

Leadership and the Impact of Covid-19 on Remote Working

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During periods of crisis, such as a rampant worldwide pandemic, many organizations and their employees are adversely affected. Furthermore, they are coerced to change the way things are done, such as remote working. This study aims to ascertain the challenges organizations and employees face while working remotely at home amid the COVID-19 pandemic and ascertain the leadership changes to adapt to the nature of remote work within organizations. A desktop study was employed for this research paper as the nature of the research is to examine what other academics have collected on the subject of Human Resource Development (HRD) in organizations and COVID-19. By comparing the findings of this study to prior research, it is concluded that challenges do indeed occur in remote work, particularly within the aspect of work-life balance and communication. Furthermore, findings reveal a shift from the ‘traditional’ leadership approach to an approach well-adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic. This research paper is intended to aid organizations in learning and acquiring knowledge about challenges associated with remote work and leadership amid the pandemic and fill literature gaps.

Keywords: *COVID-19, remote work, leadership, leader.*

Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a virulent disease that developed precipitously worldwide, to the magnitude of being declared a severe global pandemic by the “World Health Organization (WHO).” The pandemic is deemed an international health crisis as well as a global economic threat. The government-mandated lockdown of organizations and industries worldwide aided in restricting the spread of the virus; however, it initiated extensive detrimental effects for both employees and employers (Anseel, Bamberger, Antonakis & Bapuji, 2020).

"The etiologic agent of COVID-19 is the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)" (Lovric, Farcic, Miksic, & Vcev, 2020:1), which appeared in Wuhan, China. In line with the WHO, from December 2019 till date, there are more than 225 000 000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and more than 4 690 000 deaths related to COVID-19 worldwide, inclusive of more than 200 countries (WHO, 2021). In the context of South Africa, there are more than 2 880 000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and more than 86 000 COVID-19 related deaths (WHO, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the way of life indefinitely. While the instantaneous transformations are noticeable, less is known about the unwavering outcomes as individuals embark on a 'new normal' across the world. Almost instantaneously, in South Africa, individuals had to stop attending work and limit themselves to their homes as the government mandated a strict lockdown. Some organizations completely shut down, while others had to establish new models rapidly, to allow their employees to resume work from where they were locked down (Sangoni, 2020).

In line with a study by Watkins & Yaziji (2020) related to leadership which encompasses 455 participants ranging from senior to employee level within a broad cross-section of industries, revealed that "the stress load across industries and within organizations, and the repercussions upon the personal lives of working men and women faced with an unprecedented emergency." Furthermore, the study revealed that organizational leaders feel responsible for managing employee morale, anxiety, and the well-being of their labor force. When it came to the challenges of working remotely, the study presented profound insights. The study revealed that personal anxiety, loss of efficiency, and "the all too available" distractions of remote working were the top three issues among respondents. Hence, this study will look at the challenges of remote working as well as the change in leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background to study

Quarantines, lockdowns, and self-induced isolations have coerced tens of millions of individuals around the globe to work from home, accelerating a workplace arrangement that had struggled to gain traction prior to the pandemic. Amid the pandemic, the restrictions and challenges of remote working are brought to light. Remote work facilitates the integration of work-life and leisure time, distorting the boundaries between the two. This has been viewed with both positive and negative connotations, where the increased socialization at home is deemed positive by those who have families, but where the distorting of boundaries results in increased stress levels and the inability to leave when the workday concludes (Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Sangoni, 2018).

COVID-19 has contravened social and technological barriers, which had averted remote work in the past, prompting a physical shift in where work is performed (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika & Smit, 2020). From the view of an employee, this shift is substantial and consequential; employees are establishing new outlooks about flexibility, and work-life balance, which cannot be negated.

Organizations need to view the pandemic as an opportunity to revolutionize how employees work. This should encompass a shift to having employees work from home and being open to alternative working schedules. Simultaneously, employees must develop resilience and actively maintain boundaries between home and work to enhance their performance and protect their well-being (BBC, 2020).

As the pandemic coerces employees to work remotely from home, it is critical to examine how organizations overcome the challenges of remote work and consider the pandemic's organizational, behavioral, and societal effects (Agerfalk, Conboy & Myers, 2020). Similarly, Sangoni (2018) affirms that many questions are raised regarding the new working arrangement such as, how the limited physical access to people and resources affects personal development and satisfaction in the work environment, how do fellow employees interact and network outside formal virtual meetings, and how will organizations evocatively pursue their transformative ambitions in light of the current situation.

The research on remote work is extensive as the concept is not contemporary; however, the current situation that many organizations around the globe are presented with is unprecedented in history. Prior research predominately covered pre-arranged and voluntary remote work structures (Grant et al., 2013; Choudhury, Foroughi & Larson, 2019; Lee, 2018). This research paper will investigate how organizational leaders are managing remote work that is unforeseen and involuntary. This is where there a significant gap in the literature exists.

Building on the aforementioned, this paper aims to ascertain the challenges organizations and employees face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of remote work. This paper covers the work-life balance and communication of remote work. Furthermore, it considers the leadership approach due to the changes emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Justification of study

The topic of this article was selected as it is a current, highly relatable topic. The pandemic has impacted organizational environments worldwide and may also be deemed a precedent that enables organizations to be well-equipped for future crises. Moreover, this study is intended to address the gaps in the literature as mentioned above and contribute to the body of knowledge associated with remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's findings will present organizational leaders with the pertinent means and information needed to better understand remote working amid the pandemic.

Objective of the study

The specific research objectives encompass:

- (i) To ascertain the challenges presented to organizations and employees in remote-working during COVID-19.
- (ii) To ascertain the change in leadership amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

The theory underpinning this study is known as the “Conservation of Resource Theory.” This theory proposes that individuals experience stress when their present valuable resources are being compromised, and additional resources seem to be inaccessible. Individuals perceive the potential or actual loss of such resources as threats. Hobfoll (1989, p. 516) defines stress as “a reaction to the environment in which there is (a) the threat of a net loss of resources, (b) the net loss of resources, or (c) a lack of resource gain following the investment of resources.”

This theory could deepen understanding of how an event, such as COVID-19, impacts employees, their work, and family. Under this theory, all work-related conditions, such as personal traits, are known as resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Furthermore, the theory groups 74 resources into various groups (Hobfoll, 1989):

- (i) Primary resources- Food, shelter.
- (ii) Secondary resources- Social structure, sense of belonging, optimism, and hopefulness.
- (iii) Tertiary resources- Social status, luxurious lifestyle.

The resources group consisted of secondary resources such as social structures, time, hopefulness, and optimism are considered for this research. These resources are compromised by the current crisis resulting in stress.

This theory has been widely accepted in several countries (Hobfoll et al., 2016; Hobfoll et al., 2010). Research has verified this theory and identified that presenting resources such as training and development to enhance employees' skills reduced their stress levels and enhanced self-efficacy (Chen, Westman, & Eden, 2009). Authors (Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Meyer, et al., 2020) employed this theory to analyze the work-home conflict of resources and identified that personal resources such as effort could enhance the general outcome.

Literature review

This aspect presents a review of literature relating to remote work and leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. It places much emphasis on the challenges related to remote work concerning communication and work-life balance amid the pandemic. Furthermore, it discusses the aspect of leadership through the pandemic. Lastly, it addresses the aspect of leading remotely.

Remote work

Remote work is a working arrangement that enables employees to work externally from their traditional working environment. The concept is that work does not need to be conducted in a particular place to be done successfully. Due to the COVID-pandemic and governmentally mandated lockdowns, remote work from home presented itself as the sole solution to continue organizational operations, with digital technology as an enabler for this new reality (Wike, 2021). However, remote work amid the pandemic differs from prior remote working arrangements due to the following (Sandoval-Reyes, Idrovo-Carlier & Duque-Oliva, 2021):

- (i) It was involuntary; for both employee and employer.
- (ii) It did not take into account individual characteristics or organizational culture- all tasks that could be completed remotely were to be executed irrespective of the employee's capacity to cope with social isolation or the organization's culture.
- (iii) It was demanding as all work had to be performed remotely.
- (iv) It overlapped with residing at home with other members of the household.

Hence, organizations had to swiftly establish and execute policies pertinent to remote work in order to ensure organizational continuity (Wike, 2021). In light of this statement, a South African-based study by Worldwideworx (2020) examined the readiness of formal strategies in line with remote work, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Strategies for remote work within South African organizations pre-COVID-19.



Source: Worldwideworx (2020).

Figure 1 illustrates that more than half of organizations were easily prepared for remote work. A quarter had a detailed strategy and a third a broad strategy that lacked specifics. However, it should be noted that a strategy lacking specifics still meant that organizations were blindsided by the extent of the impact of COVID-19. Hence, this indicates that only a quarter of organizations were truly equipped for the swift shift to remote work (Worldwideworx, 2020).

Remote work presents many benefits; instead of commuting to an office daily for work purposes, remote employees can use that time to implement their strategies and exceed their goals wherever they see fit. Remote workers have the flexibility to plan out their days with the aim of their personal and work lives coexisting harmoniously and experiencing both these aspects at their full potential (RemoteYear, 2021).

Conversely, remote working presents disadvantages. These disadvantages include challenges in communication within physical distance and the blurring of work and non-work life due to the “always-on culture” enabled by “information and communication technologies (ICT)” (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Waizenegger, et al., 2020). While ICT enables employees to have greater temporal and locational flexibility, accelerating a multidimensional fragmentation of work, it also contributes to pressure for employees concerning continual connectivity and responsiveness (University of Pretoria, 2020). Furthermore, remote work can also be

emotionally overwhelming and results in tiredness and adverse emotions (Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai, & Bendz, 2020). Expediating the aforementioned, Waizenegger et al. (2020) state, remote work creates social and professional isolation, a lack of informal learning opportunities, and declining support from the organizations.

The challenges of remote work are predominately linked to communication and work-life balance. Their role in the challenges and of this work arrangement will be introduced in the subsequent paragraphs.

Communication

Prior to the pandemic, many organizations were getting by with outmoded communication and collaborative means and were reliant on email and mobile phones to sustain their working environment. However, when the pandemic emerged, organizations had to abruptly adopt new technologies such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or other virtual platforms for organizational continuity (Morris, 2021).

Teams, where most members work remotely, are highly dependent on consistent electronic communication to cultivate precision, trust, and collaboration. However, studies propose that remote working presents significant challenges in relation to communication (International Labour Office, 2021; ICPLAN, 2020). These challenges multiply over time as a result of the increased extent of separation and professional isolation as employees are working remotely. The concept of collaboration of teams progressively declines because communicating by electronic means results in employees sharing less information with their fellow employees. In some circumstances, information received may be misconstrued. Furthermore, the process for providing feedback tends to be less when compared to working in an office space (International Labour Office, 2021, ICPLAN, 2020).

Orangefiery (2020) conducted a study that explored employees' perceptions on the need for communication, and it was ascertained that employees seek:

- (i) Transparency concerning what employees are aware of and not aware of.
- (ii) Information regarding resources for emotional and mental health, stress management, and anxiety.
- (iii) Reassuring acknowledgment of the severity of current events.

In an organizational context, a key concern is a heightened vulnerability to an organization's network getting hacked. A simple click of an attachment in a suspicious email by an employee can result in a cyberattack (Morris, 2021).

Work-life balance

While the challenge of sustaining a work-life balance is not a new concept for many employees and employers, as technological advancements have blurred the boundaries between work and family, working remotely from home amid the pandemic has presented a new array of challenges that coerced organizations to take the approach of remote working. Evidently, the

pandemic has fragmented the concept that remunerated work and personal life are two distinct aspects (University of Pretoria, 2020; International Labour Office, 2021).

While many employees are acclimatized with remote working, government-mandated lockdowns are a situation that is unique and consequently requires an entirely different vision and approach. Working from home amid the lockdown and pandemic can be interpreted as unprecedented and stress-inducing due to the numerous elements that impact employees' ability to work (University of Pretoria, 2020). Conversely, a study conducted by Sikhakhane (2021) indicated "that the feeling fortunate to still be in work, the collapse of work-life boundaries, and the fear of being under surveillance from employers, have all led to people working harder for longer." However, broad research has been conducted in light of work-life balance states that employees find work-life demands and family life contradictory. Hence, employees could experience an overall decline in their well-being (University of Pretoria, 2020).

Prior to lockdown, with the aid of domestic workers, employees could give their full attention to their work while being at home during the day. Employees strategically planned their workday because several role players presented them with consistent and expected support. For example, employed parents knew they had most of the day to focus on work and were prepared for disruptions when their children returned from school. Moreover, working from home meant they had continual work time without conversing with fellow employees or attending ad-hoc meetings. Even employees who did not have domestic support were able to plan their house chores and work hours. They only had their schedule to take into account when working from home (University of Pretoria, 2020).

However, given the pandemic, the current remote working environment lacks flexibility, direction, and support. House chores are plentiful as domestic workers have returned home. Daily predetermined schedules are now something of the past, as employees are not the only individuals at home during the day. Many are also challenged with increased parental obligations as they need to fulfill their children's demands and take the role of an educator (University of Pretoria, 2020). The study by International Labour Office (2021) concurs with the above, as it was ascertained that over one in five individuals living with children below the age of 12 faced challenges when working from home amid the pandemic. Moreover, the aforementioned can be seen in the study by Sikhakhane (2021), whereby a recent poll indicated that 71% of working mothers requested leave to look after their children and that those are who have children and caring for older relatives are also finding the impact of current events challenging.

Leadership

As COVID-19 has transformed the work environment, organizational leaders had to expedite something they knew was imminent in the future. The pandemic presents a considerable challenge for organizations to survive and flourish in this complex environment and for employees who must acclimatize to a new way of working. Leaders must take on a new

approach, which fosters organizational flexibility. As a result of the remote working approach, which is not restricted by time, location, and type of communication technology, the success of such demands technological, societal, and organizational support in the style of leadership (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020).

As COVID-19 is deemed a crisis that transitioned the daily operations of organizations, this topic will review the concept of change and crisis management. An in-depth study regarding remote leadership will follow this.

Change and crisis management during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been portrayed as a crisis that has impacted all aspects of each individual's life. Prior research proposes that a crisis can affect an individual's work and psychological well-being to a significant extent (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Ramlachan & Beharry-Ramraj, 2021). The concept 'crisis' has been long misrepresented or underestimated: to exaggerate the unavailability of a popular product; or to express anxiety when a keynote presenter at a conference fails to show up; or when an over-enthusiastic reviewer publishes an unfavorable statement. However, the global COVID-19 pandemic has altered the way this concept is used.

With more than four million people deceased, hundreds of millions infected, and tens of millions unemployed, leaders should be under no impression that a critical organizational crisis involving life, death, and organizational continuity is not purely a momentary inconvenience or challenge. Hence, crisis describes an emotionally overwhelming and worrisome experience in an individual's life (Jaques, 2021).

The outbreak of COVID-19 has resulted in a crisis and pressured a significant transformation in standard working conditions globally, coupled with high levels of uncertainty (Kanupriya, 2020). In addition to the stress related to the pandemic, media speculation has expediated this psychological pandemonium. The existing situation with lockdown and remote working has induced stress in many individuals' lives. Prior studies have acknowledged that excessive work and impractical deadlines, work-family imbalance, and job insecurity are deemed key stressors for employees (Sangoni, 2020).

Leadership and crisis management

It is a reality that leaders may be professionals in ensuring smooth operational flows within organizations; very few leaders have developed their careers in crisis management- and it is an experience most would evade. However, a crisis can be one of the most inspiring and critical moments in the life of a leader (Jaques, 2021).

The strategic manner to address a crisis is not one that is unfamiliar or complex - establishing a crisis management team, establishing manuals, processes, and procedures, ascertaining and training spokespersons, and presenting an occasional simulation exercise. The actual test for leaders is making executive decisions rapidly under extremes levels of pressure of a genuine crisis. Hence, Jaques (2021) explains that a crisis in an organizational context is "a low-

probability yet high-impact event likely to cause serious damage to reputation, or to inhibit the ability to do business.” A crisis is characterized by the uncertainty of the source and impact, overlapped by risk and vagueness. Most crucially, there is no apparent or straightforward resolution, which calls for making the correct decisions. Crises accentuate the criticality of decision-making, all of which is conditioned to strict legal, regulatory or public inspection (Jaques, 2021).

Leading remotely

The state, societies, and businesses are in crisis mode and are seeking direction from their leaders. The problem lies in the change of perception of system order; what individuals thought they knew is now eroding. This could result in a cessation or revolution of an organization that is reliant on leaders. Leaders' response to the pandemic could perpetually alter economic, social, and health aspects (Dirani, et al., 2020).

As time went by, academics established a general best practices criteria that leaders fulfilled pre-COVID-19. Kausner & Posner (2012), cited in Dirani et al. (2020), reviewed numerous “best leadership practices” and discovered five best practices that leaders require, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Best leadership practice

“Leadership Practice	Operating definition
Model the way	Clarifying values and setting the example through: finding own voice, affirming and personifying shared values, and reflection on action.
Inspire a shared vision	Envisioning the future through: imagining the possibilities, finding a common purpose, and enlisting others by appealing to common ideals and animating the vision.
Challenge the process	Searching for opportunities and taking risks through: seizing initiatives, exercising oversight, generating small wins, and learning from experience.
Enable others to act	Fostering collaboration and strengthening others through: creating a climate of trust, facilitating relationships, enhancing self-determination, and developing competence and confidence.
Encourage the heart	Recognizing contributions and celebrating values and victories through: expecting the best, personalizing recognition, creating a spirit of community, and being personally involved.”

Source: Dirani et al. (2020)

Conversely, Douglas (2021) rationalized that the pandemic necessitates a new leadership style. McGuinness (2020), as cited in Dirani et al. (2020), networked with organizational leaders within numerous organizations and have ascertained four skills that leaders require during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- (i) Accountability and awareness of employees' approach to stress management, their job, and personal situations.
- (ii) Foresight, the capacity to analyze misinformation, discipline, and fairness, environmental and situational awareness.
- (iii) Put employees first.
- (iv) Decisive adaptability.

Buttressing on the above, in line with the study conducted by Bogusky-Halper (2020) pertaining to the leadership amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of the study discovered that leaders need to have the following:

- Honest, transparent, direct communication.
- Composure.
- Lead by example.
- Aid employees in staying safe and healthy.
- Empathy.

Similarly, Koehn (2020) ascertained four distinct leadership qualities which will constructively contribute to leading amid the COVID-19 pandemic: acknowledgment of fear, presenting roles and purpose, emphasis on training and development, and considering the vigor and emotion of employees. Furthermore, Schwantes (2020) presented four other leadership qualities required by an organizational leader. This encompasses active listening, maintaining engagement, accounting for emotions, and presenting flexibility.

Research methodology

This research paper employed the desktop research method. This type of study acquired secondary data where research was conducted by examining previous research findings and gaining an extensive understanding of the researched theme (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020).

This method was adopted due to the nature of the research to examine what other academics have collected on HR development in organizations and COVID-19. It also looked at the adjustments taking place within the work environment to adapt to the pandemic. It was also appropriate for the study due to the time sensitivity of the research. This method was beneficial as data was readily available and inexpensive (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). Pertinent and vital academic papers were discovered by performing a systematic search of electronic databases. Articles were found on Google Scholar, Research Gate, and the University of Kwa Zulu Natal's online library using the terms 'COVID-19', 'leadership,' and 'remote working.'

The data was analyzed by combining and evaluating the various information acquired from online research papers. The information collected was to attain the study's aims: (i) to ascertain the challenges presented to organizations and employees in remote-working during COVID-19 and (ii) to ascertain the change in leadership amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings and discussion

This aspect presents the findings and discussion of the study's results. The findings are discussed concerning each research objective. The aim of reviewing the findings is to discover whether they concur or not with existing findings. This aspect begins with discussing the findings related to the challenges presented to organizations and employees in remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing challenges related to communication and work-life balance. Furthermore, the findings related to the change in leadership brought about due to the pandemic are discussed.

(i) To ascertain the challenges presented to organizations and employees in remote-working during COVID-19.

Summary of challenges of remote working from home amid COVID-19 regarding communication and work-life balance can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of challenges of remote working from home amid COVID-19 regarding communication and work-life balance

Challenges	
Communication	Work-life balance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased degree of separation and professional isolation. • A decline in collaboration and information-sharing. • Lack of feedback. • Increased vulnerability of cyberattacks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blurred the line between work and family. • Stress-inducing. • Remote working from home lacks flexibility, direction, and support. • Increase in parental obligations

Source: Authors compilation

Communication

In a study undertaken by Downes (2020), it was acknowledged that there is a significant risk of miscommunication when working remotely at home, and these misinterpretations are challenging to detect. The study further identified that a critical concern is the recipient of the information lacking context. Expediting the above, the study findings of Yang et al. (2021) illustrate a decline in synchronous communication and an increase in asynchronous communication; simultaneously, these effects may make it challenging for employees to obtain and distribute new information across the network.

In line with a study by Naidoo (2020) concerning cyberattacks, it was ascertained that copious COVID-19 themed scams are capitalizing on the heightened dependence of electronic networks and information systems. Furthermore, it was detected that “18 million daily malware and phishing emails related to COVID-19” (Naidoo, 2020, p 306) were circulating in the initial

months of COVID-19 being declared a pandemic. Google, however, “reported more than 240 million COVID-19 related spam emails” on a day-to-day basis (Naidoo, 2020, p 306). Expediting on the above, Kumaran & Lungani (2020:1) concur that phishing, cyberattacks, and threats have multiplied by 5-6 times during the pandemic. “By the end of March, more than 42,000 websites with domains containing ‘COVID’ and ‘corona’ had been registered – the majority of these appear to be suspicious

Work-life balance

In line with a study undertaken by Sahni (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has unquestionably created an atmosphere of apprehension and anxiety in employees coupled with high levels of stress and challenges emanating from remote working. As a result, this could harm the individual’s mental health and overall well-being. Similarly, studies have acknowledged that remote work has increased work intensity and work-home interference, resulting in detrimental effects on employees' well-being and stress levels (International Labour Office, 2021).

Irawanto, Novianti & Roz (2021) researched the job satisfaction of remote working from home amid the pandemic, focusing on Indonesia's work-life balance and work-related stress. With the adoption of a quantitative approach, 472 employees had participated in the study. Responses were analyzed with Smart-PLS software. The study's findings revealed that remote working from home, work-life balance, and work stress significantly affect job satisfaction.

Similarly, Sandoval-Reyes et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between remote work, work-related stress, and work-life balance amid the pandemic in the Latin-American context. The study acquires data from 1285 participants between the period April-May 2020. A partial least-squares-based structured equation modeling was used to analyze the study, revealing that remote work during the pandemic reduced work-life balance and job satisfaction. It ascertained a significant gender difference; when working remotely, perceived stress affects males’ productivity more acutely than females’.

Table 3: Leadership skills pre and amid/post-pandemic

Leadership pre-pandemic	Leadership amid/post-pandemic
“Model the way Inspire a shared vision Challenge the process Enables others to act Encourage the heart.”	Accountability. Foresight. Environmental and situational awareness. Decisive adaptability. Empathetic. Composure. Maintain engagement. Active listening

Source: Dirani et al. (2020); McGuinness (2020); Bogusky- Halper (2020).

(ii) To ascertain the change in leadership amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

In line with the above literature review and Table 3, Kouzes & Posner (2012) highlighted a criterion for leadership best practices pre-COVID-19, this encompasses “modelling the way, inspiring a unified vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act and encouraging the heart.”

However, with the emergence of the pandemic, there has been a shift from the above-mentioned criteria (Douglas, 2021). Authors such as Schwantes (2020), Douglas (2021), Bogusky-Halper (2020), and McGuinness (2020) expedited leadership qualities that are of paramount importance to contribute to the COVID-19 pandemic positively.

Douglas (2021) explains that the pandemic requires leaders who can recognize the importance of bonding with their employees frequently to get a clearer understanding of their worries and conditions. The new criteria encompass leaders to lead with empathy, spend time coaching, and ensure employees have access to the proper means and information and adequate support needed to work competently and sustain their well-being. A study by O.C Tanner, as cited in Douglas (2021), identified that when leaders connect their employees to their objectives, employees are 74% more likely to have high engagement levels and 49% less likely to have burnout. Hatami, Sjatil & Sneader (2020) explain that leaders have to be composed, optimistic, empathetic while simultaneously being highly engaged and fact-based in their actions.

A study conducted by Ergovan, Guo & Seidl (2021) concurs with the above. The study aimed to investigate the change in leadership styles resulting from the effects of the pandemic. The study was exploratory and qualitative and comprised of nine participants. A thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The study's findings revealed that instead of employees being performance-driven with strict monitoring and supervision, leaders had a human-centric approach and were more accessible and fostering to lessen employee stress.

Recommendations

The study aimed (i) to ascertain the challenges presented to organizations and employees in remote-working during COVID-19 and (ii) to ascertain the change in leadership amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The key findings show numerous challenges associated with remote working from home amid the pandemic, particularly work-life balance and communication challenges. In communication, challenges encompass an increased degree of separation and professional isolation, decreased collaboration and information-sharing, lack of feedback, and increased vulnerability of cyberattacks. Conversely, in the aspect of work-life balance, the challenges encompass blurred boundaries between work and family, stress, lack of flexibility, direction and support, and increase in parental obligations. Furthermore, the findings show that the pandemic necessitated a change in organizational leadership skills. These skills encompass accountability, foresight, environmental and situational awareness, decisive adaptability, empathy, composure, engagement, and active listening.

Recommendations include:

- (i) Management of expectations.
- (ii) Establish a dedicated workspace,
- (iii) Regular breaks.
- (iv) Create transition times.
- (v) Establish a routine.
- (vi) Effectively communicate needs.
- (vii) Solicit feedback.
- (viii) Leadership should adopt the skills mentioned above.

Future research

As this research was solely a desktop study, it presents many opportunities for further investigation of the topic employing primary research. This will aid in obtaining a greater understanding of the topic. Facets of remote work demand longitudinal studies, such as the effects of isolation and remote work on employees' well-being, relationships, and performance can be future research. Furthermore, only the short-term effects of remote work during the pandemic are highlighted in the above study. Whether the benefits and drawbacks are sustained over more extended periods remains to be studied. Other proposed areas encompass remote working, organizational leaders, and employees amid the COVID-19 pandemic within a particular industry, organization, province, or country.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to organizations and employees as it was necessitated to facilitate remote work from home. Given this working arrangement, employees lack socialization which emanates from the physical work environment.

In most ways, the findings of this research are consistent with past research, implying that though remote work amid the pandemic is involuntary, the benefits and drawbacks translate effectively. This indicates that with the extent of the unknown, it may be cost-efficient to make suitable adjustments, such as an increase in socialization, now rather than later, mainly if the end goal is permanent remote work from home.

Leaders must take a more functional role in facets of work that have previously been considered instinctive and self-directed within the physical work environment, specifically, employee communication and socializing. Socialization is critical to establishing a workforce that is healthy and happy. It is proposed that video chatting should be highlighted in order to reintroduce body language in communication. Furthermore, virtual social events should be organized and promoted, such as a virtual break room with an open video chat server where employees have the freedom to come and go; this will aid in bringing personality within the communication.

It is impossible to foretell the future; however, remote work is here to stay given current circumstances. Adaptableness, flexibility, effective communication, among other traits of leaders and employees, are crucial to success.

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