CHAPTER 15

Theoretical Model to Gauge the Organization's Readiness of Flexible Work Arrangements (Work-From-Home)

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Introduction

Since early January 2020, the world is battling the biggest health scare of the century, due to the spread of covid19, creating a pandemic situation. Infection rates are high with no known cure in sight yet. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it "A Global Pandemic" on 11 March 2020 and had outlined detailed guidelines for the world to follow. With neither a cure nor a prevention (vaccine) is yet developed, the only known way to restrict its spread is through social distancing, isolating the sick from the healthy. Thus, most countries were placed under lockdown (mid-March onwards). This has led to huge hampering of business. The way of functioning, in every aspect of life, has changed,

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Rajagopal and R. Behl (eds.), *Managing Disruptions in Business*, Palgrave Studies in Democracy, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship for Growth, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79709-6_15

some drastically, most permanently. In this context, it becomes imperative to understand how an organization is changing/how to control the change/how to successfully navigate the change, so that the organization sustains. One glaring change in work-life which has happened is the way work is being conducted. For instance, in the days of social isolation and movement restrictions, most companies have mandatory work-from-home policies implemented for their employees, whichever role possible. Thus, the importance of work-from-home mandates has become more pronounced in the pandemic situation the world is currently facing. While manufacturing, production, operations, supply chains, tourism, travel, hospitality, etc. requiring physical presence have been adversely affected, with many coming to a standstill, others who could, shifted to work-from-home for its employees in the lockdown period. Initially, there were external compulsions to do so, but then many organizations are waking up to the possibility of having continued work-from-home options for its employees, even in the post-pandemic situation. This is changing the very facet of organization as we understand, right from strategic, structural, functional as well as process implications.

Study Motivation

Though flexible work arrangements including work-from-home have been in existence in organizations since long time as a family-supportive policy/family-friendly work culture ('showing we care'), opting for this was voluntary or on consideration grounds, and hence, the impact at the organizational level (structure, functioning) have never been that significant to be explored much by prior researchers at the macro-level. The reason for choosing to inspect work-from-home is twofold—one, covid19 pandemic has made organizations opt for work-from-home, whichever role possible, thus impacting the functioning/design of the organization as a whole, and two, prior studies have not really analyzed much at the macro-level, i.e., the organizational level. I have also chosen to specifically look at the interventions required through the HRM lens, as the role of HR is also transforming with the transforming organizations, and this requires further deliberation, both for the academicians as well as the practitioners.

Scope

Since most firms are still grappling with the unprecedented situation the world is forced into, and are responding and reacting accordingly, the scope of research is vast. It is not possible to categorize nor explore them all within the limited purview of this paper. Hence, I am looking at only one such strategic change, that is, implementing work-from-home mandates, and present a theoretical model to gauge the organization's readiness to implement work-from-home policies/mandates so as derive maximum benefit for the organization.

Literature Review

Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements are defined as "*employer provided benefits that permit employees some level of control over when and where they work outside of the standard workday*" (Lambert et al., 2008, p. 107). While there are multitudes of flexible arrangements, researchers have broadly demarcated them under "flex-time" and "flex-place", the former meaning having flexibility in the time of work, whereas the latter meant flexibility in the location where work is done. Flex-place includes work-from-home, telecommuting, work-from-anywhere options. Flex-time arrangements include reduced workload, compressed work weeks, variable shifts, job sharing, work sharing, phased retirement, and partial retirement.

First introduced to the world by Christel Kammerer in the 1960s (Stanley, 1995), research on flexible work arrangements has come a long way since. Researchers have long established the beneficial effects of flexible work arrangements aiding employees' work-life balance (Lee et al., 2002), along with increased well-being (Rudolph & Baltes, 2017; Shockley & Allen, 2007), greater satisfaction (Baltes et al., 1999; Chen et al., 2018) and higher productivity (Baltes et al., 1999; Bloom, 2014). However, I have observed that barring a few papers, researchers focused more on examining the individual-level antecedents and outcomes. Among the studies which have addressed the macro-level of analyses, researchers explored the influence of organization's size (Kotey & Koomson, 2019), financial constraints, and workforce characteristics to managing flexible work arrangements (in small NFP firms) (Townsend et al., 2017). In another study, researchers examined data

from employers and observed that industry sector, labor market conditions, and organizational cultural support of flexibility are predictive of wide-scale availability of flexible work arrangements (Sweet et al., 2014). Other researchers examined the role of flexible work arrangements toward sustainable development (Čiarnienė et al., 2018) analyzed at individual, company, and societal levels, as well as network perspective for opting for this, based on the concept of exploration and exploitation in organizational learning (Litrico & Lee, 2008). I came across only one study which looked at how flexible work arrangements are designed, implemented, work processes affected, and how structural and cultural factors shaped them (Fisher, 2010). Interestingly, there was only one cross-cultural study which I came across, comparing findings from twenty-one countries on the mediating role of national culture and organization characteristics on organizational outcomes of flexible work arrangements (Peretz et al., 2018). It can be seen from the above that none of these above studies really looked into how to gauge the readiness of the organization for implementing flexible work arrangements. This is not surprising, as the choice of working under flexible arrangements has always been driven by few selected groups (working mothers, especially with small children, dependant/ill family member(s), etc.), that is to say, some constraints the individual employee had in his/ her personal domain, which made him/her opt for a flexible work arrangement. The numbers have not been high in the pre-covid19 situations, on a regular basis. But this scenario has changed with the pandemic situation, and hence, importance as well as inclination toward such flexible work arrangements is something which is of growing interest for researchers and practitioners alike.

Flex-Place Arrangement—Work-From-Home (WFH)

Work-from-home is a type of flexible work arrangement, where the concerned person can carry on his/her work from any space/anywhere. This has been possible due to the advent of digitization, change in work profiles (jobs which can be done online/virtually/remotely), and family-supportive organization policies and practices.

Prior studies have shown that flex-place kind of work arrangements are less effective in spillover of roles, i.e., interferences created by work on family and vice-versa (Byron, 2005; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006; Shockley & Allen, 2007). Thus, the probability of occurring of conflict due to blurring of boundaries (Kossek et al., 2006; Lapierre &

Allen, 2006) is higher in flex-place arrangements like work-from home. Flexible work arrangements are associated with a variety of attitudes and outcomes like productivity, performance, and job satisfaction (Baltes et al., 1999; Chen et al., 2018), this holds true even after controlling for gender, age, marital status, education, number of children, and hours worked (Mcnall et al., 2009). On the flipside, flex-place arrangements like WFH also increases the probability of work-to-family due to blurring of boundaries in conflict situations (Kossek et al., 2006; Lapierre & Allen, 2006). Benefits to the employees include greater work-life-balance, lesser commute time, lower stress, thus increased well-being (Mcnall et al., 2009; Hayman, 2009; Rudolph & Baltes, 2017; Shockley & Allen, 2007) and work-family enrichment (Baral & Bhargava, 2011; Jain & Nair, 2017; Wadsworth & Owens, 2007; Zhang et al., 2015). However, there are added issues of monitoring, maintaining ethics, and the challenge of retaining and developing the organization's culture, which makes this challenging for the organization.

Discussion

This section describes the current scenario, that is the Covid19 pandemic, and how it is impacting the organization, through the external factors which are created. While decoding the impact on the organization, the design challenges mentioned by Kates and Galbraith (2007) for the STAR Model of organization designing—strategy, structure, processes, rewards, and people have been used.

Decoding the Pandemic Scenario (COVID-19)

When we look at the kind of uncertain environment faced by everyone across the world, be it nations, organizations, global groups (like GVCs), inter-organizational networks, intra-organizational groups, and individuals, everyone is in a flux, forced to go the backfoot (at least initially). For organizations, the focus is forced into building resilience, sustainability, and revisiting their processes, rather than growth and expandability. External environmental changes act as a catalyst, forcing firms to change internally, to adapt, and sustain. This is coming from the Open System perspective, which defines organization as "*congeries of interdependent flows and activities linking shifting coalitions of participants embedded in wider material-resource and institutional environments*" (Scott & Davis,

2007, p. 32). Thus, the focus is more on the process than on the structure, valuing the interdependencies with the environment. In a crisis situation, like the covid19 pandemic, organizational performance is hampered due to both external and internal challenges and restructuring to adapt to such challenges require not only an in-depth understanding of the external environment, but also organization designing to address the same (Lin et al., 2006).

There is little doubt on this unprecedented situation being a Black Swan event. As per Taleb (2007), an event is called a Black Swan Event when (a) it is high-profile, hard-to-predict, rare beyond normal expectation, (b) probability of its occurrence is non-computable, and (c) psychological biases are present due to uncertainty and rarity of the event as also its huge role in history. Apart from numerous blogs claiming the Black Swan event leading to a global economic crisis (worse than the Great Depression in America), multiple researchers have already published articles substantiating this claim with support and evidence (Balsa-Barreiro et al., 2020; Mazzoleni et al., 2020; Platje et al., 2020; Wind et al., 2020). This background is essential to investigate the far-reaching impact the pandemic situation has already created and is expected to be furthered in the future. The uncertainty situation in which the whole world is pushed into has changed the way organizations are functioning, some drastically, some not so much. Among the numerous impacts of this pandemic situation at various levels (world, nation, firm, group, individual), the external macro-factors, which, are the ones needing immediate attention of the organization have been listed.

External Factors Impacting the Organization

Economic Recession

Countries across the globe have been plunged into recession due to the global pandemic. IMF has warned that we are into a global recession, worse than the 2008 Financial crisis. The global growth rate was pegged at –3% in April 2020, and revised to a grimmer –4.9% in June 2020.[1] During the lockdown period (March–July/August 2020), countries across the world had gone into recession, and experts predict little

[1] Retrieved on 4 October 2020 at 00:03 hrs from https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/06/24/WEOUpdateJune2020.

chance of a V-shaped recovery. Admittedly, though the impact of the pandemic has been adverse for all, the intensity has been different for different industries, with the most hard-hit ones being manufacturing, aviation, tourism, and hospitality services. Growth has been dealt yet another blow with global value chains, supply chains et al. shocked into exposing their weakest points, and firms and multi-national companies (MNCs) and trans-national companies (TNCs), from startup to e-commerce giants, have all had to think on their feet, be agile, shifting focus on building resilience and sustainability, in place of the aggressive vision of exponential growth of the last decade.

Deglobalization

Some researchers have opined that the third wave of deglobalization has already started (Tang, 2020). Along with already present geopolitical tensions (U.S–China trade wars, sanctions imposed by the U.S. on various countries, Brexit, etc.), the pandemic has triggered risk-aversion among organizations as well as individuals. Global trade has become, and is destined to become more fragmented, with the rise in AI, digitization, and other technological progresses. China, from being the biggest supplier to the world, has lost credibility, and many nations are cutting/decreasing their dependencies on the country from whose labs the covid19 virus has been alleged to be generated. Most countries had sealed their borders, and the aviation, tourism, and hospitality industry being severely hit due to the movement restrictions imposed by the pandemic. World travel, business or pleasure, has been hit tremendously under this very eminent scare, with countries worldwide imposing travel restrictions, quarantines, and curfews, quite a few still remaining. Even the role of global value chains (GVCs) is getting redefined, with new equations being formed (China's role lessening and other developing nations of Asia gaining prominence, including India). Disruptions to global value chains, however, pose additional risk of amplifying the shocks of the pandemic on the trade, production, as well as the financial markets.

Accelerated Digitization

Due to social movement restrictions, online platforms came to the rescue for the socially isolated human beings. Forced to stay at home, unable

to venture out, people turned to online avenues for business, education, entertainment, and social interactions. Schools and colleges and offices, whoever can, shifted to working from home, and continue to do so. Digitization has been accelerated. While progresses in machine learning, artificial intelligence, IoT had ushered in Industry 4.0, with the pandemic situation, the focus has shifted to furtherance of digitization, especially to the masses. For example, in the education sector, digitization had been sporadic till now (reference point here is India). Prior to the pandemic, only some schools, colleges, and universities of urban India boasted of being at par with contemporaries worldwide. Post covid19 lockdown was imposed, education institutions, right from pre-schoolers to doctoral students, were forced to relook, revamp, and retrain to use digital as a medium for teaching, and thus online classes were started full-swing. Though a lot still remains to be done, especially for the rural students, stop gap arrangements have been made, and fast. For organizations, work-from-home mandates for employees has furthered the requirement of digitization. Firms have rushed to implement work-from-home directives, however well-prepared or ill-prepared they were to do so. This has created new challenges and opportunities for all the parties involved. Right from internet connectivity issues to security problems, the challenges thrown up are many, let alone the concerns of well-being of the employee.

Cybersecurity Concerns

Cybersecurity is defined as "*the organization and collection of resources, processes, and structures used to protect cyberspace and cyberspace-enabled systems from occurrences that misalign de jure from* de facto *property rights*" (Craigen et al., 2014). With accelerated digitization came the concerns of security and safety. Cybercrime had risen manifold since the onset of the pandemic, due to the vulnerabilities in the cyber landscape. Security flaws in tools used, malware and ransomware attacks, hacking, attack on digital payment systems—all point toward the risk of data breaches and frauds (phishing, scamming). This holds especially true for rural and semi-urban population of India. Additionally, with the rise in the levels of online activities, confidentiality, integrity, and network traffic (bandwidth) are of significant concern, more so for remote-working arrangements.

Implications of the External Factors on the Organization

The five critical design challenges as mentioned by Kates and Galbraith (2007), based on which they built the STAR Model (Kates & Galbraith, 2007) for the purpose of categorizing the implications have been used to explain the effects in an organization. These five design challenges, viz., strategy, structure, process, rewards, and people, are the most common and most relevant ones in organization designing. I have purportedly used the concepts of organization designing for explaining the implications, as they are well-defined. Challenges imposed on strategy, structure, processes, rewards, and people by the external changes, are my focus area of interest here. In order for organizations to cope effectively and regain control, they need to re-design the organization, and hence the concept of organization design is of importance here. Organization design is defined as "*the deliberate process of configuring structures, processes, reward systems, and people practices to create an effective organization capable of achieving the business strategy*" (Kates & Galbraith, 2007, p. 1). Organization designing is focused on creating a stable structure being in a relatively stable state (Emelah & Enyia, 2018; Waring, 2016), which is also the desired goal here. The STAR Model is one of the most widely used, accepted, and proven model by practitioners across organizations, for effective organization designing, and hence, I have also used its concepts in this paper. In the sub-sections below, I shall discuss the impacts on each factor, in detail, within the context of this paper.

Strategy

Organizations have moved toward building resilience, business continuity and agility in this pandemic situation. Focus has been on maintaining continuity, especially with the economic recession scenario, predicted worse than the 2008 financial crisis, the severest since the World War II levels.[2] Many businesses have been forced to close, with unprecedented disruption of commerce in most industry sectors. Apart from short-term

[2] Retrieved on 4 October 2020 at 1:00 hrs from https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/08/covid-19-to-plunge-global-economy-into-worst-recession-since-world-war-ii.

challenges like health and safety measures, supply-chain, workforce retention/retrenchment, cash flow, sales, and marketing, companies have to face the additional woe of consumers becoming more averse to spending, thanks to the job losses, pay cuts, and uncertain future created due to the economic recession, across nations across the world. This can best be explained by the contingency theory perspective, as organizations are required to adapt and change according to the changed environment. Also, the change itself is a radical change, due to its suddenness and uncertainty involved (Gersick, 1991).

In order to maintain continuity, many organizations opted for, even imposed mandatory work-from-home policies for their employees, at wherever and whichever role possible. Other roles temporarily shut down. In fact, new-age tech stalwarts like Google, Facebook, Amazon have mandated one-year work-from-home mandates, with Twitter going so far as to even provide for life-time work-from-home options, should the employees so desire.[3] In India, too, companies like Citibank, BCG, HUL, KPMG, RPG Group, Cognizant, Infosys, Philips, Pfizer, Pidilite and TCS[4] to name a few, have mandated that only essential workers are required to be physically present in the office premises. 85% of the IT workforce in India is working from home, with MHA (India) extending work-form-home mandated till 31 December 2020 for IT & BPO companies.[5] A survey conducted in July in India (by Lenovo)[6] revealed that the majority of the people also preferred to work-from-home. While such

[3] Retrieved on 4 October 2020 at 00:40 hrs from https://indianexpress.com/article/technology/social/twitter-employees-work-from-home-forever-covid-19-6407724/.

[4] Retrieved on 1 September 2020 at 22:00 hrs from https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/playing-it-safe-amidst-covid-19-work-from-homes-working-so-india-inc-wants-it-to-stay/articleshow/77252879.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

[5] Retrieved on 10 September 2020 at 1400 hrs from https://www.india.com/news/india/work-from-home-for-it-companies-till-december-31-what-does-this-mean-4091309/.

[6] Retrieved on 12 April 2020 at 20:00 hrs from https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/15259-working-from-home-more-productive.html#:~:text=Working%20From%20Home%20Increases%20Productivity&text=According%20to%20one%20study%2C%20remote,weeks%20of%20work%20per%20year.&text=One%20of%20the%20most%20effective,taking%20breaks%20throughout%20the%20day.

surveys revealed that remote working increases productivity levels,[7] they also revealed that respondents were more stressed and struggled to maintain work-life balance, due to increased role conflict, inability to manage time, as well as demarcate work and life.

This decision of the organizations, that is, to apply work-from-home, draws support from various organizational theories. As per the transaction cost economics theory (Williamson, 1979, 1986) removing traditional work setup decreases the infrastructural and administrative costs associated with physical offices (overhead costs), while increasing expenditures in supporting technologies (cybersecurity, smooth internet connection, devices, etc.). In addition, the productivity of employees also increases due to such flexible work arrangements (remote, WFH), as substantiated by various studies (Baltes et al., 1999; Bloom, 2014; Mcnall et al., 2009), even during the pandemic, as supported by a study conducted by Lenovo in India.[8] Other benefits include companies having access to a bigger and wider talent pool to hire from, unrestricted from geographic limitations, and more positive image (supportive organization) with more satisfied employees (Baltes et al., 1999; Chen et al., 2018; Mcnall et al., 2009).

Structure

The traditional hierarchical structure is affected due to the work-from-home mandates. Majority of the companies across industries, barring the new-age ones preferred to have their workforce under a traditional office setup, with formal hierarchy and supervision structure in place. While in the context of the STAR Model, the authors spoke about units formed around functions, products, geographies, or customers, and suggested formal hierarchy which enables unhindered management and decision making and communication, the covid19 pandemic situation has changed the scenario quite drastically, and also permanently. The strategic decision to work-from-home, to retain business continuity in the times of

[7] Retrieved on 10 September 2020 at 14:05 hrs from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/work/work-from-home-survey-66-employees-feel-their-work-productivity-has-gone-up-considerably/articleshow/77649776.cms.

[8] Retrieved on 10 September 2020 at 14:05 hrs from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/work/work-from-home-survey-66-employees-feel-their-work-productivity-has-gone-up-considerably/articleshow/77649776.cms.

lockdown and social movement restrictions, has opened up avenues for structural changes in the formal hierarchy system itself.

In order to address these issues of communication, management, and decision making in such work arrangements where the physical meeting is absent, the hierarchical structure of the organization needs to be looked at with a different lens. Having an organization that is informational rather than industrial is what is required. A dynamic, non-hierarchical (or flatter hierarchy), technologically advanced organization, while being agile and supple, not only helps in quick adaptation to the dynamic environment, but also reduces costs and maintains business continuity.

Processes

Process, as defined in the context of the STAR Model, is "*a series of connected activities that move information up and down and across the organization*" (Kates & Galbraith, 2007, p. 17). Advances in technology, digitization, and focus on agility have been nudging organizations to change the mediums of information flow since long, the covid19 situation, again, acted as a catalyst to accelerate the changes. While electronic mediums were already present (videoconferencing, teleconferencing, email, skype, zoom, etc.), most organizations had in place a blended system, using a cocktail of physical as well as virtual presence. In fact, a new era of workforce, the jet-setters who traveled all across the world frequently, boomed the aviation and hospitality industry. However, the pandemic situation had restricted travel severely, and hence, these virtual online platforms have come to the aid. Moving away from traditional workplaces and workspaces, the employee is made (forced) to work-from-home, along with the constraints associated. This requires supportive changes from the organization at the technological level (having devices like laptop/desktop, uninterrupted wi-fi connection, issues of cybersecurity) as also the administrative level (challenges of monitoring, smooth unhindered communication across the team, ethical issues, employee well-being, etc.).

Those organizations who lied the positive end of digitization, i.e., were more technologically advanced, flourished, and the others lagged behind—having to race to catch up now. The tech companies, be it in finance, e-commerce, IT/ITES are the ones who have led till now. Manufacturing, automotive industries have been struggling, especially those who required physical workers presence to function. Exploring the

constraints and challenges of those sectors are outside the purview of this paper. Still, needless to say, organizations across industries, across the world, have moved to work-from-home whichever role possible, and this has been aided with technological support and digitization.

One of the key challenges, apart from the infrastructural ones, is that of cybersecurity. The use of technology, in fact, brings with it more issues and threats, in this covid19 pandemic, including DDoS attack, malicious domains, malicious websites, malware, ransomware, spam emails, malicious social media messaging, business email compromise, mobile apps, and browsing apps (Khan et al., 2020).

Rewards

With the economic recession, uncertain situation, and the overall negative outlook, profitability and work continuity for many industries are at stake. There have been many instances of job losses, pay cuts, furloughs, etc. across boards, rewards have admittedly taken a backseat for many. Simultaneously, the importance of skillsets, especially technological knowledge demands have increased commensurate salary expectations. Work-from-home arrangements throw up challenges of monitoring and performance, and this required a changed rewards system. While different organizations follow different compensation and rewards policy, based on a variety of internal and external factors, the impact of all the external uncertainties has shifted the power dynamics by greater emphasis on some roles while reducing/devaluing others. For example, with the rise in cybersecurity concerns, such roles/persons with requisite skillsets are much in demand, while those having traditional job roles are diminished.

People

Within the context of STAR Model, people practices include the human resources policies looking at the selection, staffing, training, and development of the employees, focused on forming the capabilities and mindsets essential to perform the organization's strategy. While it is undeniable that HR practices aid in creating sustained competitive advantage (Collins & Clark, 2003; Delery & Roumpi, 2017), as well as increase organization effectiveness and performance (Belfield & Marsden, 2003), in the covid19 pandemic scenario, the role of HRM is also rapidly evolving, requiring a different approach. Digitization has been onset even in the pre-Covid19

era, with artificial intelligence, machine learning, big data analytics, and the like. E-HRM has been adopted by organizations since the past four decades (Marler & Parry, 2015), with the desired outcomes of cost reduction, service improvements, and reorientation toward strategic HR (Ruël et al., 2007). Within the purview of work-from-home mandate, the issue of monitoring and control of people is of prime importance, along with employee adjustment and well-being, compensation structure, and retaining organizational and work culture (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Factors Influencing Implementation of Work-From-Home

Work-from-home mandates, though on paper may be applicable for all employees of an organization, cannot be practically implemented as a blanket cover for all. There are various factors which are at play here.

Digitization Readiness of the Industry

Each industry functions differently, and are at different stages of digitization. We can only look at the automotive industry and e-commerce—these are very unique and different industries per se, each having their challenges and advantages of operations. Except maybe support functions, which can be done remotely, the job functions which are/can be completed for work-from-home would be different among both. Even within the industry itself, the levels of digitization vary from one organization to the next. For example, the level of digitization in Tata Motors is quite different from, say, Bajaj Auto. While institution theory emphasizes that in the long run, organizations tend to "isomorph" (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983) however, this depends a lot on other factors like the size, strategy (defender/analyser/prospector, reactor) (Miles et al., 1978), etc. In fact, Kotey and Koomson (2019), in their study, observed that organization size affected the relationship between flexible work arrangements and financial performance. Hence, it is proposed that firms can be clustered under three categories, depending upon their digitization readiness—low, medium, and high, based on their size and strategy. Accordingly, It is proposed as:

P_1: Organizations which are high on digitization readiness are the ones who are agile prospectors, who are also already invested more in the digitization process.

Internal Capabilities

By internal capabilities, the employees' readiness, and willingness toward accepting digitization. While there are many studies looking at the positive outcomes of flexible work arrangements (Bloom, 2014), here I am interested in looking at the readiness of the employees as a whole. There are two aspects to internal capabilities—the individual employees' readiness, meaning the specific skillsets, the knowledge required. The second aspect is that of the employees' willingness. In the current situation, with no vaccine yet for the Covid19 virus, people are more prone to accept work-from-home mandates, for safety, security, and health concerns. There are added benefits of increased productivity, performance, and job satisfaction (Baltes et al., 1999). However, there is also the added stress of being confined in one place, decreased social interaction (colleagues, supervisors, subordinates), and stress created due to blurred boundaries between work and life (Kossek et al., 2006; Lapierre & Allen, 2006). Man being a social animal, social isolation creates havoc on the physical and psychological health. Thus, the long-term willingness of employees is something which needs to be addressed, and herein lies the work of the HR manager. Shockley and Allen (2012), observed that individuals were more driven toward flexible work arrangements due to work-related motives than life management motives. Prior research has found that people having higher self-efficacy (Butler et al., 2004) opted for such flexible arrangements, as also those who are need-motivated (Shockley & Allen, 2010). For such employees, monitoring issues will also be lesser. Within this context, in the current scenario, therefore, it is proposed that:

P_2: Employees with technical know-how, who are self-motivated, having higher self-efficacy will be more ready and willing to embrace the digitization process.

Internal Supports

By internal supports, I mean the infrastructural supports required for digitization. Quite a lot of factors are at play here. Organizations already invested in digitization, and having an industry advantage, with a strategic orientation toward digitization will be spending more on infrastructure building for supporting digitization. In the current scenario, with the covid19 situation and mandated work-from-home, organizations are forced to invest more in such associated costs, like hardware and software support for remote work, uninterrupted internet connectivity, cybersecurity, etc. Let me take the example of an IT company, who had implemented work-from-home for its employees till the end of this calendar year. Initially, employees had to manage/arrange for their own internet connection. However, due to the fluctuations of bandwidth, connectivity issues, etc., the company entered into a tie-up with a leading broadband service provider to give discounted internet connection to all its employees across India. Yet another MNC, a corporate bank, which did not even allow USB access or laptop in the office due to security and confidentiality concerns, had to change its policies drastically to implement work-from-home for its employees across the world. To address the data confidentiality issues, the company provided secured devices for each employee covered under work-from-home, and this was a significant overhead cost incurred. Thus, from the above, the research proposal has been constructed as:

P_3: Organizations who already have greater internal support (thus incurring lower infrastructure costs and overhead costs), will be more advanced in the digitization process.

Theoretical Model

Based on the above understandings, as discussed in previous sections, I propose the following model, given as Fig. 15.1, for gauging the success or failure of the WFH in the organization. This model will also enable the organization to understand where it stands, that is, which quarter it belongs to, and thus put in necessary interventions for improvement.

The three factors determining the implementation of work-from-home mandates are as stated below:

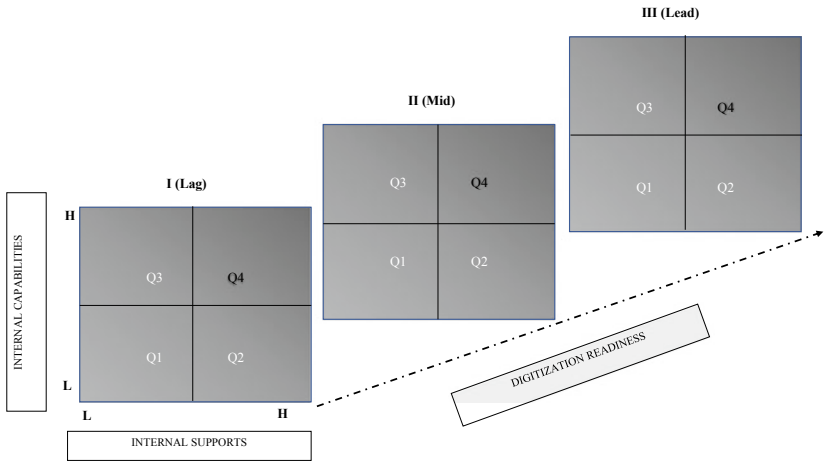

Fig. 15.1 Theoretical model (*Source* Author)

(i) X-axis—Internal Supports (infrastructure costs, overhead costs)
(ii) Y-axis—Internal Capabilities (employee readiness, employee willingness)
(iii) Z-axis—digitization readiness (organization size, organization strategy).

There are 3 levels of digitization readiness of the industry—lag (I), mid (II), and lead (III), these are clusters of organizations within than industry. Low cluster ones are those firms which are more traditional in nature, and not that much digitized, while high cluster ones are those firms which are already on advanced digitization, the pioneers in that industry.

In this XY plane, within the clusters, there are 4 quadrants where a firm can lie, viz., Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4. These are such that firms which are low in both internal capabilities and internal support, lie in Q1, while those firms which are high on both internal capabilities and internal support, lie in Q4. In Q2 lies those firms which are low in internal capabilities but high in internal support, and in Q3 lies those firms which are high in internal capabilities but low in internal support.

Implications

For Researchers

This model is, to the best of my knowledge, the first of any such framework aimed to gauge the implementation of flexible work arrangements (work-from-home), from a macro-level. I hope this would open up further interest into the macro-level analyses of this arena, more so in the current context where flexible work arrangements are gaining importance at a broader level. Researchers interested in the digitization process, as also those of E-HRM, may find this model interesting. Testing the above model, for its reliability and validity, may open up more areas of in-depth research yet not explored.

For Practitioners

This model should enable practitioners to assess the current position of the firm, based on the level and quadrant they fall into, and thus help in identifying improvement areas. The aim of a firm should be to reach Q4 within that level of digitization readiness (I, II or III). Thus, the first step would be in identifying the current quadrant and level for the firm, and then put in necessary interventions to move ahead to the highest quadrant, i.e., Q4. For example, a firm lying in level I of organizational readiness cluster, and Q2 quadrant (low internal capabilities but high internal support), the role of HRM practitioners would be to see whether employee willingness or employee readiness (or both) is lacking, and thence provide necessary interventions (for willingness—policy/reward structure changes to increase motivation; for readiness—training or hiring to match the required skillsets). This exercise needs to be done periodically, so as to monitor the progress/regress/change, and it is hoped that such data would allow create knowledge base, aid decision making and contribute to its strategic choices. Especially from the HRM perspective, the role of HR as a strategic partner to the core business is hoped to be strengthened.

Future Research

The first step would be to test the above model with real-world data. For this, identification of testable variables, along with scales of measurement has to be done. I envisage this to be a longitudinal study, so as to assess

the movement of firms across quadrants and levels. Results from such analyses would help in further honing and modifying the above model, so as to make it more useful and applicable, not only for the academicians but also for the practitioners.

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