

THE COVID PANDEMIC EFFECT ON WORK CULTURE

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Abstract: *Two years have passed since Covid-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization, and the new working culture changed our lives. There was an abrupt shift towards work from home while millions of others lost their jobs. The aim of the research was to study the effect of covid pandemic on work culture. The objectives were to list down the effect of covid pandemic on work culture, to compare the employers and employee's perspective on the effect of covid pandemic on work culture and to suggest strategies for better work culture. 50 employers and 100 employees participated in this survey. A self-structured questionnaire was made to collect information. Snow ball technique was used to collect data. Google form was circulated to the employers and employees to collect data. Percentages were calculated to analyse the data. The results show that organizational culture had improved during the pandemic. We need to build an algorithm for measuring workplace culture in a variety of dimensions and create a framework that organizations can utilize for articulating these elements. The paper suggests strategies for better work culture.*

Key Words: COVID Pandemic, Work Culture.

1. INTRODUCTION :

The Covid-19 pandemic has had tremendous and swift effects on workplace culture. The global lockdown and travel bans have upended assumptions about the nature of work and corporate interactions. People have discovered that they don't have to be in an office, that they can get most things done remotely. They do not need to commute to work. Others have gone from jet-set to home-bound with little effect on their business. The pandemic has forever changed the workforce landscape. Even as some employers are back at work, others are transitioning to remote work for the foreseeable future or partial remote work flexibility moving forward.

Culture can be an enabler, or a hindrance based on the situation and the way it is implemented by the organisations. A carefully evaluated and thought organisational culture can promote the highest productivity possible with better employee relation and engagement. The best technology can yield better productivity only if it is used in an effective way by the qualified engaged human resources. (Waisfisz and Hofstede, 2017).

The Coronavirus has and will have significant impact on our ways of living, work, studies, ways of socialisation, communication and overall culture (Huen & Bobby 2020). It's the time to welcome the new cultural change and adapt our ways of living as we are standing in front of a new work culture (Gautam, 2020). Companies that have gone remote during the pandemic are experiencing newfound challenges with their distributed workforce. When it comes to human resources (HR), the goal has always been to attract, retain and grow their talent, as well as help foster company culture. Covid-19 has impacted company culture significantly and has forced leadership to re-evaluate their business — and quickly. This reassessment has been the catalyst for innovation, pivoting to stay operable, rethinking how we build our workplace and maintaining business culture online.

These changing work dynamics and employee perspectives, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, are highlighting the importance of having a strong work culture that's sustainable.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Reviewing related literature, it was found that social distancing is making it hard for employees to feel connected to where they live, work, and play. Connection is a significant component of our support system.

A silver lining of the pandemic is that it has forced the rapid and widespread adoption of remote work practices that otherwise would likely have taken years or even decades to unfold (Nickson and Suzy, 2004). Companies are therefore well positioned to implement remote work practices quickly in the post-pandemic environment. The challenge

will be recognizing that remote work during the pandemic is, in many ways, different from what it will look like in the post-pandemic environment, and therefore some existing practices will need to be adjusted and new ones will need to be adopted.

Work from Home

Following the pandemic, a large-scale workforce shifted their work to remote locations, and employees ditched their commutes and large office spaces and switched to working from their homes. The corporate culture faced casualty as companies lost their tangible aspect of the business. Starting from the perks that the companies offered (free coffee, restrooms, gyms) to socialized meetings, the corporate world lost it all. However, companies need to brace themselves, as post Covid era will be the new normal.

Gender Divide

There is the gender divide; with the world struggling to stay on edge with the raging pandemic, the women were pushed off the edge. The soaring unemployment hit women the hardest as women were 1.8 times more likely to lose their jobs than men. The percentage of women in unpaid work was already high; during the pandemic, it has skyrocketed. The burden of demand for unpaid childcare, cooking, and cleaning fell on women more, becoming a barrier for socio-economic development. With women being employed in the corporate, the burden of housework fell on them, which led to a decrease in their overall productivity.

Gradual Change in Work Culture

Work culture is likely never going to be the same in the post-pandemic era. However, this gives us an ample opportunity to rethink how we run the companies. For decades, 9-to-5 has been the unofficial slogan of the work centred around offices. This rigid structure changed in the covid-19 era as companies gave up unnecessary meetings and office timings. Looking at this from an employee's perspective, they are now allowed to make flexible choices about the working conditions, and they can get their work-life balance on track. Businesses who will be able to adapt to this new model of corporate culture will definitely gain a competitive advantage in the industry as they will be able to maintain agility in the organization along with the spirit of teamwork. New studies have found that less than 12% of employees want to return back to the full-time office job (Sharma, 2020).

Technology Upgradation

There was a surge of new technologies loaded on those who worked from home in the pandemic. There is development in the 5G spectrum, which enables workspaces at any place, and with Artificial Intelligence being powered through laptops and Virtual Reality headsets, meetings are being conducted with employees all across the world. In this Zoom era, organizations are hosting more meetings; however, employees, in general, are spending less time attending those meetings. Companies are pushing more and more to incorporate their employees' needs in the meeting, and companies are acknowledging the vastly complex lives their employees have. Offices are now shifting to a hybrid workspace model post-pandemic where employees will prefer working from home for a large portion of the financial year. Approximately 40% of the workforce can afford to actually work from home, and for them, the change is already here. However, for the rest, 60%, who work in lowly paid jobs like transportation, retail, restaurants, run the risk of losing their income as the jobs disappear. This needs to be the main concern in our economic recovery – equitable growth for all.

Equitable Growth

Covid-19 had the most severe impact on jobs, and the pandemic has revealed that the current scenario is not sustainable in the long run. The Post-pandemic era could prove to be a boon in this sector. In India, financial institutions are focusing on financial inclusion across the country, and in western countries, the focus is on a diversified and inclusive workforce.

This pandemic could prove to be a catalyst as companies will finally work on socio-economic upliftment. The new companies coming up after the pandemic are providing better access to their employees in terms of medical benefits, financial plans, wealth management, and insurance schemes. This could spur significant societal changes and paramount reforms.

3. Aim: To study the effect of covid pandemic on work culture on employers and employees.

4. Objectives:

- To list down the effect of covid pandemic on work culture on employers and employees.
- To compare the employers and employee's perspective on the effect of covid pandemic on work culture.

- To suggest strategies for better work culture.

4. METHOD:

50 employers and 100 employees participated in this survey. A self-structured questionnaire was made to collect information related to employer and employees' views about organizational culture during the COVID 19 pandemic. Snow ball technique was used to collect data online. Google form was circulated to the employers and employees to collect data. Percentages were calculated to analyse the data.

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

5.1. Sample Distribution

The figure below shows the distribution of the sample from various industrial sectors. Maximum numbers of the employers were from software industry followed by the food industry, automotive industry, pharmaceutical industry and the textile industry. The least number of employer respondents were from the construction industry.

Similarly, if we look into the sample distribution of the employees it is seen that the maximum participation is from the automotive industry followed by software industry, food industry, chemical industry, pharmaceutical industry and construction industry. The least number of employee respondents was that of the textiles industry.

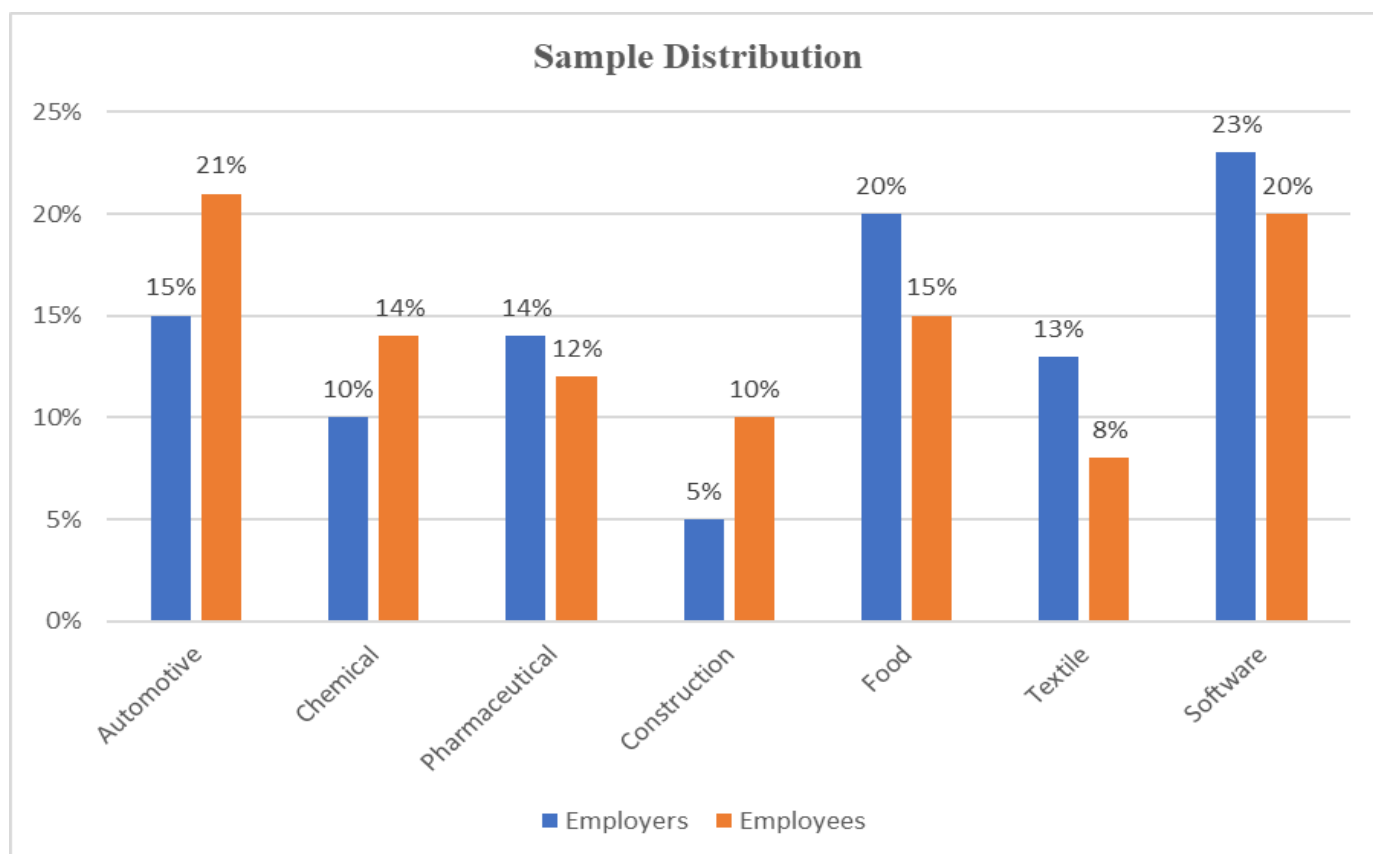


Fig.1. Sample Distribution

5. 2. Employer and Employees view about organizational culture during the pandemic

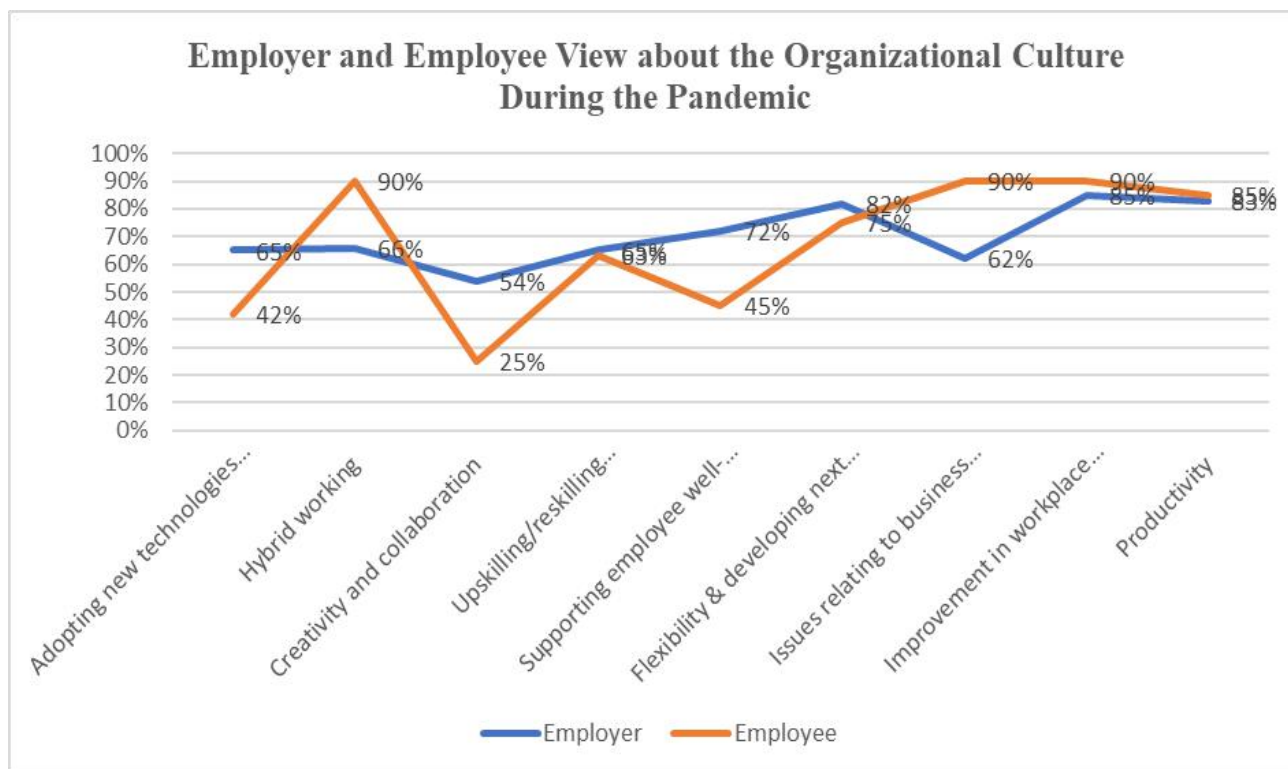


Fig 2: Employer and Employees view about organizational culture during the pandemic

The survey canvassed the views of 100 employees and employers examining their views on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workplace. It explores their perspectives on the risks and opportunities of hybrid working. 85% of employer 90% of the employee respondents believe that workplace culture has improved since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings show that 66% of employers are planning to make moderate to extensive changes in order to allow more hybrid working, reflecting the views of 90% of employees, who say they want flexibility in when and where they work. However, only 46% have communicated these plans, creating a potential disconnect with employees on crucial issues such as flexibility, culture, and productivity. The remaining employer respondents are either still planning or waiting to communicate any decisions about their new ways of working. Employers have heard loud and clear that employees are demanding flexibility in the post pandemic working world.

The biggest danger facing most employers is that they fail to provide clarity around their hybrid work and return to office plans. Organisations that want to flourish need to ensure that their plans are well defined and communicated, and that they balance business and employee priorities in refining these plans to help create a win-win for the business and the workforce.” Despite the overwhelming recognition of the importance of flexible working, the survey reveals that 39% of employer respondents want all their employees to return to the office full time post-pandemic.

While some of these employers are in industries that require on-site presence, there are other organisations that can operate virtually but want it to happen in person. On issues relating to business travel there was a notable disconnect where 62% percent of employer respondents say that they want to decrease business travel post-pandemic, but 90% of employee respondents say they want it to resume. On other key issues such as productivity employees and employers were in consonance, where 83% of employer respondents believe productivity can now be measured from anywhere, compared to 85% of employee respondents. Employers who took part in the survey were also asked about risks beyond physical health that they believe may come with the shift toward hybrid working. Almost half (53%) say one of the biggest risks will be their ability to establish fairness and equity among employees when some jobs require a fixed schedule or location creating a ‘have and have not’ dynamic based on roles. 50% say a key concern is how to retain talent and offer flexibility and developing next generation talent (82%) employee 75%. Other risks identified include 41% pointing to hybrid working as a risk to culture, creativity and collaboration, supporting employee well-being (72%) employee (45%), establishing and measuring productivity (53%) employee (45%), adopting new technologies to support hybrid working (35%) and upskilling/reskilling employees for new ways of working (65%) employee 63%. 85% of employers and 90% employees believe that workplace culture has improved since the onset of COVID-19 pandemic

5.3. Strategies for better work culture

A strong, cohesive organizational culture benefits the organization from the inside out. Employees prefer to work for a company with a strong culture and a defined set of positive values. The following strategies can be adopted for better work culture:

- Revise strategy to engage a remote workforce
- Update your communication strategy, tools frequently
- Check-in with employees on a personal level
- Form employee resource groups
- Utilize digital tools for idea sharing and wellbeing challenges
- Encourage frequent employee recognition
- Give teams the autonomy they seek
- Realign wellbeing strategy
- Have a preventive health campaign
- Give employees time off for a preventive visit
- Demonstrate to employees that their involvement is critical
- Conduct periodic (preferably annual) culture audits
- Celebrate the successes of all

Once the organizational work culture is improved, the next challenge is to maintain it. An organization has a healthy culture when it contributes to the creation and accomplishment of a organization's vision, it attracts people into the organization, it retains employees, and it focuses on employee engagement. Changing the organization's existing culture takes hard work, perseverance and commitment. More than 50% of organizations struggle to retain valuable employees. Improving and maintaining company culture is a matter of survival for the organization.

6. CONCLUSION:

We are looking at a modernized workplace to make sure that the transition of employees to a hybrid workstation is smooth and easy. Alternative work schedules are now being adopted and proactive companies will gobble this up as new normal, which will give them an advantage over the industry. Slowly but surely, companies will step up to embrace this messy situation and turn it into a new opportunity. The future is wide open for us. Organizational culture had improved during the pandemic. Workplace culture transcends the office, and it isn't about arbitrary rules either. It sounds abstract, but there is a science behind it. We need to build an algorithm for measuring workplace culture in a variety of dimensions and create a framework that organizations can utilize for articulating these elements. With employee stress at all-time high, employee health and wellbeing is more important than ever. Realigning organizational wellbeing strategy will prepare organizations to proactively address the needs and challenges that employees will face in the upcoming year.

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