



Impact of Remote Working Environment in Kenyan Organizations

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Abstract

Remote working environment refers to working outside the traditional workspace. Such environments define working as a mobile activity rather than needing a specific space to accomplish it. Remote work has been around for some time before the pandemic however, the quarantine and lockdown protocols pushed many organizations to adopt the system. Other organizations have found the conveniences of remote working, including reduced rental expenses and other organizational amenities while maintaining profitability and productivity. The remote working environment is here to stay in the professional realm; hence this seminar paper seeks to look at organizations in Kenya. Most sectors in Kenya were adversely affected by the remote working environment. The study adopted review and analysis methodology of the existing literature, through Google Scholar search engine and Z-library by use of key words to investigate the impact of remote working environment on employee productivity, attitudes, and challenges to Kenyan organizations. The paper also looks at the overall organizational performance under a remote working environment. The study reveals that employee performance and attitude are significantly boosted under the remote working environment. Distractions and lack of proper utilities were highlighted as the key challenges faced by employees in remote working environments. The study also recommends the formulation of policies and procedures that will guide employees while choosing a framework for evaluating performance in the remote working environment.

Keywords: Remote Working Environment, Organizational Performance, Employee productivity, Employee Attitude and Employee Challenges.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Information

Due to the sudden rise of the pandemic, the government set up some regulations to help cope with the spread of the virus. The main purpose of the regulations was to minimize the spread of the disease and ultimately reduce the loss of life that the virus was claiming. As such, it has been paramount for society to adhere to the rules set for the benefit of everyone. Some of the regulations to mitigate the pandemic included; washing hands, maintaining social distancing, and avoiding crowded places (Wronka, 2022). These are just a few examples of how it has affected our day-to-day lives. Many normal activities such as

public events and academics were put on hold or banned due to the pandemic. Despite the challenges that the pandemic posed, life had to move on. Society has tried to adapt to a new way of life while ensuring safety from the pandemic. Most of the activities put on hold due to the pandemic are slowly resuming while implementing special measures that ensure strict adherence to the protocols. As expected, many aspects of life have changed hence the need to adapt to technological solutions (Wronka, 2022). Many businesses have gone through shutdowns and were having difficulty adapting to the different way of life that had been brought. Online platforms of different kinds have been developed, including communication and coordination platforms that facilitate the completion of tasks, attending meetings or classes, and serving clients, among other things that could otherwise be done in person. Physical contact was reduced to a minimum, leading to various systems, procedures, and policies to ensure that organizations meet their customers' goals and services. Organizations have come up with new ways of working remotely while ensuring that their products and services are delivered to the best standard (Rani & Dhir, 2020). Therefore, the main focus for many businesses knew how to connect to the workers without demanding any physical presence while delivering their services. The firms utilized different digital and technological tools to connect with employees in real-time and facilitate their decision-making processes. Employees, therefore, do remote work, more so as a result of the pandemic, which is an environment that is yet to be known and understood by many organizations.

1.2 Problem Statement

Many organizations are hesitant to offer their employees the option of working in remote environments. One of the main reasons is the cost of infrastructure. Remote working environments require seamless technological infrastructure for effective communication and coordination among team members. Firms also fear the failure of the infrastructure at a critical point will position their business at a considerable disadvantage. Also, some managers prefer management of their employees physically due to the ease in finding them, compared to looking for employees who are far off.

1.3 Justification

The proposed solution showcases the significance of assessing systems, procedures, and policies of remote working environments. Due to the many complexities and assumptions of remote working environments, firms do not want to spare time to get to know the trend and instead choose to ignore it. Understanding the different facets of remote working environments will enable organizations to move past their fears and embrace something that could greatly benefit them and their employees.

1.4 The objective of the Study

To assess the impact of systems policies and the procedures for remote working environments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5 Research Question

What is the impact of remote working environment systems and procedures on the employee's attitudes and productivity in Kenyan financial institutions during the pandemic?

1.6 Materials and Methods

The review utilized existing literature as the primary source of secondary data to provide insights regarding the impacts of remote working environments on the workforce. Peer-reviewed articles were retrieved from Google Scholar search engine and Z-Library online databases to provide insights regarding the impact of the remote working environment on the Kenyan workforce. A total of ten articles using the key words in the study were reviewed. The main aspects that were addressed in the study included employee attitude, organizational productivity, and challenges experienced by employees in the remote working environment, in Kenyan organizations.

2.0 Attitudes Concerning Working in Remote Environment

2.1 Attitude of Employees

Since the introduction of remote working in organizations due to the pandemic or other reasons, many employees have different opinions concerning the change from the traditional workspace of an office. Despite the difference in opinion, the majority have a positive attitude towards remote working. According to a research done by 'Indeed Survey', roughly 40 percent of employees prefer salary cuts to working remotely. Since the introduction of remote work, 30 percent of the mentioned employees would quit their jobs if remote work was put off the table. According to Canon Australia (2019), the most significant aspect of remote working perceived by the employees is the chance it gives them to live flexibly and balance between work and home life. The balance of their personal lives with their work brings positive morale to the employees, giving them opportunities to be with their families while working at the job they love. Positive morale also increases productivity and performance, which is ultimately a good thing for any organization. Canon Australia (2019) also emphasizes commuting as a significant aspect of the traditional working environments that have been eradicated by remote working. Some individuals spend most of their salaries on fuel and fare. In a remote working environment, commuting is unnecessary, thus enabling employees to save on fuel, time and energy, and other hustles brought about by transiting from home to work and back. Many employees enjoy the luxury of not arriving home during late hours to the point of exhaustion while anticipating waking up early in the morning for the next work shift, with the help of remote working environments. Much time is therefore saved while adopting remote working for employees, allowing them to interact with their families or do other organizational activities that could not have been completed due to excessive time consumption that traditional working environments bring.

2.2 Attitudes of Remote Working Environments Based on Gender

Both men and women have different attitudes towards remote working, according to (Canon Australia, 2019). For women, remote working has been a significant step up in their professional world. In most organizations, expectant mothers need to take leave to care for their children. Some women may come back from the leave to find themselves replaced by other people. Others may find it difficult to find money, especially when they have

younger children to look after at home. With remote working, women can work from their homes and look after their children.

According to a study done by Pew Research Centre (Desilver, 2020), remote working elevates the probability of women being promoted and elevated in the career stages. The investigated different women concerning what holds them back from navigating towards the top positions of their careers. About 1800 women responded that their family responsibilities could not permit them from growing further into their careers. The research showed that 43 percent of women give up their careers to raise their families. With remote working, such challenges can be overcome thus, women can continue working and improve themselves professionally. In organizations that have adopted remote working conditions, women hold three times more managerial positions than organizations without remote working options.

McAdam (2020) emphasizes that some employees, however, want to be seen physically productive many of them being men. Many men have had the upper hand in society because of their opportunities in the professional world. Women are trying to get their fainting to get weighed by their family responsibilities over difficulties in catching up with the male gender, thus, rendering some at the mercies of the male gender. The professional world has usually been the upper hand for the male gender. By giving women the opportunity to work from home, many will be empowered. Remote working will provide an opportunity for women and men to compete fairly in the professional world.

3.0 Challenges the Employees are going through while working remotely

3.1 Distractions in the Remote Working environment

Despite the many advantages of remote working environments, employees encounter challenges while doing the same. According to Franken *et al.* (2021), the main challenge is maximizing productivity. Most of the remote working conditions currently are working in a personal space, most likely home. There are many distractions in a home since it is not necessarily an ideal workplace. The distractions may include children, television, and social media, among other variables regulated in a traditional working environment. Therefore, some employees may find it difficult to finish projects on time due to such distractions. This aspect nullifies the many advantages that remote working environments bring. Assessing the system's policies and procedures of remote working environments enables firms to understand the challenges that the employees face and realize ways to overcome the challenges to ensure effective delivery of tasks, especially in specific seasons where remote working is paramount. Xiao *et al.* (2021) reveals that firms can employ different training programs to help employees cope with the remote working environment, especially when used in traditional working environments. Considering the effective distractions, employees can learn how to eliminate them and create a conducive work environment in their remote working conditions. Creating a workspace that is never utilizing a remote working environment is a key factor in eliminating distractions. The workspace created can ensure that employees concentrate fully on the tasks of the day, thus increasing productivity. Such aspects may seem simple but require time to explain and train employees. Remote working environments are a current trend in the professional world. Xiao *et al.* (2021) further highlights that organizations have to be able to flexibly transit from the traditional office workspace to remote work environments,

especially in trying times such as during the pandemic, in order to save the organization from being shut down or undergoing massive losses. In assessing the remote working environment, the challenges that employees encounter during this process helps firms prepare adequately to ensure that their employees are performing to the best of their ability. Firms can even utilize the advantages of remote working environments when employees effectively understand and produce their work in a comfortable place of their choosing.

3.2 Lack of Infrastructure

Banham (2021) states that employees encounter a challenge in acquiring the necessary resources to accomplish their tasks while not at the office. Some employees have challenges such as poor internet connection and difficulty navigating through various digital platforms required for communication and other important activities for the organization. Organizations find it hard to become productive while applying remote working environments by neglecting some of these challenges.

4.0 Significance Remote Working Environments Play in the Business World

4.1 Remote working environments as an emerging trend

Among more than 26 million Americans, 16% of the workforce utilizes the remote working environment. This information is based on a study conducted by the U.S Bureau of Labour and statistics. According to the same research, between 2005 and 2015, there has been an increase in telecommuting among the workforce by 115%. Despite the many advantages that are brought by adopting remote working conditions, some jobs cannot accommodate the new trend (Adams, 2019). Remote working environment can therefore be utilized partly or fully depending on the needs of an organization. When used effectively, remote working can be an advantage to both the employer and employee. Such a flexible aspect of remote working environment showcases the increasing role that the trend plays in the professional world. As mentioned earlier, many employees see the benefits of remote working environments and prefer them to the traditional work environments. This aspect shows the significant role that a remote working environment can play in an organization. An employee given the same job opportunity with the traditional workspace versus another job opportunity with a remote working environment will most likely choose the job with a remote working environment offer. Organizations therefore need to assess the system, policies and a procedure involving remote working environments since it is most likely the new current trend in the professional world that concerns the employees.

4.2 Employee performance under remote working environment

In a study, 273 teleworkers from various departments such as marketing and accounting departments established that employees whose work demanded high performance and completion of complex tasks without the need for social support or significant collaboration performed better in a remote working environment rather than a traditional workspace. According to the research, such employees need time to think and reflect on problem-solving techniques (Adams, 2019). A traditional working environment may fail to give such employees the adequate space and time they need to perform complex tasks faster. Also, according to research done in 2015 by Research Review, the author Golden and his counter parts established that employees working in remote environments have a higher performance percentage and experience less work stress than those in a traditional

working environment Adams, 2019 Davies, 2019 states that the main reason organizations fail to implement remote working environment policies into their business activities is that employees may reduce their performance since they are not being supervised. Such a perspective showcases how managers measure employee performance based on late work nights and completing more work as a bar for employee effectiveness. This perspective is necessarily untrue.

4.3 Remote Working Environment and Overall Organizational Performance

Organizations are usually keen on ensuring employee satisfaction, employee retainment and focusing on having the best workforce for better results for their organizations. Many organizations have adopted remote working to develop and establish the mentioned aspects in their organization. According to research done by the Office of National Statistics, about 50% of the workforce in the U.K. will focus on remote working in 2020. The research further continues to show that there has existed an increase in the remote working workforce employees in the last decade. A remote working environment makes a job more appealing to individuals. The trend therefore sets organizations apart and ensures the best talent is brought on board to businesses that employ it. Due to the nature of the trend, the application of remote working in a firm gives it the opportunity to formulate a diverse workforce which will ensure the business remains competitive. The different perspectives of people, together with a variant pool of knowledge, can lead an organization to better decision-making patterns (Pinincu, 2020). Since remote working environments attract big talents, a firm can easily get a good reputation based on its employers and the quality of work, thus propelling it to greater heights. Invention and innovation, which is a critical aspect in our current technological world, will also be present in such an environment, therefore maximizing the growth of an organization. Whenever a problem or crisis arises, such a team will ensure the organization is at the top of its chain. A study was conducted by Harvard Business Review involving six teams being exposed to complicated, strange, and new situations (Pinincu, 2020). The best performance came from the most cognitively diverse groups. The conclusion of the research showcased how a diversified team can produce better results in times of crisis.

Conclusions

Organizations that assess remote working environments' systems will ensure that their employees understand and navigate digital platforms. Such employees will also be able to work effectively under favourable policies to ensure that tasks are completed in time. Many organizations have failed to get back to where they once were due to failing to understand their challenges. Assessing the remote environment will curb such difficulties and ensure the success of remote working environments. Assessing the system, policies, and procedures of remote working environments will enable managers to view employee performance based on results. This aspect is challenging for managers to grasp but it is important for the organization progresses. Organizations have no choice other than to adopt and implement remote work environment, since it is what the world is fast embracing both locally and globally. Any organization, institution and business entities that want to connect globally must now work remotely in the current economic world.

The study revealed that the employee attitude in terms of morale and motivation was significantly boosted under the remote working environment. This is majorly attributed to the comfort of working from home with their families around. The employees also cut on the time and resources spent commuting to work every day instead of directing the time and resources on something else. Women also find the remote working environment more convenient as it allows them to take care of their families while working. The remote working environment eliminates the risk of losing jobs due to maternity leaves given to expectant women. The critical challenge under the remote working environment that has been highlighted in the literature is the chaotic environment and family-work conflicts. The chaotic environment is a result of auditory and visual distractions associated with the work-from-home environment. The work from home environment weakens the employees' engagement while demotivating them to direct efforts on their job tasks. Lack of proper utilities such as internet access, computers, and ergonomic chairs also emerged as a critical challenge faced by employees in the remote working environment. The overall employee performance is boosted under the remote working environment. The pressure associated with the traditional office setup is eliminated in the remote working environment, allowing employees more space to brainstorm and solve organizational problems.

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