Should I go or Not go to Office? Challenges And Opportunities in Remote Working in An Indian Commercial Vehicle Organisation

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Abstract: Ensuring business continuity and achieving employee productivity are the major questions which commercial vehicle organizations try to find the answer while implementing work from home or remote learning. Traditionally the commercial vehicle organization being physical in nature had limited or no scope of remote working. Increase in technology and digital collaboration platforms have paved the way for remote working in commercial vehicle organization also. While there are many advantages and positive aspects of implementing the remote working, it also comes with its share of challenges and difficulties implementing them. While setting a clear and structured job expectation is necessary, equal important is to have a well-defined employee friendly human resource policy suitable for remote working to equip the executives to deliver.

Keywords: Remote working, work from home, commercial vehicle, co- working, productivity

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1. Introduction Need for WFH before and after COVID-19

The nature of work from home varies from industry to industry. Work from home or remote working has been differently adapted in different organisations. Comparing Information technology, Banking and financial organisation, Engineering services, consultancy the way commercial vehicle organisations have seen work from home was much lesser. Since there are lot of manual processes, physical nature of the job work from home was not seen as a viable option. With the present challenges posing the commercial vehicle organisation such as travel restrictions to the factory , office and customer locations , higher costs related to maintaining office and factory spaces, sanitisation requirements, safety protocol to be followed, social distancing norms running and sustaining the organisation has been increasingly difficult. Hence the commercial vehicle industry has been forced to work and innovate on ways and means to run industry by working remotely.

2.Survey of Literature

Literature surveys provide insights on impact of pandemic in the remote working and the various challenges faced by employees. Bin Wang Yukun Liu 2020 infer from from semi-structured interviews with Chinese employees working from home in the early days of the pandemic, we identified four key remote work challenges (work-home interference, ineffective communication, procrastination, and loneliness), as well as four virtual work characteristics that affected the experience of these challenges (social support, job autonomy, monitoring, and workload) and one key individual difference factor (workers' self-discipline). On the other hand Tracey Bowen, Antoine Pennaforte 2017 infer that Social media, network capabilities, and digital communication technologies are changing the nature of work for individuals in WIL programs; further challenging the connections between industries and universities in their efforts to ensure individuals are work ready. Alan

Golo Henseke 2017 focus on remote working associated with higher organisational commitment, job satisfaction and job-related well-being, these benefits come at the cost of work intensification and a greater inability to switch off.Though the above researchers have provided insights on the impact of the current environment with respect to the remote working and factors affecting the organization as well as individual it was not clearly spelt out on the remote working in organizations having physical processes like the commercial vehicle organization in the Indian context. Based on this gap, the paper has intended to study on the current maturity level of remote working and progress of a future maturity level with respect to remote working in a Commercial Vehicle Organisation

3.Covid-19 pandemic and Related Social Distancing Norms

Enhancing cleaning, sanitization, availability of hand washing stations, temperature checking, providing personal safety equipment's including masks are some of the hygiene factors being followed in the commercial vehicle industry. Many organizations have also introduced the roster management where in there is a control and ensuring the restrictions in terms of head count in production shop floor or office space. This helps to achieve a hybrid work methodology where few hold the responsibilities at the front end and the balance provide the back-

end support from remote locations. This helps to achieve business continuity at the same time also helps individuals to take care of themselves during testing times.

4. Concerns Of Remote Working

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Lack of infrastructure
- Connectivity

Distractions in the remote location is one of the key concerns to dispense remote work or work from home. Distractions could be in many ways. Thin boundary between work and personal life needs have a definite role to play in terms of distractions. It could be in way of other members in the family, kids at home, online engagements for other family members especially online learning, all the family members being at home and need for constant support for each other, sound distractions, elderly in home who needs constant support are some of the major concerns. In major cities, the floor space available for work is also a concern especially for junior and middle management. Macro-economic environment, business pressures to the commercial vehicle industry, volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the professional life have caused anxiety and stress in the minds of people. Over and above based on the geographical locations of the place from where the individual operates internet connectivity varies from place to place.

5. Role Based Work From Home

Enabling a work environment suiting the role requirement whether the executive needs to be physically present in the work location or can perform the role remotely is very important. The role can be fulfilled effectively by providing the executive with required aspects like desktop, laptop, dongle or broadband services, required software, security permissions, a noise free area, ergonomic workspace with proper furniture. Also, availability of a digital collaboration platform to teamwork in a virtual mode is also important.

5.1 Remote working competencies.

Different executives performing different roles have different Challenges and difficulties

While many people in the commercial vehicle Organisation enjoy working remotely and do so successfully, a multitude of challenges can make it quite difficult for others:
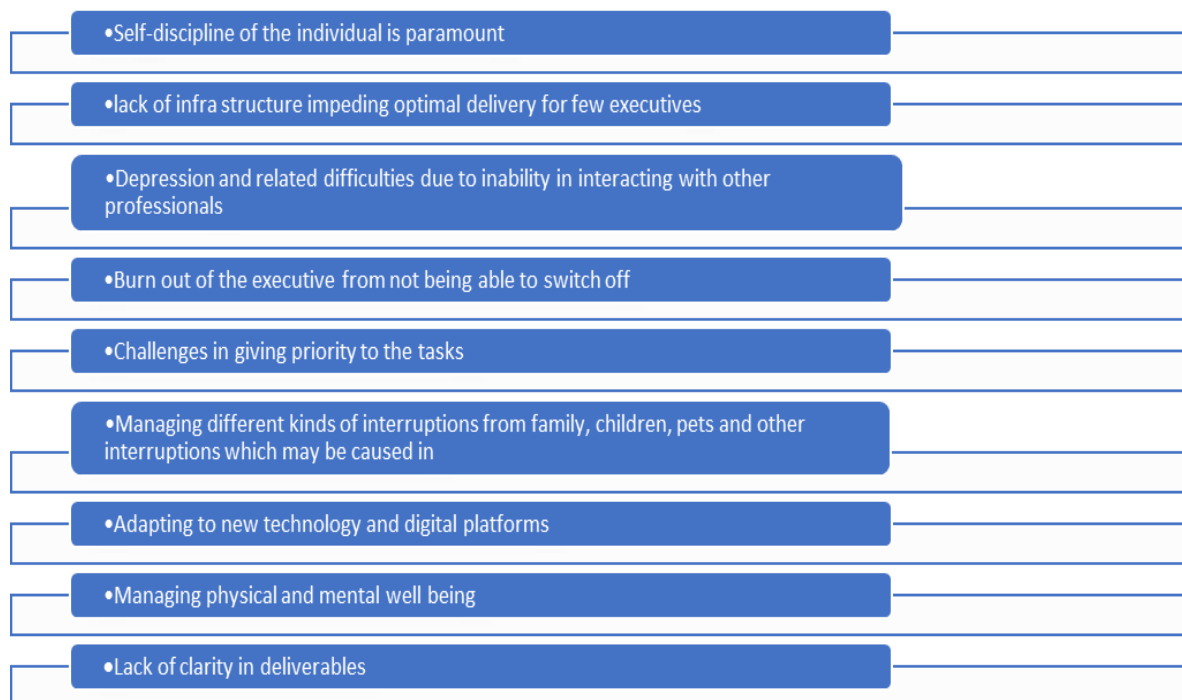
- Self-discipline of the individual is paramount
- lack of infra structure impeding optimal delivery for few executives
- Depression and related difficulties due to inability in interacting with other professionals
- Burn out of the executive from not being able to switch off
- Challenges in giving priority to the tasks
- Managing different kinds of interruptions from family, children, pets and other interruptions which may be caused in
- Adapting to new technology and digital platforms
- Managing physical and mental well being
- Lack of clarity in deliverables

Figure 1: Challenges of remote working

Though remote work in the Indian context is new to the commercial vehicle organization, many organizations globally have been doing it successfully for years, and employees have likely experienced both the benefits and the challenges of getting things done away from the office.

Important questions to ask when implementing a remote workforce:

• How can the capability and capacity to work remotely be measured and understood?
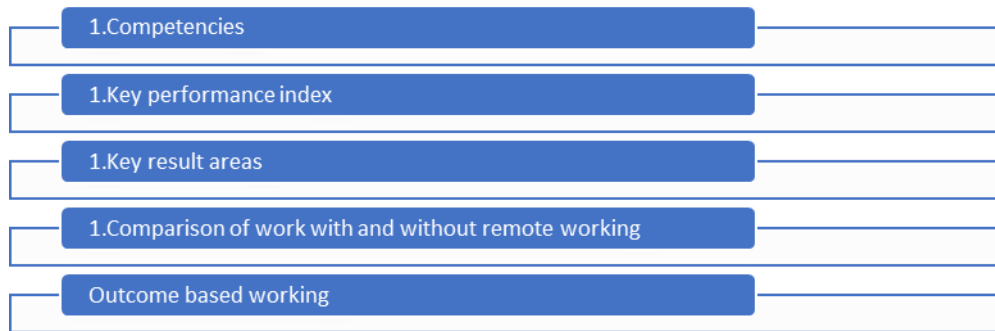
1.Competencies

1.Key performance index

1.Key result areas

1.Comparison of work with and without remote working

Outcome based working

Figure 2: Metrics on Remote working

• How can leaders adjust their management style to help employees succeed in a remote environment?

1.Mentoring

1.Digital networking

1.Communicate more

1.Make the targets and output clear

1.Set the ground rules clearly

Figure 3: Leader's framework

•How can data and talent analytics assist in making good decisions for your organization?

1.Management information system and dashboard

1.Data based decision making

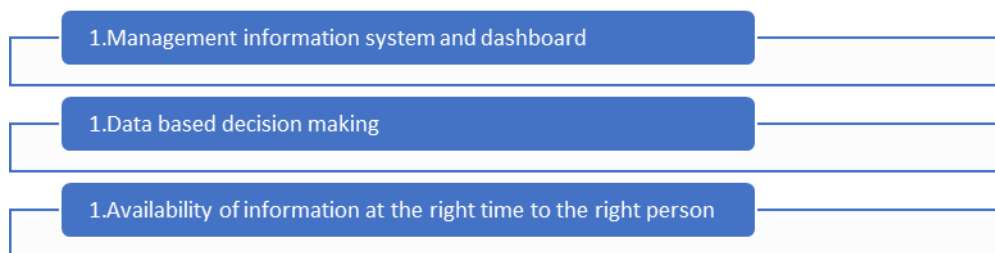1.Availability of information at the right time to the right person

Figure 4: Data and analytics framework

6.Cost Optimization

During the corona pandemic situation, the commercial vehicle organization suffered business challenges severely and sustaining the organization and coming out of the crisis itself was a huge task. Hence companies had to resort to the following areas towards cost control

Figure 5: Cost control measures

Over and above the wage and salary related reductions, companies also deep dive in reduction and optimization of administrative over heads and production over heads. Administrative overheads in a commercial vehicle organization consists of travel, stationery, stay, logistics, welfare measures, maintaining office spaces etc., while production overhead related to power, consumable, manpower, tooling costs associated with producing the products.

7.Organizational Process

Major challenges and bottlenecks in remote working comes from physical processes, need to use equipment's, computers and servers at office and shop floor locations, pen and paper methods and process followed. Ability to bring more people under the umbrella of remote working depends on automating the processes from the traditional pen and paper method. Listing the role requirements of the individual and grouping them based on which roles needs remote working and need to work in office would help organization to optimize people working in office space

7.1 Productivity

Commercial vehicle organisations primarily have workforce which can bucketed into three categories. The first category consists of people who are the executives or the white collared work force who take up roles such as supervisory management, daily work management of the work force, knowledge workers, handling teams, decision makers, strategy and policy makers, thought leadership, that involves delegation, mentoring and coaching, implementors of strategic initiatives and projects of the organisation. The second category of people are the associate category or the permanent work force or the blue collared work force. The nature of job would be more defined in production of components, aggregates and final products, production support functions such as progress chasers, material feeders, stores and inventory management in shop floor, inspectors in the shop floor, maintenance of equipment's, data entry related, billing and clerical jobs, transactional activities which can be defined based on certain time standards. This category of workforce may be unionised, and productivity increase are generally achieved through long term settlement negotiations with the management. The third category of people are the flexible workforce or the contractual manpower. The nature of the jobs is very similar to that of the permanent category of workforce except for the fact that these workforces are generally hired for the seasonality of demand. Also, the shop floor work can be grouped based on the criticality with respect to delivery of quality and skill level of the job. Based on the grouping job nature which are not critical to quality and critical to product may be given to the low skilled workforce. This category of workforce is also called as the gig workforce wherein the company can hire for specific time bound projects and activities. These specific projects or tasks could be strategic or transactional in nature. Organisations in order to bring in productivity adopt the process of reducing or removing a process which is not value adding, Mechanise or robotise or automate the process which can be done, contracting or giving to third party or providing to a gig work force if we are unable to do the first step and the second step. This helps the organisation to optimise the resources and achieve productivity.
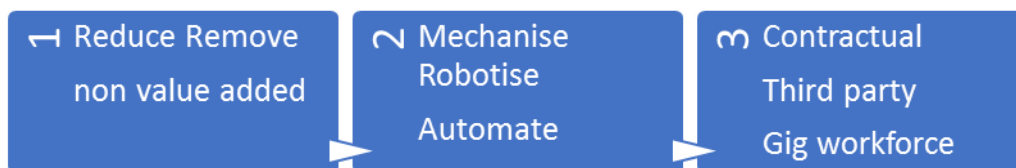

Figure 6: Productivity framework

7.2 Collaboration platforms

With the growing trend in remote working and work from home, online collaboration or digital collaboration occupies a vital place in the life of a role holder. Digital collaboration platform helps to achieve easy task management, seamless visual and audio communication, sharing of information, taking feedback, live and interactive data capturing and sharing, brainstorming, documenting the overall proceeds of the meeting, etc. Progress review and project management can be done easily using these platforms which otherwise done through a physical approach can lead to a tedious process. Tasks can be further broken down into sub tasks, check lists, completion status and monitoring the overall progress of the project and milestones. These platforms also help to collaborate with multiple users geographically separated. Based on the confirmation from team, these meetings can be recorded which acts as a rich source of knowledge management. Many cases they also are used for knowledge transfer and dissemination as part of various learning initiatives. There has been a sharp increase in usage of these collaborative platforms like zoom, teams, jio meet, WebEx, google meet, etc

7.3 Dedicated place at home without interference

In order to overcome the distractions at the remote working workplace, it is imperative to have a dedicated location for work. This to a great extent helps the individual to focus an align towards work. Not all people however have the luxury to have a dedicated workplace. In such cases organizations can help by establishing co working spaces where an individual can go and work which is not the office space. This is like having a satellite workplace which the organization can pay and organize for the individuals. Also, organizations can plan to provide Hot desking facility. Unlike the co-location workspace, hot desking is providing a space to work in the office space. Hot desking is not a dedicated workplace, but a place given to an individual on first come first serve basis.

7.4 Digital skills to cope up with WORK FROM HOME

The productivity of work would not be achieved if the executive has the enough digital skills which are required to have an optimal level of performance during remote working There are two versions of the competencies: One for remote workers and the other for leaders who manage remote workers.

Remote working executives - can compare their own behavioural tendencies to those that are most likely to produce positive outcomes.

Leaders of Remote working executives - can gain insights into their own management style and potential adjustments that will benefit team members and organizational performance.

7.5 Co working spaces

Increased competition in the commercial vehicle organisations have forced the organisations to think about innovating the products and achieving cost efficiency. While cost efficiency can be achieved in so many ways, one of the important ways of reducing cost has been by optimising the administrative overheads. Organisations for optimising the administrative overheads are adapting an asset light model where the capital expenditure has been kept low. Remote working helps in optimising the administrative costs where the office space can be made optimal. This can be established by enabling through an employee friendly work from home policy. Also practicing concepts such as Hot desking and co working spaces would significantly bring down the costs.

8. Conclusion

Considering the benefit which organizations have seen and accrued in terms of reduced travel time, more digitalization happening in the work place, ability of help the special needs of executives, better control of cost and keep the competitive edge, freedom and flexibility to hire the best of the talent which is agnostic of the geographical location. Hence the benefits seen by implementing the work from home and remote working policies are likely to remain even post normalcy with certain finetuning based on needs of the employee and the organization.

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