EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF WORKING FROM HOME ON EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

https://doi.org/10.47743/jopafl-2023-29-32

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Abstract: The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic caught the world unawares. Many organisations closed the operations and employees had to work from home and as such were not ready for this sudden change of the working environment. The purpose of the study was to establish whether there was any significant relationship between factors impacting on working from home and employee productivity. This was a quantitative study wherein a questionnaire was administered to the respondents. The population was N=60 employees, due to a small population, the entire population (n=60) was utilised. All questionnaires administered to the entire population were returned and the return rate was 100%. The study produced the following results (r=.24, n=60, p-value-.00)); (r=.23, n=60, p-value=.00); (r=.22, n=60, p=.00) and (r=.32, n=60, p=.00), respectively. The results indicated a statistically significant relationship between independent variables (dedicated workspace, tools of trade, self-discipline, work-life-balance) and a dependent variable (employee productivity). The Model summary R-Squared (R^2) produced 68% and the Durbin-Watson statistic 1.92. The results contributed to the body of knowledge within the human resource development field.
Keywords: dedicated workspace, tools of trade, self-discipline, work life-balance, employee productivity

Introduction

The concept of working from home has been in existence for quite sometimes (Chung, 2018). However, many organisations based on their operations could not adopt the concept of working or introduce a hybrid working model (Wojcak & Barath, 2017). The hybrid model has worked for some organisations, especially those that their operations are spread across continents and counties. The outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic tested the agility of organisations and the ability to change course within a short space of time. Organisations had to adapt or close shop as almost all of them were forced to convert employees from being workplace-based to home-based employees (Mailand & Larsen, 2018). Employees had to convert dining and sleeping rooms to working spaces (Mailand & Larsen, 2018). However, employees had to adjust to the reality of working from home and to embrace challenges associated with working from home (Naor, Pinto, Hakakian & Jacobs, 2021). Organisations especially those that did not have a reliable technological infrastructure to communicate and keep in touch with employees found it difficult to cope with the sudden change (Ipsen, Van Veldhoven, Kirchner & Hansen, 2021). Many organisations struggled with collaboration, especially for those employees whose connectivity through laptops and cellphones when working from home (Mailand & Larsen, 2018). Managing and monitoring employees became a daunting task as employers were unable to keep track of the employees and that they were performing the work as expected (Mailand & Larsen, 2018).

Research purpose and objectives

The study is intended to establish whether working from home affects employees' productivity in the workspace. To further provide recommendations on how working from home could be implemented to benefit the organisations.

Literature review

Working from home factors

Dedicated workspace

Employers provide a working space for employees that is in conducive and meeting all health-related standards for employees to feel at home and be productive (Wohlers, Hartner-Tiefenthaler & Hertel, 2019). However, the challenges with a sudden change wherein employees had to pack their working tools to work from home brough with it many challenges. Employees had to find working spaces in their homes something they were not prepared for (Wohlers & Hertel, 2016). It should be noted that homes are not build in such a way that they accommodate the concept of working from home (Kim & De Dear, 2013). Most homes do not have offices because homes are meant to be a family space not a workspace. Therefore, under the circumstances in which employers and employees found themselves in, rooms in the house had to be converted to working spaces (Kim & De Dear, 2013). Irrespective of make-shift offices in homes employees found it difficult to operate in their private spaces. Many employees felt isolated and missed the social aspect of working within the premises of the employer (Traqq, 2023). Employees suffered a lot in that, their spaces did not meet the requirements of a conducive working space, and health issue became a challenge.

Tools of trade

Tools of trade is what the employers provide to employees to perform functions they are employed for within the organisation. The tools of trade are linked to the operational requirements of the business (Cooper, 2020; Willcocks, 2020). Most employers provide employees with laptops, cell phones, data to name a few for ease communication. It is indeed true that for employees to perform their job effectively, they require tools of trade that are in good working conditions to assist them to contribute to the achievement of organisational strategic objectives (Cooper, 2020). Employers will provide not provide the tools of trade but also offices which are conducive to work at (Willcocks, 2020). It is therefore important as stated in Deshpande et al. (2016) that 'when selecting a technological system is to choose one that caters to most, if not all, of difficulties that a remote team is facing and can communicate effectively without any hustles. This will allow all members of that team to participate in decision making (Cooper, 2020).

Self-discipline

Self-discipline is when a person is able to exercise independence and not be micro-managed by the supervisor. Working from home posed a lot of challenges with regards to the discipline of employees (Evans, Meyers, De Calseyde & Stavrova, 2022). This is even though working from home provides some form of flexibility (Traqq, 2023). It should, however, be noted that when employees are at home, they consider that time to be a family time and they need to attend to personal matters. Therefore, working from home requires a lot of discipline (Traqq, 2023). In instances wherein employees do not exercise self-

discipline, they are likely not to perform at the level expected by the organisation. Inzlicht and Friese (2021) highlight that on the other hand, employees who are able to exercise self-control and are able to discipline themselves have a better chance to be reliable to the organisation. Hence, it is important that organisations develop programmes that are intended to assist employees to exercise self-discipline.

The programmes will further assist employees to stay focused in their work and not be tempted by activities happening at home and the community. Boundaries should be set so that one is not impacted by such activities (Troll, Venz, Weitzenegger & Loschelder, 2022). Troll et al. (2022) further state that temptations to join family and community activities will make it difficult for an employee to stay focused and to maintain acceptable levels of productivity (Nguyen, 2021). Again, developing a work routine will assist the employee to stay on course all the time.

Work-Life balance

Jyothi and Jyothi (2012) described work-life balance as 'achieving a balance between employees' family or personal life and work lives. Employers acknowledges that they have a workforce that is drawn from society, and as such they have other interests that might not be necessary related to their work (Lopez-Igual & Rodríguez-Modrono, 2020). In the same breath organisations have been attempting to assist employees to have a balance life that accommodates both work and family or personal life. Of importance while organisations acknowledges that employees have other competing interest, employees are expected to perform at an expected level (Lopez-Igual et al., 2020). Jackson and Fransman, 2018) allude to that in instances wherein there is no balance of work-life and personal-life can even affect the health of an employee. This in turn will have an impact on the work of that employee. It is for these reasons that organisations should endeavour to understand employees outside of the workplace Jackson & Fransman, 2018).

In general family structures have changed when compared to a period when it was a taboo for a man or woman to raise children alone. However, in today's world it is not frown upon when children are raised by a single parent. Therefore, this requires a strong sense of consciousness and a whole lot of balancing acts between work and family lives (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). In short employee wellbeing should be put at the fore front when organisations contemplate programmes that will assist employees to cope under this demanding world (Haapakangas, Hallman, Mathiassen & Jahncke, 2018). In so doing organisations will be avoiding challenges that employees are likely to face when not assisted. It should be remembered that work-life balance includes a whole person that is physical, emotional, and social (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020).

Productivity

Lin and Bao (2019) opine that productivity is the level at which an organisation produces a product or offers a service to the customers. Productivity can be measured in various ways depending on the type of business. Human capital plays a crucial role in producing for the organisation (Lin & Bao, 2019). Loss of productivity in an organisation can lead to results of non-delivery of orders or services to the customers. Therefore, it is important that organisations should create a platform wherein employees can thrive. This platform can include placing resources at the disposal of employees to perform their work (Penalver, Salanova, Martinez & Schaufeli, 2019). The creation of platforms for employees to excel

makes an organisation to hold employees accountable in instances where production is decreased or becomes low (Appel-Meulenbroek, Steps, Wenmaekers & Arentze, 2021). Furthermore, organisation can integrate technology with human capital to increase the rate of productivity. The integration and the foresight of some organisations in respect of bringing integrated systems assisted these organisations at the time of COVID-19, unlike those that were caught unawares (Awada, Lucas, Becerik-Gerber & Roll, 2021). Organisations that were ready at the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic were agile enough, in that the pandemic did not affect their productivity like those organisations that were not ready (Awada et al., 2021). Productivity was directly impacted during this period, especially to organisation that relied on the physical presence of their employees to produce goods or services (Lin & Bao, 2019). Awada et al. (2021) further allude to the fact that those employers who could not provide reliable connection, employees had issues depending on where they were located in different places were in other places connectivity was an issue. Therefore, productivity was affected as managers were unable to disseminate instructions properly.

Research Methodology And Design

Research approach

The study employed a quantitative method. In this study a questionnaire was utilised to collect data and was analysed using MS Excel and further transferred to SPSS for more complex analyses. Rubin and Babbie (2016) posit that this type of research (quantitative) gives the researcher an opportunity to use a questionnaire and not to have an influence on how respondents fill in the questionnaire, which allows independence from the respondents' perspective.

Research participants

The total number of people in a particular environment or elements that are occupying a particular space (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). The sample is drawn from the population. Sampling should represent characteristics of the population for the study to be valid. However, in this study the researcher utilised the entire population *(N=60)*, which comprised of Control Language Practitioners, Senior Language Practitioner and Language Practitioners covering all official languages in the Republic of South Africa. The entire population was utilised, as drawing a sample from the population would have led to a small sample, which would not have been a fair representation of the population. The questionnaire response rate was 100%.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Gender	%	Age group	%	Rank	%	Education	%
Female	63	18-30 years	17	Control Language Practitioner	18	Diploma	7
Male	37	31-40 years	30	Senior Language Practitioner	18	Degree	48
		41-50 years	33	Language Practitioner	64	Honours	30
		51-60 years	17			Masters	13
		61 years-above	3			Doctorate	2
Total	100	60	100	60	100	60	100

The questionnaire was administered to a group of Control, Senior and Language practitioners. The entire population was 60 respondents. Therefore, the researcher by virtue

of a small population took a decision to administer the questionnaire to the entire population. The reason of utilising the entire population is that a small population would lead to a very small sample. In ensuring that a questionnaire is easy to understand, it was first piloted to at least 5 respondents, the results of the pilot indicated to a simple and a clear questionnaire to complete.

Research instrument

The questionnaire was divided into six (6) sections as follows: section A: demographics; section B: dedicated workspace; section C: tools of trade; section D: self-discipline; section E: work-life balance and section F: productivity with statements or questions related to that relevant variable. A 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; and 5=Strongly agree) was utilised for all independent variables and a dependent variable. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire was tested using a Cronbach's alpha. Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 22 was utilised. The instrument proved to meet both the reliability and validity of a recommended threshold of above 0.6 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Below (Table 2) present the validity and reliability of the instrument so utilised.

Table 2: Cronbach Alpha coefficients

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Dedicated workspace	.728	6
Tools of trade	.766	7
Self-discipline	.812	6
Work-life-balance	.808	6
Productivity	.878	8

Table 3: Summary of descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic
Dedicated workspace	60	3.16	.402
Tools of trade	60	3.03	.418
Self-discipline	60	3.09	.422
Work-life-balance	60	3.01	.398
Employee productivity	60	3.08	.416
Valid N (listwise)	60		

Research procedure and ethical considerations

This was survey research wherein a questionnaire was utilised. The questionnaire was used to establish whether there was any significant relationship between factors impacting on working from home and employee productivity. Collecting data utilising a questionnaire has more advantage than the drawbacks in that a questionnaire make data collection to be simple. The researcher while collecting data had no direct influence as the respondents complete a questionnaire independently away from the researcher. What the researcher does is collect or receive the questionnaires for analysis purposes and not to do any other thing beside analysing. Confidentiality on data collected through a questionnaire protected the confidentiality of correspondents as their private information even their names were not revealed or written on the questionnaire (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011).

The questionnaire was administered to a group of Control, Senior and Language practitioners. The entire population was 60 respondents. Therefore, the researcher by virtue of a small population took a decision to administer the questionnaire to the entire population. The reason utilising the entire population is that a small population would lead to a very small sample. In ensuring that a questionnaire is easy to understand, it was first piloted to at least 5 respondents, the results of the pilot indicated to a simple and a clear questionnaire to complete. The researcher delivered the questionnaire physically to the respondents and collected the questionnaires after ten (10) working days from a box provided, which was placed at all entrances of the section. The Researcher after collecting the data, it was captured using MS Excel wherein the data was validated to establish whether the data was captured as expected. This was done to eliminate errors when analysing the data.

After data was captured and validate on MS Excel, it was then transferred to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Complicated analyses were done from SPSS, while for simple statistics such as percentages MS Excel was used. In addition, respondents were given an option to withdraw from the study in instances wherein they felt that their privacy was being infringed (De Vos, Strydom, Schulze & Patel, 2011). The researcher emphasised that confidentiality of respondents will be kept private, and information was used for the purposes of the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2016).

Statistical analysis

Data as alluded to above was analysed using both the MS Excel and SPSS. Percentages were utilised to analyse the demographics, which comprised of the following: (gender, age group, level of education, rank of respondents). Further on the demographics means and standard deviations was generated using SPSS. Data such as establishing the relationship between independent (dedicate workspace, tools of trade, self-discipline, work-life balance) variables and a dependent variable (employee productivity) SPSS was further used. In addition, the significance value was tested at a 95% confidence level ($p \leq 0.05$). Tables were used to present the data which indicated the strength of the independent (dedicate workspace, tools of trade, self-discipline, work-life balance) variables and a dependent variable (employee productivity). To measure how close the data was to the fitted regression line R-Squared was utilised (Dhakal, 2018).

Results

The demographic results in *Table 1* in respect of gender: female (63%), male (37%), In respect of the age group, the results indicated that 33% of the respondents are in the age category of 41-50, and the least age group were those in the age group of 61 years and above at 3%. The results with regards to the rank further indicated that most respondents were Language Practitioners at 64%, and the least respondents were Control Language Practitioners at 11%. In addition, level of education produced the following results, most respondents had undergraduate degrees at 48% and least respondents had diplomas. Below *Table 4* are the results generated testing the relationship between variables in view of the hypotheses:

Table 4: Correlations between variables

		Dedicated workspace	Tools of trade	Self-discipline	Work-life balance	Employee productivity
Dedicated workspace	Pearson Correlation	1	.249**	.327**	.255**	.242**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Tools of trade	Pearson Correlation	.249**	1	.202**	.098	.236**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.073	.000
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Self-discipline	Pearson Correlation	.327**	.202**	1	.492**	.227**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	60	60	60	60	60
Work-life balance	Pearson Correlation	.255**	.098	.492**	1	.326**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.073	.000		.000
	N	50	50	50	50	50
Employee productivity	Pearson Correlation	.242**	.236**	.227**	.326**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	60	60	60	60	60
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Table 5: Hypotheses on relationship between variables

No	Hypotheses	Path Coefficients (P value)	Supported/not supported
(Ho1)	There is no significant relationship between dedicated workspace and employee productivity.	(r = .242, *P*>0.05)	Null hypothesis not supported
(Ho2)	There is no significant relationship between tools of trade and employee productivity.	(r = .239, *P*>0.05)	Null hypothesis not supported
(Ho3)	There is no significant relationship between self-discipline and employee productivity.	(r =-.227, *P*>0.05)	Null hypothesis not supported
(Ho4)	There is no significant relationship between work-life balance and employee productivity.	(r =-.326, *P*>0.05)	Null hypothesis not supported

Table 6: Model summary

Model	R	R-Squared	Adjusted R-Squared	Std. Error of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.275[a]	.068	.044	.34024	1.922

a. Predictors: (Constant), dedicated workspace, tools of trade, self-discipline, work-life balance

Discussion

Outline of results

The purpose of the study was to establish whether there were relationships between factors impacting on working from home and employee productivity in the Language Service Section, Parliament of RSA. The study had four hypotheses as highlighted in Table 4 and 5 that were tested using Pearson-product moment. The results produced the following

results: H_o1: There is no significant relationship between dedicated workspace and employee productivity. The results generated was (r=.24, n=60, p-value-.00), this demonstrated that there is a strong statistically significant relationship between dedicated workspace and employee productivity. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not supported in favour of the alternative hypothesis.
The findings of H_o2, stating There is no significant relationship between tools of trade and employee productivity, produced the following results (r=.23, n=60, p-value=.00), the results indicated that there is a positive relationship between tools of trade and employee productivity. The relationship was also significant. Meaning that the tools of trade does indeed affect productivity. Therefore, null hypothesis was not supported in favour of the alternative hypothesis.
The findings of H_o3: There is no significant relationship between self-discipline and employee productivity. The results produced (r=.22, n=60, p=.00), which indicated that there is a strong positive linear correlation between the variables, which is statistically significant. Therefore, null hypothesis was not supported in favour of the alternative hypothesis.
The results with regards to H_o4: There is no significant relationship between work-life balance and employee productivity. The results produced (r=.32, n=60, p=.00), which indicated that there is a strong positive linear correlation between the variables, which is statistically significant. Therefore, null hypothesis was not supported in favour of the alternative hypothesis. In addition, The R-Squared (R^2) produced .68, which is equal to 68% and the Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.922, which is not less than 1 or greater than 3. This means that the model falls within the acceptable norm.

Practical implications
The study makes contribution to the body of knowledge within the human resource development field in as far as factors on working from home and employee productivity. The knowledge generated from the study will assist Language Services Section to improve support of employees while they are working from home. In addition, the study can be used to used side by side with other studies conducted in this area of working from home and factors impacting on employee productivity.

Limitations and recommendations
The study was conducted within the Language Services Section of Parliament of RSA. The study did not include Unit and Section Managers and Managers in other Units and Sections. The study focused only on the factors affecting employee productivity when working from home.

Conclusion

This study intended to establish whether there is a relationship between independent variables (dedicate workspace, tools of trade, self-discipline, work-life balance) and a dependent variable (employee productivity) within Language Services Section. The results indicated that the relationship between independent variables and a dependent variable was positive and statistically significant. Hence, null hypotheses were not supported. The results demonstrate that when one variable moves to a particular direction so is the other variable. The R-Square produce 68%.

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