

A Study on Telecommuting as a Coping Strategy for Work –Family Conflict



Management

KEYWORDS : Work-Family conflict, Telecommuting, Job autonomy.

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ABSTRACT

This study focusses on finding whether telecommuting would help employees to cope up with work life conflict. Telecommuting policy is gaining importance nowadays. The study is conducted among IT professionals working in Bangalore. Firstly, the study, through secondary research confines the attributes of telecommuting and work family conflict. The second step of the study is a survey administering a questionnaire. The employees' opinion on the benefits of telecommuting is analyzed in finding whether telecommuting is the coping strategy. Telecommuting is infamous due to the practical difficulties and challenges in implementing the policy in India. There are good number of benefits for both the employer and employee in adapting telecommuting policy and keeping this in mind, telecommuting increases scope for better performance, higher productivity, reduction in overhead, improved employee retention and attraction, better work-life balance for the employee's, etc. This paper analyzes the policy of telecommuting with reference to work-family conflict of employees.

INTRODUCTION

Work-family conflict occurs when there are incompatible demands between the work and family roles of an individual. Conflict occurs in both work and family. Work family conflict is generally a resultant of Family interference in Work (FIW) and Work interference in Family. Measures have to be taken to balance both work and family, since it may lead consequences like, occupational burnout, quitting intentions and job stress, and decreased health and job performance. Work-family conflict is a source of stress that many individuals experience. One of the latest and trending coping strategies for work-family conflict is Telecommuting. The term "Telecommute" has been coined in 1972 by Jack Nilles. It is a way in which employees enjoy work in terms of flexibility, location and timings. Many researches confirm that telecommuting helps in resolving the conflict between work and family. Telecommuting is infamous in India but the phenomenon is gradually growing. The annual survey done by the Society for Human Resource Management last year, found a greater increase in the number of companies planning to offer telecommuting in 2014. Studies state that telecommuting has risen 79 percent between 2005 and 2012 and now makes up 2.6 percent of the American work force, or 3.2 million workers, according to statistics from the American Community Survey.

Increased employee retention	Change forces organization outside comfort zone
Reduction in overhead facility costs	Difficulty in fostering team synergy
Larger talent pool from which the organisation can recruit/select	Possible negative effects on workplace social networking outside workplace

Table 1: BENEFITS OF TELECOMMUTING IN THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

Advantages	Disadvantages
Higher morale and job satisfaction	Implications of limited interaction with the line manager for career oriented discussions
Autonomy and flexibility on work schedule	Difficulty in distinguishing between work and value family time
Elimination/Reduction of commute time	Feeling of isolation from workplace and social networks related to workplace
Less money spent on commuting, parking, work attire	Inadequate equipment or lack of technical support
Can avoid unnecessary office politics	Feelings of hostility/resentment from co-workers

Table 2: IN THE ORGANIZATION'S PERSPECTIVE:

Advantages	Disadvantages
Improved employee productivity	Difficulty in employee performance monitoring
Lower employee absenteeism	Difficulty in measuring employee productivity

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dex and Scheibl (2001) studied ten small and medium-sized enterprises and four large organizations and established the reasons for implementing flexible working arrangements. The study highlighted on business benefits and employee wellbeing. It was found that the motives varied by the type of arrangements as well as by the size of the organization and the way employee relations were structured.

Duxbury and Higgins (1992) studied about telecommuting after regular work hours as a work arrangement where work needs are fulfilled at home on a computer outside regular office hours. They examined how telecommuting impacts an individual's ability to balance work and family demands (measured as role overload, spillover of interference from work to family and spillover of interference from family to work). They gave a structural model for the investigation of work-family conflicts innovated by investigating a sample of Canadian organizations. The research model investigated the both the work to family and family to work conflicts and its implications.

Maxwell and McDougall (2004) conducted seven case studies in public sector and voluntary sector and found that flexi-time work was predominant among other forms of flexibility offered by these case study organizations. Further, two rationales for introducing work life balance were found to be consistent across all the case studies. First was to improve the recruitment of the best people and second was to improve retention of staff.

Noraini M. Noor (2003) tested three sets of variables namely demographic, personality and work and family-related variables in light of employee well-being. The study included a test of the indirect effect of these variables on well-being, via perceptions of work-family conflict. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were done. The model provided a better fit of the complex relationships that existed between variables of women's work and family lives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to find out, whether telecommuting will reduce work-family conflict.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design: The type of research design undertaken is descriptive research.

Area of the study: The study was carried out among IT professionals working in Bangalore.

Sample size: 100

Sampling technique: Convenience sampling method

Tool for collection of data: Questionnaire method

DATA COLLECTION METHOD:

The main sources through which data is collected are:

1. Primary Data: The instrument used to collect primary data is results obtained by administering a questionnaire.
2. Secondary Data: Secondary Data is collected through reviewing various e-journals, journals, books and websites.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Table3: Showing demographic details of the respondents.

Demographic details	Content	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	62	62.0
	Female	38	38.0
Age	Below 25	3	3.0
	25-34	16	16.0
	35-44	65	65.0
	45 and Above	16	16.0

Marital status	Married	85	85.0
	Unmarried	15	15.0
No of years of experience	Below 5	11	11.0
	5-10	8	8.0
	11-15	63	63.0
	16-20	18	18.0
Designation	Junior Manager	17	17.0
	Middle Manager	50	50.0
	Senior Manager	33	33.0

It is inferred from the table that most of the respondents are from the age group of 35-44 and the least is below 25 and most of respondents are male with 62% and 38% are female. It is inferred from the table that highest experience range is if 11-15 years and most of the respondents are working as Middle managers of 50% and 33% of senior managers and 17% of them as junior managers.

Table4: Showing the job autonomy of employees through telecommuting.

S:no	Job Autonomy	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	87	87.0
2	No	13	13.0
	Total	100	100.0

It is inferred from the table that 87% of the respondents opined that they have job autonomy while opting telecommuting policy to work.

TABLE 5: CORRELATION TABLE FOR WORK VARIABLES AND FAMILY VARIABLES

Hypothesis:

H₀: There is no significant association between work variables and Family variables

H₁: There is significant association between work variables and Family variables

Correlations							
			Telecommuting Policy	Work Demands	Expenditure	Job satisfaction	Responsibility
Job Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	1	-.055	-.591**	-.561**	.862**	-.636**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.585	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100
Telecommuting Policy	Pearson Correlation	-.055	1	-.052	-.056	-.048	.022
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.585		.609	.583	.638	.826
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100
Work Demands	Pearson Correlation	-.591**	-.052	1	.475**	-.471**	.526**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.609		.000	.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100
Expenditure	Pearson Correlation	-.561**	-.056	.475**	1	-.465**	.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.583	.000		.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100
Job_satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.862**	-.048	-.471**	-.465**	1	-.468**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.638	.000	.000		.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100
Responsibility	Pearson Correlation	-.636**	.022	.526**	.611**	-.468**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.826	.000	.000	.000	
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Inference

It has been established in the light of the calculated table values that there is positive and significant correlation between Job autonomy and Job Satisfaction. It is obvious that freedom and responsibility in one's job enhance job satisfaction.

As per the correlation results it is observed that there is a highly significant correlation between work demands and responsibility. It is a common human resources principle that responsibility

increases work demands and work demands bears more responsibility. It is no wonder that responsibility and work demands are positively and significantly correlated.

The correlation results establish that work demands are positively and more significantly correlated with reduction in expenses of an employee. It is also seen that more responsibility in job has a positive and significant relationship in reduction of expenses. It may be understood in

simpler terms that more concentration in the job results in lesser incidental expenses. Though these are contradicting eventualities in general, keeping in mind the subject matter of discussion, i.e., telecommuting, it gives us a positive note that employees believe that telecommuting reduces incidental expenses.

Table 6: Regression analysis summary table for Work family conflict and telecommuting variables

R	R Square
.677 ^a	.459

The above table suggests that all the selected variables fit into regression model. R is the multiple correlation coefficient of dependent variable with the group of independent variables. It is found to be positive and high in this model. R square is the proportion of variation in dependent variable explained by the group of independent variables in the equation. In this model, a high value of R square is found, showing that the score is found to be statistically a good fit.

The following ANOVA table, by the significance value confirms the dependency of work family conflict on the telecommuting policy

Table 6.1: Anova Results of the Regression Analysis of work family conflict and telecommuting policy

ANOVA ^b						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.082	2	15.541	41.100	.000 ^a
	Residual	36.678	97	.378		
	Total	67.760	99			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Tiredness, Work Life Balance						
b. Dependent Variable: Stress Management						

The above table shows the results of ANOVA conducted on the regression model. The value of F shows that R square is fairly significant at 5 % level of significance. Hence it can be concluded that the regression model is statistically fit and significant. The significant value of (p) <0.05, the level of significance in Anova table ensures the significance of regression. The regression coefficients are given in the following table

Table 6.2: Regression Coefficients of work family conflict and telecommuting variables.

Variables	Regression coefficient	Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	.317		4.772	.000
Work Life Balance	.098	.314	2.884	.005
Tiredness	.098	.413	3.793	.000

The above table represents that work life balance influences stress as equally as tiredness influences stress.

The regression equation is
 Low Stress = Work Life Balance + Reduced Tiredness
 = .098+.098

From the value of this equation it is understood that both work life balance and tiredness are influencing stress equally. This may be due to the fact that employees who have a good work life balance do not incur stress as well as employees who reduce tiredness are fresh enough to fight stress.

FINDINGS

1. Majority of the respondents are male, who are availing telecommuting policy.
2. Married employees are high in number. They are about 85% of the total respondents.
3. Middle level managers are the majority who work from whom among the junior level and the senior level managers.
4. Majority of the employees have opined that they have freedom and privilege to make decisions in their job.
5. 51% of the respondents have opined that through telecommuting they are able to spend reasonable time with family.
6. 80% of the respondents have agreed that they are free from stress, anxiety, fatigue through telecommuting
7. About 85% of the respondents opined that they have reduced the expenditure on travel, clothing etc. through telecommuting policy.

CONCLUSION

Telecommuting is a novel concept in the Indian context, yet it seems to be a fruitful measure to implement in order to achieve a better work life balance. Employers reap the benefits in terms of capital expenses in today's cluttering cosmopolitan environment. Though telecommuting has few disadvantages, organisations can think on curbing the demerits and implementing the policy in order to envisage employees feel comfortable. It is certain that in the near future telecommuting would become the order of the day.

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