REDESIGNING THE WORKPLACE FOR OPTIMUM EFFICIENCY: A NECESSITY FOR POST PANDEMIC

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A B S T R A C T

COVID-19 has become a major concern for the entire globe and has also permanently altered the way people work. The social and economic consequences have been catastrophic for everybody, and have had permanent and long-term consequences. The epidemic produced serious health problems and fatalities, and afflicted nations were forced to halt all social and economic operations for a while. In the same vein, business activities in several other sectors were halted as a result of complete or partial lockdowns throughout the globe. Airlines, manufacturing, and hospitality industries were among the most affected. Some companies closed temporarily or permanently as a result of the disruption, as they were unable to withstand the financial losses caused by the pandemic. Today, businesses all over the world are attempting to manage offices and administrative functions remotely in order to offset the catastrophic impact. Furthermore, organizations are attempting to deal with the COVID 19 turmoil by using technology to facilitate the work-from-home notion. Because of the considerable benefits of remote work, businesses are increasingly seeing it as a vital element of their operations. It is imperative to imagine the workplace when people return to work. This term paper previewed important literatures on workplace changes, and their economic and social implications. It also shed some light on the impact of the pandemic on businesses and what businesses can do to adapt to the changes in order to remain resilient.

K E Y W O R D S

Covid-19, Pandemic, Psychological Well-being and Workplace, Remote Work, Hybrid Working

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous disturbance throughout the entire globe during the last year. With the successful turn of events and the appropriation of a COVID-19 antibody, one would think that the world has seen its end; this has become even clearer as new variants are discovered and other variants are still being anticipated.   Thus, it is difficult to say with precision when this whole covid scare will completely be over. The outbreak of covid-19 was unprecedented; as such many organizations were adversely affected. Only few proactive organizations that had put in processes and strategies in place before the pandemic were able to keep their businesses afloat and are still operating effectively. On the other hand, many organizations have folded up while some are barely able to keep their heads above the waters as a result of their inability to strategize and implement the required change. It therefore, becomes imperative for individuals and organizations globally to begin to consider what the working environment will look like when other waves or variants are discovered, (Kane et al,2021). As the world continues to speculate on when and how we will return to normalcy, the premise at the centre of the discussion is the redesigning of the workplace.

Before March 2020, most employers and employees didn't see the possibility of effectively working from home. However, today, the pandemic has made managers realize that people can actually work from home. Although, work environment concepts such as virtual workplaces had been developed and tested prior to the pandemic. Firms such as IBM, and others attempted various things with remote work. While these groups dabbled with far-flung projects prior to the pandemic, many were hesitant to try them. Coronavirus caused a shift in the standpoint on the ultimate destiny of labour. It will be foolhardy to try to ignore or dodge the new normal. Therefore, there is need to revisit the office. Similarly to understand how the advancement of technology has revolutionized the world, organizations must begin to look at the future of the workplace; workplace where many will choose remote work,(Vierling, 2020).

One significant discovery with regard to the workplace after the pandemic, is that telecommuting is the way forward and its much benefits cannot be over-emphasized.   As the business environment changes, firms will have to forego the conventional workplace model and veer off as they search out models that are in tune with today's business needs. Pioneers are tasked with gathering input from a wide range of partners within the organization in order to make knowledgeable decisions. There are major fragment disparities in what employees need, for example, Mothers on the whole, are more likely than men to prefer the versatility of working both at home and at work. Furthermore, young people are more amenable to long-distance employment than older workers. There is a lengthy list of preferences.

Work configuration is central to post COVID-19 pandemic. Changes in the workplace go beyond middle-class employees telecommuting and the practical risks of poorly constructed workstations. In this regard, we should imagine wellness specialists electronically diagnosing and treating patients, as well as restaurateurs shifting personnel, hardware, and working hours to provide critical point and home conveyance management. These advancements should not be limited to advances in invention and automation, but should also represent how tasks are completed.

Theoretical Framework

Rational Choice Theory: The Rational Choice Theory, often known as the Choice Theory, is a financial rule that acknowledges that individuals constantly choose reasonable and legitimate choices that provide them with the most elevated and individual benefits or fulfilment. The theory is based on the understanding that individuals try to effectively increase their advantage in every scenario and, as a result, consistently seek to limit their misfortunes (Wikepedia, 2020). Everyone makes decisions by first weighing the costs, risks, and rewards of various options. Choices that seem illogical to one person may make sense to another dependent on the individual's desire, since they are based on personal preferences. At its heart, rational choice theory posits that individuals make their own choices. Rational choice theory may assist to explain the behaviour of individuals and organizations, as well as why people, groups, and society makes various decisions depending on certain costs and benefits. The theory clashes with various other sociological ideas. According to psychodynamic theory, humans want satisfaction owing to unconscious qualities. Meanwhile, rational choice theory says that every activity has a reasonable explanation, and individuals attempt to maximize benefits since they are worth the cost. This theory was used in this paper to understand and justify private organizations' decision to cease operations because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary goal of private organizations is to make profit and achieve growth, this may be a mirage due to the global pandemic except they put the right strategies in place to help them adapt to the current change. No doubt, organizations that choose to carry on their business as usual will negatively impact their business; the financial performance of businesses will be impaired as a result of their inability to make the right choice. Business would deteriorate, resulting in poor profit. In the face of poor support, the owners of business would invariably have no choice other than to lay off employees, thereby making employees to lose their jobs.

Empirical Review

Office design is one of the factors that have been found to have a direct impact on work productivity. Since the 1930s, there has been an understanding of the link between office design and work productivity (e.g. a study by Pennock 1930; Mayo et al. 1939). Originally, an office was created with cubicles, known as a cellular-type office; however, since the 1950s, open-plan designs have been erected and have grown in popularity since the 1970s owing to their efficiency (Brennan et al. 2002; Brunia et al. 2016). Open offices do not have dividing walls, decrease the boundaries between workstations, and therefore take up less space. As a result, efficiency becomes the key word in converting a cellular design to an open-plan workplace (Van der Voordt 2003; Laihonen et al. 2012; Kim et al. 2016).

The importance of teamwork and staff productivity cannot be overstated. The physical environment of an office should promote staff tasks such as effective communication, focus, and mood (de Been et al., 2017). According to studies, the open office idea offers the best atmosphere for knowledge production since it enables workers to communicate and cooperate in a natural way. An open workplace would encourage encounters and casual chats, which might result in both knowledge exchange and learning (de Been et al. 2017; Kasuganti 2018). Increased communication and engagement may also lead to more successful teamwork (Heerwagen et al. 2004). According to de Been and Beijer (2014), open offices, whether combi (based on an open or half-open office with an assigned workstation for each employee) or flex (similar to the combi office but with no assigned workstation), increase the frequency of interactions among employees more than individual and shared room offices. The interaction that might lead to cooperation among co-workers has an impact on their productivity (Brill and Weidemann 2001; Haynes et al. 2017). Furthermore, workers in an

open office are more energized by the strong ties they build with others who sit near them (Oldham 1988); the freedom to work independently without interruption is a significant aspect in office design. Previous research confirmed that an organization's physical circumstances will ultimately externalize into workers' job performance. Numerous studies have so argued that altering the work environment as a channel for organizational growth (e.g. Allen, et al. 2005; de Been et al. 2017; Kasuganti 2018). Employees' greater cooperation and openness would foster camaraderie and boost job satisfaction. The open style also boosted the number of chances for friendship (Rasila & Rothe, 2012).

Office in the Post-Pandemic Reality

To adapt to the issues that we are confronted with globally today, innovation is key. The coronavirus outbreak has altered the architecture of our environments. According to research presented at the Casa Decor event in Madrid by APE group in partnership with Future-A, the arrival of the hoffice (home office) implies that houses will have to be structured to support both business and personal life. This entails locating solutions that allow for easy integration and concealment of the workplace, as well as using versatile multi-purpose items both inside and outside of office hours. While most businesses opted for remote working strategies during the pandemic, many chose hybrid working, which is why offices will remain vital. According to ACE Group, 37% of industry experts feel that offices would be the most crucial flexible places since they are gathering places for individuals to engage and collaborate. Although, prior to the crises, most proactive people saw the workplace as a driving force for efficiency, collaboration, and development and optimally maximized the strategy; so when the pandemic moved the labour force out of the workplaces, several organizations used the social media; they successfully used video conferencing tools and correspondence programmes to achieve agreeable representative commitment and were able to effectively receive and disseminate information. They posit that offices will be separated into distinct sections for different purposes, such as concentration spaces, brainstorming areas, collaborative work rooms, workshops, and so on. As workplaces tend to favour more compartmentalized solutions, having to focus in the widely well-known traditional open-plan layouts may become a thing of the past. However, not every organization or individual can entirely work remotely. Being physically present in the workplace is essential for some types of activities. Managers should keep this in mind while re-visiting work and improving working spaces. The pandemic has compelled governments and companies all around the globe to adapt new methods of operation. As firms continue to adapt to the pattern of dealing with the pandemic, isolated methods currently seem to be the foreseeable future; consequently, office space utilization must be developed to keep up with the present trend of providing measures against coronavirus transmission. As a result, both employers and employees must reassess their job and their various office roles in ensuring a safe, productive, and rewarding workplace for everyone. One thing is certain, expectations and attitudes on the role of the workplace are changing for both employees and employers; though in opposite ways nevertheless, the chasm is widening.

Summary and Conclusion

COVID-19 ushered forth a new paradigm for the future of work. We may never return to "normal," but the crisis taught us to be more concerned about health and safety, as well as ensuring that the workforce can effectively adjust as we navigate a future that is so uncertain.Covid-19 pandemic has not just disrupted the world, there is a likelihood that other eventualities will occur that will in no small measure impact the world and business, and thus organizations must begin to earnestly rethink/redesign the workplace. One sure way to begin to return gradually to the workplace is

exploiting opportunities for hybrid ways of working; combining working remotely with physical appearance in the workplace. Although remote work has its disadvantages, investigations revealed that employees who returned to the workplace just one or two days each week boosted the number of unexpected connections to a reasonable extent. When managers rethink the workplace, it can create fresh prospects for rethinking the workforce and, eventually, work itself.

Recommendations

1. It is critical to implement ways to aid employees to deal with the effects of the pandemic. While the precautionary measures pose pressing business challenges, many others who are legitimately employed are working in altered settings with new technology, new locations, lessened social and physical connections, and also less monitoring and backup. As the struggle continues, employees are often unsure of their assumptions, both to and from their bosses.

2. It is pertinent to create a safe working environment: The pandemic provided opportunities to improve the working environment. Cleaning conventions, outside air ventilation, and high limit channels were further developed to collect germs and contaminations. Continued and established work environment wellbeing estimations will minimize absenteeism, increase efficiency, and improve employees' physical and psychological well-being.

3. Organizations must ensure workplace wellness: As employees return to work, management should provide ways for social distancing, temperature checks, give opportunity to employees who test positive for COVID-19 to be isolated for the specified periods and get fully recovered before coming back to work while ensuring that restrictions and limits are enforced.

4. Developing processes for new examples of work: Employers should develop techniques to oversee and reduce the harmful effects of the pandemic, as well as proof-based instructions.

5. Strike a balance between electronic change and human association: The widespread turn of events and reception of advanced stages modified how organizations' meet, operate together, communicate, and better serve customers. To avoid computer fatigue, firms must balance mechanical advancement with basic human interaction that generates strong alliances and communities.

6. Gradually reintroduce workers back to the workplace: It is almost impossible to reintroduce the whole labour force instantly. Aside from the chaos of people returning to work, managers must allow workers to reacclimatize to their new/old working environment. Because of the extended time away from the workplace and the updated working environment, labourers will need to spend more time in order to adjust to being back in a real working setting, thus a diverse workforce is prudent.

7. Assist workers in adapting to their new normal: Pairing employees with other colleagues is one technique of assisting them in adjusting to their new normal. Social contacts are methods for hastening the transition to a new employment.

8. Make the workplace an integral goal: Regardless of the work-from-home trend, the working environment is still an important goal for developing, critical thinking, learning, teaming up, tutoring, and, above all, connection building. Over the course of the pandemic, daily efficiency slowed as innovation and growth were stifled.

9. Businesses should provide working circumstances that encourage employees to return to the workplace and do their best.

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