

A Study of adoption of Teleworking in Select Organizations in Pune

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Key Words:

1. Telework
2. Telecommuting
3. teleworker

Abstract

Recent advances in telecommunications, technology and transportation, have freed many workers (especially the knowledge workers) from the traditional model of fixed work place. The telework phenomenon is an outcome of the recent changes in our ideas of work and the workplace. The

Telework is defined as working outside the conventional mode of working and communicating with it by way of telecommunications or computer-based technology (Nilles, 1994; Olson & Primps, 1984).

The objective of the study was to understand the adoption of teleworking by the companies from various sectors. It also helped to understand the different traits of a teleworker. The paper also, describes the benefits of teleworking for employees and employers.

The scope of the study was restricted to Pune city. The survey was done by circulating the questionnaire, through electronic mode, to employees of different companies. The respondents were from varied sectors like, Manufacturing, services, IT, etc. The study has underlined the pros and cons of implementing telework.

INTRODUCTION

In modern day organizations, several employees do not have to report to the office every day and can work from a remote location their home or any suitable place for them to work.

Telework evolved from the concept of home based work. Many organizations have started to implement this concept of flexi working hours. Long travels of the workers also made working flexible, means against the traditionally working culture.

Recent advances in telecommunications technology and transportation have freed many workers (especially the knowledge workers) from the traditional model of fixed place of work in two major ways.

First, many knowledge workers spend at least a part of their regular business hours either in home offices, satellite offices or neighborhood work centers close to their homes, at customer sites, or on in transit. Second, it

has become increasingly common for work to be performed by virtual teams — where the membership of the team is not limited by the physical location of an employee's primary workplace or a team member's functional unit within the organization.

The telework phenomenon is an outcome of the recent changes in our ideas of work and the workplace. Telework is defined as working outside the conventional workplace and communicating with it by way of telecommunications or computer-based technology

Kurland and Bailey (1999) interpreted telework as including home-based telecommuting, satellite centers, neighborhood work centers, and mobile working. The commonality in terms is the transition from "in-person supervision to remote managing, from face-to-face communication to telecommunication-related communication, from on-site working to off-site or multiple-site work, and, in the case of groups, from side-by-side Teleworking 5 collaboration to virtual teamwork" (p. 53).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Telework involves 'the decoupling of work activity from one material workplace such as "the office" . . . as well as from

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prescribed working hours, work schedules, scripts and practices' (Tietze, 2002: 385), thus challenging traditional organization theory and management practices.

Traditional management practices, especially the exercise of control, based on the visibility (i.e. the capability to observe the employee) and the presence (i.e. the capability of the employee to interact with co-workers) of employees are not directly applicable to remote working arrangements like telework (Felstead et al., 2003). Consequently, telework involves a re-regulation of work, that is, a reorganization of the conduct of work (Edwards et al., 2002), which will have variable effects on the employment relationship.

Telework is defined as a form of work organization where the work is done partially or completely out of the conventional or traditional company workplace, with the aid of information and telecommunication services.

Joice (1999) defined telework as a "work arrangement in which employees work at alternate worksites to conduct some or all of their officially assigned work during paid work hours" (p. 3). He also stipulated that the alternative worksite must reduce the employees' commute, and that the employee must average at least eight hours every two weeks.

Jack Nilles, the "father" of telework, defined it as "any form of substitution of information technologies for work-related travel" (Ellison, 1999, p. 341). On the other hand, he defined telecommuting as "periodic work out of the principal office, one or more days per week, either at home, at a client's site, or in a telework center" (p. 341).

Ellison (1999) explained that the definitions of these terms have been the "subject of substantial deliberation and little consensus for both academics and practitioners" (p. 340). The two most common terms used in the research are "teleworking" and "telecommuting". Some researcher's use these terms interchangeably. Fairweather (1999) explained that telecommuting uses information and communication technologies to bring work to the worker and that some, but not all, types of telework should be considered telecommuting.

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Telework has emerged as a tool to tide over the shortage of certain category of professionals, a retention tool, a policy

to help women to maintain work-life balance (especially in the context of rising proportion of women in the workforce), a productivity tool that cuts down on long distance travel to the work place, a cost saving tool to optimize office space & other infrastructure requirements, and so on. Telework or Work from home has also been triggered in some cases due to an individual's personal requirements such as taking care of the old parents.

Attracting, retaining and motivating talent is a key objective as well as a challenge for all organizations. The altered milieu poses a challenge for the organizations to keep the teleworkers engaged and derive the maximum productivity as compared to the conventional ones. The human dynamics in terms of supervisor-employee interactions, peer bonding, support and supervisions, etc. also need to be considered in a new perspective.

From an employee perspective, literature suggests that certain cohorts embrace teleworking. These include married employees, women, and parents with children at home, mothers of young children, well-educated employees, and managers or professionals (Mokhtarian et al., 1998; Pratt, 1999).

Telework also places distinct demands on the teleworker, in terms of the ability to be fully engaged and productive in your work, while being located at home, connected to the company's network over a VPN connection, if needed, while physical presence in office is not expected.

In the developed world, the concept of telework has been in existence for more than 2 decades. In the Indian context, several organizations are welcoming the concept of telework and also have started adopting it. IT organizations were or rather are the first ones to adopt this concept.

Some Manufacturing organizations have also started adopting the concept of working from home. One manufacturing organization has made it compulsory for the women, with children below 13 age, to work from home for twice a week. However, the adoption of Teleworking is expectedly at a nascent stage in the manufacturing sector, as there is 90% of the workforce working on the shop floor. Possibly it could be extended to certain departments doing the support or backend jobs, like Accounts, HR, Sales force, etc.



Adoption of teleworking is mostly the decision of the senior management and calls for a well-established policy. Generally, the practice has been to restrict it to certain segment of the employees.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1.To study the status of adoption of telework by organizations and employees.
- 2.To study the benefits of telework to the organizations and employees.
- 3.To identify the traits of Teleworker.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Descriptive research design method approach has been used to investigate the research questions. The study sought to get an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the teleworker, the adoption of teleworking by the organizations. It has also, helped in understanding the benefits of teleworking for organizations and the employees.

The scope of the study is restricted to Pune city. Pune has a unique blend of manufacturing, services, government, semi-government and educational organizations. The demographics of Pune provide enough diversity in terms of age, gender, socio-economic strata, and other key dimensions.

The researcher has adopted a cross-sectional and descriptive research for the study. The respondents were employees working in the organized sector, manufacturing and services, in Pune. The sample design was probabilistic in nature. A sampling frame of email ids of employees from

over 50 organizations was generated through multiple sources. Snowballing method was deployed to generate the email ids itself. Several trigger and initiation points were identified to generate the sampling frame and data base of email ids. The email ids were organized in a random fashion in an Excel Sheet. A test email was sent to all the email ids in the database for validation of email ids. Post validation of email ids, an introductory email was sent to valid email ids for verifying that the respondents were employees of the organizations who have adopted or have plans of adopting the teleworking practices.

A structured questionnaire was developed based on literature review and indepth interviews of senior HR professionals from diverse sectors of the industry in Pune, both in the manufacturing sector as well as the service sector. The questionnaire was self-administered by the respondents in an electronic format. The questionnaire was a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions.

RESPONDENT'S PROFILES

Total Number of Respondents: 27

Gender: Female – 9, Male - 18

Sectors: BFSI – 3, E-Commerce – 4, Manufacturing – 5, Information Technology (IT) – 15

Companies: Birla Financial Distribution Ltd, Capegemini, Foodpanda, Mahindra & Mahindra, Lear

Corporation, Persistent, Zensar, Info Edge (naukri.com), Tech Mahindra, Redington, etc.

Findings, Analysis and Discussion:

The findings of the study are tabulated and discussed below.

Table No. 1: Status of adoption of teleworking

Item	No. (Out of 27)	%
Have adopted	11	40.74
No proposal to adopt telework	1	3.70
May adopt in about an year	1	3.70
May adopt but unsure of the time frame	2	3.70
Depends on the business need – but have no position on it right now	11	40.74
Cannot say	1	3.70
Other	1	3.70

The study reveals that the most of the organizations have adopted the concept, but this adoption is mostly depended on the business needs.

Table No. 2: Current Status of teleworking policy

Item	No. (Out of 27)	%
On ad hoc basic	9	33.33
By Select Departments	5	18.52
To Select Employees	5	18.52
As a Well-defined policy	7	25.93

IT Companies like, Zensar, Persistent, Capgemini, Maersk Global - India, etc., have already implemented. While some organizations roll out teleworking as per the business requirement eg Yes Bank, Lear, Wartsila, etc. So, the IT companies are more likely to allow telecommuting than

non-IT ones. But, Mahindra and Mahindra has set a policy for WFH, but to a certain set of employees. While, TAL Manufacturing may not have this policy at all. 39.5% have already implemented while. It also depends on the business need – but have no position on it right now.

Table No.3: Policy about teleworking

Item	No. (Out of 27)	%
All employees	8	29.63
Only Senior management	7	25.93
Only Middle Management	5	18.52
Only field work force	7	25.93
Only Females	3	11.11
Only Males	1	3.70
Only those with a certain years of experience	7	25.93
Cannot say	7	25.93

Mostly the policy of Teleworking is equal for all employees across the organizations. Some of the organizations

extend the benefit of teleworking to senior, middle level and to the field workforce.

Table no.4 : Proportion or Jobs / Roles compatible with requirements of Teleworking

Proportion	No. (Out of 27)	%
Less than 10 %	7	25.93
Less than 20 %	6	22.22
Less than 30 %	5	18.52
Less than 40 %	0	0.00
Less than 50 %	5	18.52
Less than 60 %	2	7.41
Less than 70 %	0	0.00
Less than 80 %	2	7.41
Less than 90 %	0	0.00
100 % are compatible	0	0.00

Most of the respondents have said that less than 10% jobs will be compatible for teleworking. Again

the role or nature of job will also depend to implement teleworking

Table No.5 : Perception about relative proportion of teleworkers w.r.t. Peer organizations

Proportion	No. (out of 27)	%
More than comparable organizations in my industry	4	14.81
Same As comparable organizations in my industry	12	44.44
Less Than comparable organizations in my industry	10	37.04

Table No.6: Organizational Readiness to adopt teleworking

Item	N (yes)	%
My organization is ready and willing to make the profound cultural shift that teleworking requires	6	22.22
Top management of my organization is supportive of telework policies and teleworkers	17	62.96
Middle Management of my organization is supportive of telework policies and teleworkers	10	37.04
Operational management of my organization is supportive of telework policies and teleworkers	10	37.04
Employee of my organization are supportive of telework policies and teleworkers	16	59.26
Teleworkers face cultural resistance from their managers and team, or find themselves as a second citizen versus those in headquarters / office.	5	18.52
Our organizational culture is friendly to remote workers.	12	44.44
As an organization we have a target of defined number / percentage of employee to work from home in a given FY.	2	7.41
As an organization we are trying to minimize the number of workers entering the office place. As part of a plan to ease traffic	2	7.41
We struggle to manage remote teams	8	29.63
We are successful with distributed workforces	9	33.33
Larger companies are more likely to allow telecommuting than smaller ones	8	29.63
Non-union organizations are more likely to offer telecommuting than those with unions	3	11.11
IT companies are more likely allow telecommuting than non-IT ones	22	81.48
Even more employees would work at home if the opting were available	18	66.67
A Global marketplace will increase and grow a talent pool of teleworkers and productivity will surely grow	11	40.74
Teleworking is viable and offers significant advantages for the employer and for employees	15	55.56
Teleworking option essential to an organization's ability to attract and retain talented employees.	11	40.74

The above table shows that most of the organizations are now quite ready for implementing teleworking. Most of the organization's, top management is very well supportive

towards teleworking. IT companies are more likely to adopt telecommunicating as compared to non-IT companies.

Table No 7: Teleworkers' Profile

Item	No. (out of 27)	%
More number of female employees prefer to work from home as compared to male employees.	19	70.37
More number of younger employees (<35 years of age) prefer to work from home as compared elderly employees.	7	25.93
Juniors in the organization have little opportunities to work from home as compared to seniors	13	48.15
The management function (marketing, sales, finance, HR) influences the likelihood of working from home	11	40.74

Most of the female employees work from home as compared to male employees. Junior employees have less opportunity for teleworking as compared to seniors since

working in isolation needs maturity and problem solving skills.

Table No.8: Employees' Perception about teleworking

Item	No. (out of 27)	%
A fad that will die down soon	0	0.00
Just beginning to be adopted	12	44.44
An established trend	12	44.44
A trend that is going to be widely adopted going ahead	20	74.07
A trend that is on the way out	2	7.41
Other	4	14.81

The above responses show that soon teleworking will be widely adopted going ahead

Table No. 9: Potential organizational benefits of tele-working

Item	No. (out of 27)	%
Save costs per person	15	55.56
Reduce absenteeism costs	11	40.74
Increase productivity	8	29.63
Save real estate costs	19	70.37
Reduce energy costs	17	62.96
Improve work-life balance	18	66.67
Improve continuity of operations	14	51.85
Reduce brain drain effect of retiring employees	7	25.93
Be able to attract and retain the best talent	14	51.85
Others	2	7.41

Teleworking helps in reducing real estate cost for the employers and helps to improve work-life balance for employees. Per person cost is also reduced through the

policy of teleworking. Teleworking helps to attract and retain best talent.

Table No. 10: Key issues in Adoption of Teleworking

Statement	Definitely Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Definitely Agree
In the context of teleworking , perception for concern for many of the employee themselves.	0	4	2	8	5	8	0
In the context of teleworking, mindset issue of entitlement and the prestige of having own closed offices are a hurdle to teleworking adoption.	0	4	5	8	6	4	0
Telework leads to frustration among employees remaining in the office who must contend with shifting patterns of interruptions, missing colleagues, and erratic workloads. [Q. 17 Which of the following are true of you / Your employees / your organization?]	0	5	4	9	5	4	0
Telework is seen as an employee benefit.	0	0	2	7	4	9	5
Telework is seen as a business imperative.	0	1	5	12	3	5	1
Teleworkers are forgotten in the distribution of more formally constructed information .	2	5	2	5	11	3	0
Teleworking option is essential aspect that will influence my choice of potential employer.	0	0	2	9	7	7	2
Teleworking are more likely to exit the firm early as compared to non-teleworkers.	4	6	5	5	4	4	0
Teleworkers miss out on office gossip.	1	3	2	9	6	5	2
Teleworkers receive poor evaluations.	3	8	6	5	2	4	0
Teleworkers, over time, become dissatisfied.	1	2	4	11	5	4	1
Teleworkers are more likely to return to the office, or stay at home with high levels of dissatisfaction.	1	7	6	8	4	2	0
Opportunities open to office-based employees could be missed by their teleworking counterparts.	1	3	0	6	11	5	2

Teleworking is mostly benefitted to the employees. Occasionally, teleworkers, may be forgotten while taking some important decisions or communicating some

important information. It may happen that opportunities open to Office-based employees could be missed by teleworkers.

Table No. 11: Proportion of Managers / Supervisors who could be open to Teleworking of subordinates / reportees

Proportion	No. (out of 27)	%
Less than 10 %	9	33.33
Less than 20 %	1	3.70
Less than 30 %	7	25.93
Less than 40 %	1	3.70
Less than 50 %	2	7.41
Less than 60 %	5	18.52
Less than 70 %	1	3.70
Less than 80 %	0	0.00
Less than 90 %	1	3.70
100 % are compatible	0	0.00

Table No. 12: Percentage of employees who have adopted telework

Proportion	No. (out of 27)	%
Less than 10%	21	77.78
Between 10-20 %	3	11.11
Between 20-30 %	1	3.70
Between 30-40 %	0	0.00
Between 40-50 %	0	0.00
Between 50-60 %	1	3.70

Telework awareness is still to go a long way. Less than 10% employees work from home or are virtual employees.

Table No. 13: Traits Expected of a teleworker

Item	No. (out of 27)	%
Know thyself	2	7.41
Be Self motivated	22	81.48
Be Focused	14	51.85
Be Curious	2	7.41
Be Flexible	9	33.33
Be Collaborative	8	29.63
Process the temperament and skill to succeed as a virtual team member	18	66.67
Manage the dividing line between working life and social life	19	70.37
Be willing and ready to work in isolation	20	74.07
Other	3	11.11

Table No. 14: Traits Expected of the supervisor of a teleworker

Item	No.(out of 27)	%
Need to maintain a corporate culture supportive of teleworkers	11	40.74
Technical and communications systems in place to enable remote employee to be successful	21	77.78
Be self-aware in tune with my skill capabilities, strengths and weakness	7	25.93
Be empathetic	6	22.22
Be emotionally intelligent	7	25.93
Be sensitive to what others need	7	25.93
Be willing to empower virtual teams	22	81.48
Be able to gauge the productivity of workers who aren't physically in the office	25	92.59
Other	3	11.11

Supervisors play a very important role for virtual teams. Most importantly, supervisors should be willing to

empower his virtual team and can gauge the productivity of workers who aren't physically present.

LIMITATIONS

The study has a limitation of small sample size. Findings of the study may not be generalizable on account of the limited geographical scope as well as the small sample size. The study relies exclusively on perceptions of the employees. More research is required from a multidimensional perspective to gain insights into the perspectives of the HR function, the immediate supervisor as well as the business heads.

FINDINGS

The study has help to understand the concept of teleworking and how it has been adopted by the organizations, of different sectors. The research reveals that most of the organizations have adopted the concept of teleworking or work from home, but this adoption is mostly depending on the business needs.

Due to the rapid development in Information technology, the IT Companies like, Tech Mahindra, Zensar, Persistent, Capgemini, Maersk Global - India, etc., have already implemented teleworking for their employees. While, there are some organizations who roll out teleworking as per the business requirements eg Yes Bank, Lear, Wartsila, etc. Thus, the IT companies are more likely to allow telecommuting than non-IT ones. But, Mahindra and Mahindra has set a policy for WFH for female employees having children below 13 years and are from the support functions. While, TAL Manufacturing may not have this policy at all. Hence, when teleworking is in place, then the organization has a specific set of policies for teleworkers to maintain the confidentiality.

The study shows that teleworking benefits all the employees, irrespective of the levels (junior, middle and senior), gender, roles etc. However, female employees work more from home as compared to male employees. Telework has dramatically changed the working and the living style of millions of people across the globe. But, still teleworking awareness in India is still a long way to go.

Study states that teleworking benefits both employees and employers. By teleworking, employees can achieve work life balance, while employers save on per person cost, infrastructure, etc. Employers are able to attract and retain skilled talent, because of teleworking.

The study could bring out the traits of the teleworker. A teleworker should be self-motivated, highly technically skilled, should be able to work in isolation, excellent in managing work life and social life, virtual team player, etc. The study also proved that the supervisors play a very important role in managing the teleworker. The supervisor should be able to empower the teleworking team, able to gauge the productivity of a virtual employee, etc. The most importantly, the technical systems have to be in place for teleworking.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study helps in understanding the status of adoption of teleworking in the organizations in Pune. The study brings out the characteristics of the teleworker and the kind of environment required to adopt teleworking. The study has helped to identify the benefits to the employees and the organization. This study has also underlined the pros and cons of implementing telework from an employee as well as the employer perspective. Further studies can focus on the Human Resource practices for effective implementation of Telework.

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