to develop positive policy choices. The study is based on an extensive literature survey including books, articles, case studies etc.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of this paper is divided in to four parts. The first part titled, ‘Work culture shifts in COVID 19’ deals with different issues faced by organizations during the pandemic. The second part, ‘Academia changes with online platform’ explains academia specific challenges in relations to virtual platforms. Third part ‘Virtual Fatigue and Academic environment’ focuses on the issue of virtual fatigue and its influences on academic work culture. And the final part ‘dealing with

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virtual fatigue: possible policy choices' offers feasible choices which can be adopted by organizations to avoid the issue of virtual fatigue.

Work culture shifts in COVID-19:

Covid-19 pandemic brought many changes in different sectors of human lives. The process and the function of different organizations have to make huge changes in this backdrop. Decision making took an entirely different approach because of these changes in the organizational set up. Organizational culture is defined by the collective norms of behavior exhibited by the individuals within an organization. Generally, workplace culture does not change very much or very fast. Rather it adjusts slowly, over a long period of time in response to an accumulation of multiple small encouragements and the occasional epiphany (PricewaterhouseCoopers, n.d.)^[4]. In addition to these challenges, communication which is considered as the life blood of any human organizations received a death blow.

- **Communications and work culture:** Communication plays vital role directing the organizations achieving its goals, it mitigates the confusions among the employees and employers. Communication involves in shared understanding of common interest. A good communication includes practices such as timekeeping, providing supplies, recording conversations, and ensuring that all participants have sufficient "air time". (Pearce & Pearce, 2000)^[5]. Whereas the communication binds the different levels of management, well intimate the organizational goals and objectives which enables the proper coordination within the chain and allows the smooth functioning. Virtual mode of communication has constructed a fresh culture in the organizations.
- **Hurdles in communications during Covid-19:** Before the pandemic the organizations were formal, engaging all the employees' under-one-roof. Later, an alternative was inevitable during outbreak to break the chain of Covid-19, when the nations were forced to impose lockdown, but for sustainability of economy and for effective functioning of the business activities organizations had to take-up work-from-home (WFH) intensively, whereas the WFH was not new approach in work process it was called as remote working, the journey of remote working quite fascinated. It has coined in 1973 by famous physicist Jack Nilles in his book "The Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff" which drive for remote working in later stages. In the beginning of 2000's broadband internet connection made available to the people's residences, where Skype released audio communication in cheaper fare, latterly upgraded to video conferencing by 2007. Remote Work remained the exception rather than the norm. "Flexible work" arrangements were a perk. In 2018, only around 3% of employees worked from home and it is given to certain management levels. However, technological infrastructure designed for telecommuting was evolving with every passing year. Survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 71 per cent of employers are struggling to adjust to remote work; 65 per cent of employers say maintaining employee morale has been a challenge; and more than one third of employers are facing difficulties with company culture, employee productivity and leave regulation.(Wcms_745024.Pdf, n.d.)^[6] At the academia, synergizing the pupils and tutors on virtual platform is at different level, absence of the physical presence, has created the gap in the learning process. This approach was existing in the online study programs, but these programs was restricted to the certain programs (i.e., executive programs) the audience are different. Whereas the general academia has a different methodology, due to the stakeholders are of with different process, diverse mind-set, attitude and values. Introducing a normative functioning at academia a challenging which had to connect the heterogeneous masses together like student community, the teaching and non-teaching (facilitating staff). The availability of digital infrastructure was limited.
- **Shift to online platforms:** Imposition of lockdown has paved for transference in the operational process at academia in forms of transferring knowledge, communication, coordination, directing the

work process, etc., These times, virtual formats and social media recently used like: Language apps, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, or online learning software, there has been a significant surge in usage since COVID-19 (The COVID-19 Pandemic Has Changed Education Forever. This Is How, n.d.)^[7]. Which has created a trend in the business processes, has should the future for the management activities. Effectively connecting the stake-holders of every forms it has built a strong coordinating mechanism and raised the retention of information.

Academia changes with online platform

The nature of academia and academic practices are different from nonacademic organizations. The academic environment proved to be more fragile than any other sector. The whole learning process requires enormous amount of communication flow.

- **Learning approaches:** The Covid-19, has changed the learning formats at the regular formal education levels, remote learning became an alternative. Transferring knowledge online and fulfilling the academia works as like offering teachers and students unlimited video conferencing time, auto-translation capabilities, real-time co-editing of project work, and smart calendar scheduling, amongst other features with the help of the virtual mode. Adopting, e-learning has successfully engaged almost 1.2 billion students all over the world (The COVID-19 Pandemic Has Changed Education Forever. This Is How, n.d.)^[8].
- **Infrastructural problems:** This problem is relatively having unique and more devastating impact on academic institutions, since this was all-of-sudden change which had happened. Adopting for the conditions was challenging, especially at academics. In nonacademic institutions infrastructural problems were one-dimensional, concerning employees of that institution. But in academic circles infrastructural requirements are turned in to multi-dimensional problem, concerning teachers, non-teaching staff, students etc. The infrastructure in equilibrium among the stake-holders due to the socio-economic or geographical aspects, the e-learning/remote learning (remote working) became a disadvantage too created a digital-divide.
- **Organizational Objectives and moral dilemma:** Academia differs with other organizations in terms of its end goal. Academia needs to have more pervasive policies which can be adoptable with the demands of learning process. In this way considering academia objectives with organizations can be blunder.

Virtual Fatigue and Academic environment: Existing research shows that virtual fatigue is disturbing the work environment in many organizations all over the world, whereas it has created an imbalance in the work-life among the employees. The, adopted methods has raised the health complications especially the psychologically, like tiredness, burn-out, stress, muscle tension, pain. Academic world is no exception to this trend of virtual fatigue, engaging the students and coordinating with other employees or the other levels of the management at institutional level was challenging. Taking over some important activities like: teaching, conducting conferences, editing the project works, evaluating, etc., as the academic duties and coordinating with other administrative works.

Earlier research: Remote working is no new concept, it was adopted during early 2000's, and it was enjoyed by a particular levels of employees and in certain organization, this was introduced as the "carrot policy" to motivate employees and build them morally. This method of remote working was intensive only in the distance educations mainly it was limited in exchange of knowledge (teaching). Due to the pandemic conditions the remote working was extensively followed all most in all organizations, this working approach was taken into the academia for better functioning of the activities at institution levels.

Relating to current scenario: With adopting strong culture it encourages for better performance. All human systems attempt to maintain equilibrium and to maximize their autonomy vis-à-vis their environment. Coping, growth, and survival all involve maintaining the

integrity of the system in the face of a changing environment that is constantly causing varying degrees of disequilibrium (Schein, n.d.)^[9]. On an encouraging note pandemic made the digital preparedness inevitable and forced the workforce to be equipped working virtually, could see the working methods shifting towards virtual. Working remote was no-more a rewarding policy it changed to be a compulsory activity. And inducing it at academia which brought a new dimension in the traditional institutional system. With the traditional work culture, the embracing new approaches can be a challenging and as well a time consuming process. Fixing up the infrastructure to be on-track, as the time passes even the adopting towards the system with it course of time. Moreover, but the digital work environment, has a greater impact on the mental health on the students and employees. In the learning process students of certain category will be with limit digital availability, this has high pressure on them, as research shows that on average, students retain 25-60% more material when learning online compared to only 8-10% in a classroom. This is mostly due to the students being able to learn faster online; e-learning requires 40-60% less time to learn than in a traditional classroom setting because students can learn at their own pace, going back and re-reading, skipping, or accelerating through concepts as they choose. (The COVID-19 Pandemic Has Changed Education Forever. This Is How, n.d.)^[10] Under these conditions this will a challenging to the students who are poorly equipped digitally. The effectiveness and efficiency can be a compromising.

Dealing with Virtual fatigue: Possible policy choices

The clear observations of the existing research and contemporary developments, the research offers following choices in organizational decision making in general, academia in particular.

- **Identifying the settings of work culture:** Establishing a strong work culture during crisis is important as individual responses to crises were different, which can boost the workers performance. The notch of employees and management disequilibrium formally creating a perfect relationship among the organization and resources. Fayol’s principle of subordination of the individual interest towards the organizational. Sustainable opportunities to be provided for self-transformation. Goals are set with short and long term deadlines in accordance with the academia strategy. If any part of the core cognitive structure is to change in more than minor incremental ways, the system must first experience enough disequilibrium to force a coping process that goes beyond just reinforcing the assumptions that are already in place (Schein, n.d.)^[11] Formal communication keep informing about the initiatives taken regarding work, and informal communication to build a fare relationship between the leader and employees can see resourcefulness.
- **Need of serious studies in organizational behavior:** The role of the organizations at academia is vital in tuning the behaviors of the workforce by ensuring the enough psychological safety. The organizations should encourage the employees to communicate openly during times of workplace uncertainty by having regular meetings, corresponding by email and engaging in group projects. The culture and performance have been interrelated to each other based upon perfect association between business processes (Reichers and Schneider, 1990)^[12] Building behavioural norms by strong leadership, encouraging for building a common morphology; and, bolstering the group-sense providing some reassurance to all that they are being included. As the remote

working has a raised the gap in the sense of belongingness hampering the shared experience to an extent. Leader who can guide the team what to do and how to do, see what leaders want and how they allocate the organizational resources showing trust and give value to the employees, which creates a sense of loyalty. Ultimately a well engaged employee are committed to the organization’s goals and values and reduce the fatigue. They are also motivated to contribute to organizational success with appropriate behavior at academia.

CONCLUSION

The organization culture helps in adopting progressive relationship that leads to manage effective organization processes at academia level. The organizations should believe in hiring contingency plans to overcome the crisis periods. The strong leadership of providing a sustainable opportunity will enable the efficiency of the employees encouraging better performance.

During this phase of recovery, it will be crucial to reflect on the role those educational systems. Often, the most profound changes happen during the crisis, and this moment holds the possibility that we might not regain the status quo when things have returned to “normal”. While this crisis has deep implications, it does not have predefined outcomes. Our collective and systemic responses to these disruptions will determine how we are affected by them. The pandemic is also an opportunity to renew our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. Education’s promise to our future society is to ensure that all young people have the chance to succeed in school and to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will allow them to contribute to society. Our ability to deal with large-scale disruptions has been tested by the current crisis. It is now up to us to make our societies more resilient in the future.

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