THE IMPACT OF REMOTE WORK ON THE IT COMPANIES, MADURAI

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ABSTRACT

Background: Remote work means working from home with the use of ICT to coordinate and collaborate with the team. It has become a popular topic among all organizations, especially in the IT sector. With technology and internet availability on the rise, organizations across the globe have adopted these employee-friendly practices. The IT companies from Madurai are mostly outside the main city and the recent water crisis occurring in the region has forced the IT companies in this region to make use of remote working.

Aims: The research aims to study the Impact of Remote Work on the IT Sector in Madurai, India from the perspective of employee and employers and to identify its value and to analyze the need for remote work around the world.

Design and Method: The research design for doing this study incorporates both quantitative & qualitative research. In quantitative research, primary data was collected through online Google forms from 76 employees of three organizations in Madurai, India. For the qualitative research, a non-probability purposive sample of management level i.e. managers were chosen from the same organizations which were chosen for a quantitative method to balance the perspective of both employers and employees. Three Semi-structured interviews, a thematic approach is utilized to gain complete insight into this topic from the same organizations to obtain both the management and employee perspective of choosing remote work.

Results: The study provided empirical evidence that remote work is mostly valued by the employees because of the benefits gained by its flexibility. It is getting promoted by many organizations because it is associated with so many benefits to the management in terms of cost, satisfaction and retention of the employees and also provides job opportunities for those who can't commute to work. Contrarily, the weakness of this remote work is mostly to the employees resulting in isolation which is also taken under consideration by the management by conducting team bonding activities. In a highly populated country like India with the rapidly growing economy with young and tech-savvy population, remote work is considered to be the best way to see the future as both sides are getting benefitted concerning self-discipline in remote working employees.

Recommendation: This study recommends to the organizations in Madurai, India from the Information technology industry to embrace the policy of allowing working from home to their employees which proves to be advantageous in the form of an increase in productivity, quality, employee satisfaction and retention.

Key Words: Remote working, teleworking, work from home, Information technology, Job satisfaction, Employee retention, job-related, Information Technology Sector, ICT, Madurai IT, Telecommuting.

INTRODUCTION

Remote work is a concept where the employees in an organization do not have to commute to a central place of work. It could also be addressed as work from home, telework and telecommuting (Tammy D. Allen, 2015). Information and communication technology have paved a way for people to work more effectively and efficiently without being physically present at their desks in the office. Work from home option is becoming an increasingly common practice. Due to the same reason, the number of people involved in remote work has been extensively increasing in the IT sector (Mahadik, 2016).

The rising popularity of remote work and the organizations are seeking remote employees comes as no such surprise as the latest, innovative technology makes the virtual collaboration and telecommuting easier and effective than before (Allen, 2015, pp. 40 – 68). This is real for Tech/IT contractor or the freelance professionals since information/computer system industry currently ranks on the second number in industries embracing the remote work (Bentley, 2016 , pp . 207 - 215). In the year 2016, 57% of the employees that are working in an IT system and Computer system spent some time by working remotely with respect to reporting on workplace finding through Gallup. Changing an expectation of workplace there are several components that have led to the outcome in remote work in the Technology and IT sector. The highly specialized Tech professionals demand flexibility when it comes to location and work schedule, hence the companies will be forced to consider changing the traditional strategies and policies (Bell, 2018).

It is a rapidly growing phenomenon on a global scale. As per the US Employee Workforce data, it is seen that telecommuting grew 115 per cent in the past decade (analytics, 2017).

- The IT industry constitutes 8% of the Indian GDP and employs about 3.9 million people in the financial year 2017. It was projected to add 130000 to 150000 in the 2018 and 100000 jobs in the financial year 2019 ('IT-ITeS-Report-Mar-20181.pdf', no date) (Bakshi, 2017, p . 86)
- A large percentage of this population is woman who often gives up their jobs in order to start a family. (Biswas, 2017)
- Remote work has encouraged more women to get on with their careers even after starting their families (Loubier, 13 March 2017)
- Moreover, researches have shown that people prefer working from home rather than working at offices. This could give them a peaceful atmosphere to work on, maintain a work-life balance and savings on travel fare (Carrión, 2016).
- Culture of a company is majorly impacted by the flexible working from home practice.

Even though there are companies that allow some sort of flexibility for working parents and especially mothers, universally this working from home practise is very much debatable. The geographical location of the company plays a major role in a company practising this policy. This is important to the business world on what kind of a culture a company wants to adopt and to be known as (Timsal and Awais, 2016). The acute water crisis in Madurai have spilt over

several offices and their working pattern, with many ICT companies in the city, are encouraging their employees to work from home for the next 3 months to tackle the water crisis (Madurai: No water, work from home, IT firms tell staff |Madurai News-Times of India, 2019).

A survey conducted in 2016 shows that most of the companies are almost virtual, with 41% never meet in person. The significant part of it is that virtual teams have become more global with an

increased global presence. In 2017 the same survey revealed that more than 50% of the team sit in different areas and have never met. In 2014, that figure was only 41%, and in 2012 it was only 33% (VIRTUAL TEAMS SURVEY REPORT, 2016). As we see in the above statistics working from home has evolved over the years and it is being used across the globe by various big companies. Hence understanding the link between working from home and its direct effect on performance, attitudes, relationships and well-being is key to the business world in retaining the employees in their company. This constant rise in working from home increases the importance of looking from the point of view in which this practice impacts the organization and the individuals (Beauregard, Basile and Canonico, 2013).

The importance of work-life balance has significantly increased in recent years. Work- life balance is an important involvement within human resources in all organizations. It was found that people working from home completed 13.5% more calls than the staffs in the office did in a Chinese travel website Ctrip. It means that Ctrip got almost an extra workday a week out of them. The attrition rate was also half the rate at which it was anticipated and predictably, at- home workers reported much higher job satisfaction (Bloom, 2014).

Remote Work in Supporting the Company

There is evidence that remote working is used to benefit the companies. The increased productivity at the level of enterprises, increased retention and access to cost-saving are documented well (Dockery A. M., 2017). For instance, networking hardware organization Cisco estimates that remote working saves the company $277 million on an annual basis in productivity (Bell, 2018). The company of computer technology Dell plans to have half its workforce working through remote at least as part-time by the year 2020 representing that remote working has also promoted productivity, led to cost savings and better for the environmental conditions (Mahadik, 2016). While, certain companies, for instance, Yahoo have declared the remote working to be a disappointment. The research suggests that too much concentration on technology and lack of focus on methods may be a part of an issue (Carrion, 2016, pp. 4545 - 4551). To assure the success of remote workers, the companies need to concentrate on initiating the strong and clear process of coordination and communication with building a company's culture that can raise engagement (Pradhan, 2015).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research paper is to focus and understand the impact of remote work in an organization, perceptions of both management and employees. The study clearly aims to seek the correlation and analyze its suitability in the South Indian work environment.

- To identify the value of remote work in the IT sector. Impact of remote work on productivity and quality of work.
- To provide recommendation and background from future studies by identifying the value of remote work.
- To identify an employee's perspective on choosing work from home option.
- To evaluate how the work from home practice helps the employees in increasing job/ employee satisfaction.
- To evaluate the influence of remote work on employee retention.
- To evaluate the demand and needs of remote work in Madurai and to reach a conclusion regarding the trend in the city.

The paper also highlights the advantages and disadvantages of remote work.

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1.1. Research Hypothesis

The above research questions were appropriately transformed into relevant research Hypothetical statements for the purpose of achieving the aims of the study. Meanwhile, in the order of clarification, only the null hypotheses are highlighted while the alternative hypotheses would be reserved until it is purported to be factual at the end of the analysis. Therefore, highlighted below are the hypotheses statements:

H01: Working from home practice has no positive and significant impact on a company's productivity in the IT industry in Madurai, India.

H02: Working from home practice has no positive and significant impact on the quality of work in the IT industry in Madurai, India.

H03: Working from home practice has no positive and significant impact on employee satisfaction in the IT industry in Madurai, India.

H04: Working from home practice has no positive and significant impact on employee retention in the IT industry in Madurai, India.

Scope of the Study

The study would be carried out to investigate the impact of remote work in the South Indian IT industry. In a clear view, the study would analyze the trend of remote work in a highly-populated metropolitan city which is Madurai, India. It would also determine the pros and cons of remote work from both the management and the employee perspective. This would let us get a clear picture of the opinion about work from home in the business world concentrating in the IT sector. The population of this research was chosen from three different IT/ICT companies which are CMACGM, Amazon India and Merit Software Services. All these companies are located in Madurai, India. Sampling for quantitative research involves a mixture of 76 employees from the above mentioned three companies and three managers were interviewed to know the management perspective from the same three companies. The populations for both quantitative and qualitative research were chosen from the same organizations to get the correlated opinion from the management and the employees. The duration in which the research was carried out is from June till August of 2019. Further scope of this paper would be to conduct similar research in other different parts of India Since this research is mainly focused on Madurai city. Further, in addition to this, employees from different sectors other than information Technology can also be analyzed to compare and contrast the suitability and sustainability of the concept of working from home in their respective sectors

Research Design

In the quantitative research method, the study implies a descriptive research strategy to describe the effects and relationship between the variables under study. This included the data collection through surveys of 76 employees to answer the research question and to meet the hypothesis. The qualitative research was carried out by conducting interviews of the managers to correlate the thoughts of the management and the employers sampling. Pearson coefficient (Schober, Boer, & Schwarte, 2018) formula is used to determine the correlation and to interpret the hypothesis of the quantitative research. This stratified sampling technique is applied to the employers of 3 different IT companies in Madurai. The qualitative sampling was done within the same three organizations by interviewing the managers. Content Analysis (Bengtsson, 2016) was carried out to organize and elicit meaning from the data collected through semi-structured interviews. This method was adopted to draw realistic conclusions from it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Introduction

The literature review is one of the significant chapters which provides insight about the topic to be researched and to be informed about the existing studies carried out by other researchers. The comparison of conventional and remote work company will also be provided to identify the success of specific work within the organization (Ranstand, 2016).

Literature Theme One – Productivity and Quality of Work through Working from Home

- Working from home is treated as a trait of quality job time as it has shown a steep increase in the number of hours and has reduced the work pressure on employees. It has also allowed employees to give enough attention to other domains of life.
- It is also observed that employees, irrespective of gender choose to work from home, find it more comfortable and at the same time can dedicate more amount of quality time towards their work (Allen, 2015, pp. 40 – 68).

According to Bakshi, The Millennial are requiring flexibility in work and more than half of professionals have left the job or considered through leaving because it lacks a factor of flexibility. These organizations must embrace the barriers of regulating productivity and the company's culture while retaining the talent and recreating corporate structure (Bakshi, 2017, p. 86). The companies are taking the demands, as glad fully and happy workers with reduced stress less must productive (Carrion, 2016, pp. 4545 - 4551)

Data Analysis

The data which is obtained from the surveys was analyzed and the findings are visualized using Microsoft excel as pie charts. Correlation analysis was used to test hypothesis and identify if work from home has a positive and significant influence on factors like productivity, quality of work, employee satisfaction and employee retention. The finding of the research and the literature was studied together in order to meet the major research objectives and also to answer the research questions.

Gender

The gender of the employees was asked just for demographic information. In the total of 76 employees who participated in the survey, 36% of them were female and 64% were male. The majority of the participants were found to be male employees. However, there is a representation of employees from both the gender.
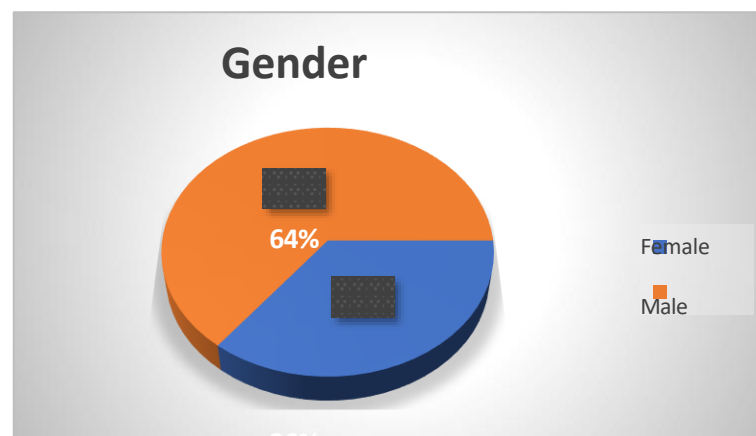
Age
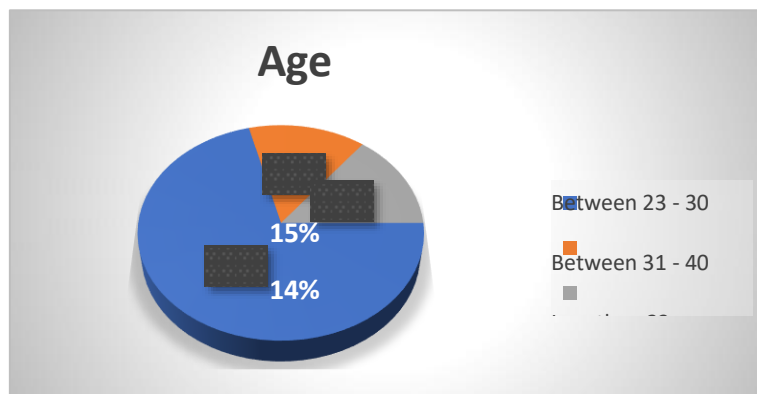
The employees were asked about their age to know the demographics of the employees. 71% of the respondents belonged to the age group 23-30 years and 15% of the employees belonged to the age group 31-40 years. Only 14% of the employees represented the age group of 23-30 years. Employees from varied age participated in the survey process. The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 23-30, so ideally experienced between 3 to 8 years.

Workplace preference

The preference percentage of employees who chose to work from home among the 76 respondents, 67% were more likely to work from home and 33% were less likely to choose this option. Majority of the employees stated that they prefer working from home.
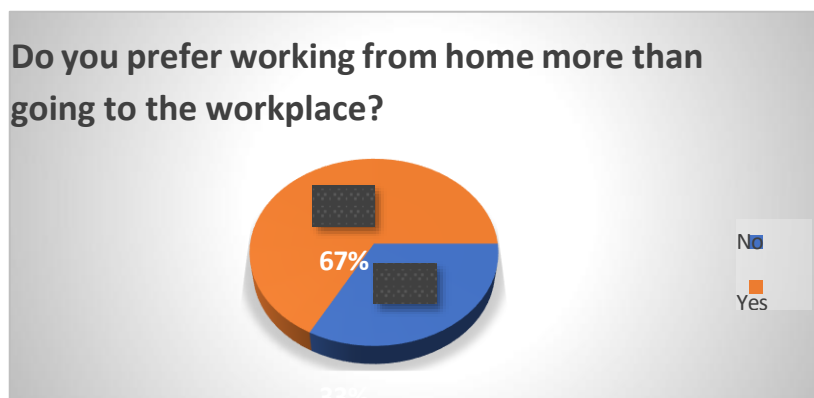

Anticipated days of employees preferring to work from home

This question was asked to the employees to know the anticipated days they work from home in a week. In this, 36% of the employees said they work between two to four days a week, about 18% and 28% of the employees' responded saying they work from home for a day and more than four days per week respectively. Finally, 18% of the employees do not prefer working from home. This means majority of the employees work at home more than office in a week.
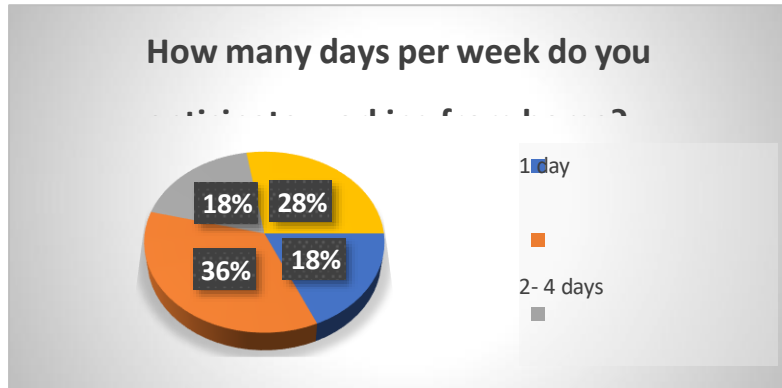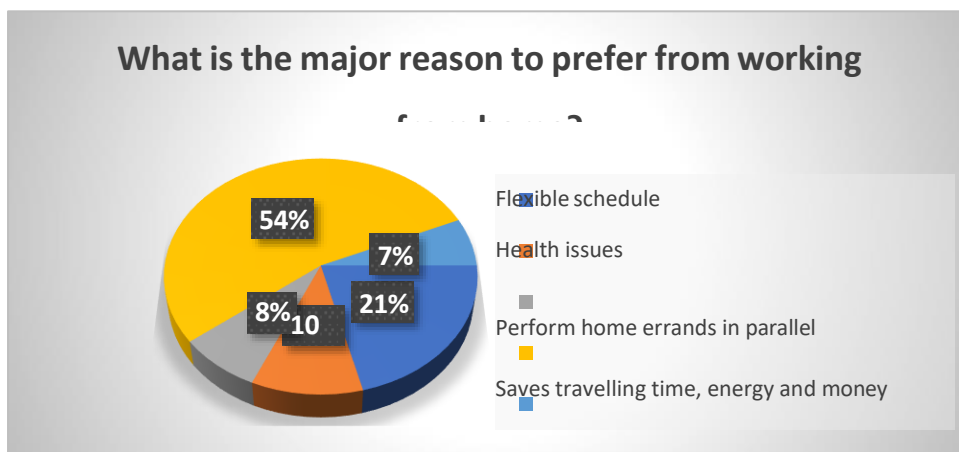
Travel time to work by the employees
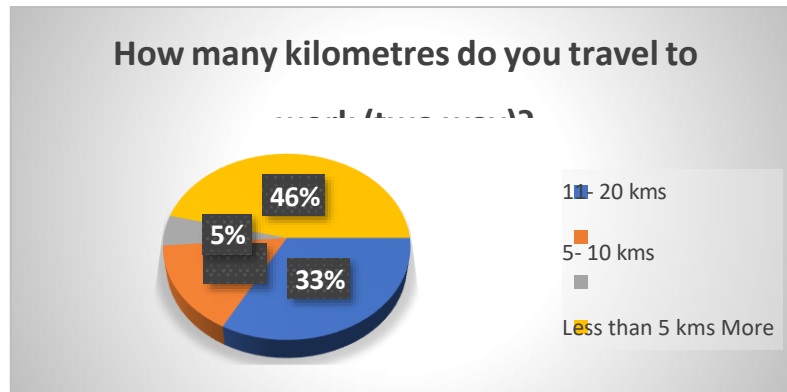
This question was asked to find out the distance travelled by the employees each day to commute to work. As a result of this survey question, 46% of the employees travel more than 20kms per day to reach their workplace. About 33% of the employees travel for 11 to 20 km and 16% travel for 5 to 10 km per day to work. Finally, only 5% of employees travel for less than 5kms per day to reach the office. As per the survey results, the majority of the employees spend a lot of time in travelling to the office.

Major reason for choosing this option

As per the survey results, the majority of the employees prefer working from home to save travel time, energy and money. The percentage of people choosing this option was 54%. The next majority for choosing this option were flexible schedule, the response percentage for this option was 21%.

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Other than these options, employees prefer working from home for other reasons like health issues, performing home errands in parallel, Weather conditions having the result percentages like 10%, 8% and 7%.

**Focus on objectives and tasks when working from home**
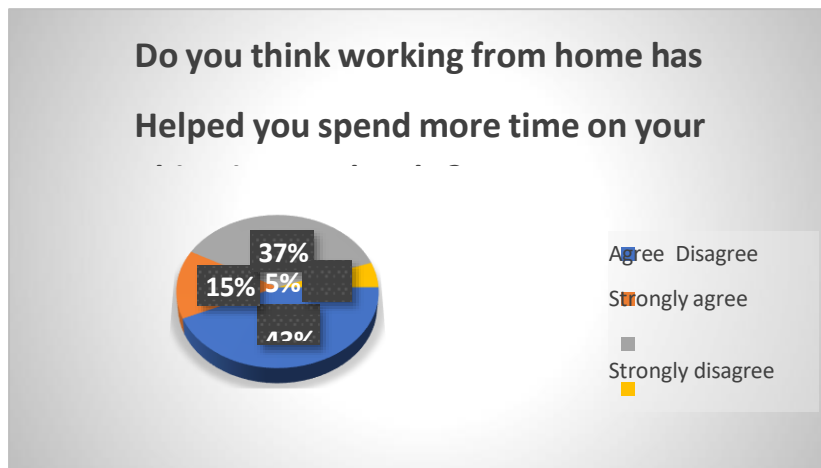
This question is asked to analyze whether the employees were able to focus on their tasks and objectives when working from home. As per the survey results, the employees were able to focus more on the objectives and tasks when working from home. The percentage of respondents agreeing and strongly agreeing are 43% and 37% respectively which is very high when compared to the disagree and strongly disagree percentage. Respondents disagreeing to the statement were 15% and there were 5% of them who strongly disagreed with the statement. Hence, the employees were less likely to focus on their tasks being at the workplace and more likely to concentrate on the tasks when working from home.

Impact of productivity when working from home

This question was asked to analyze the productivity level when working from home, the results clearly state that 64% of the employees agree that it increases when working from home and 34% feels that it doesn't. But the majority of the percentage feels that they are more productive when working from home.

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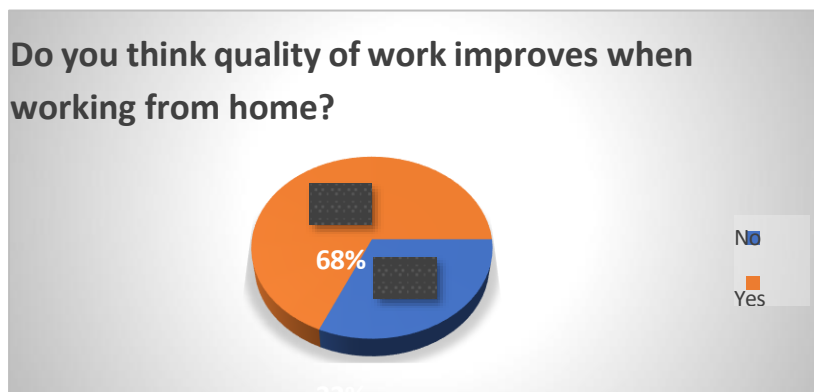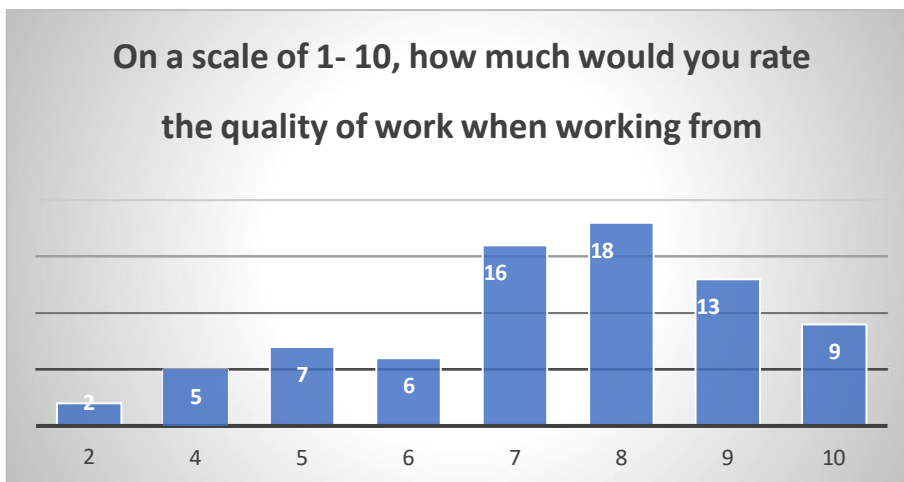On a scale of 1 - 10, how much would you rate the productivity of work when...
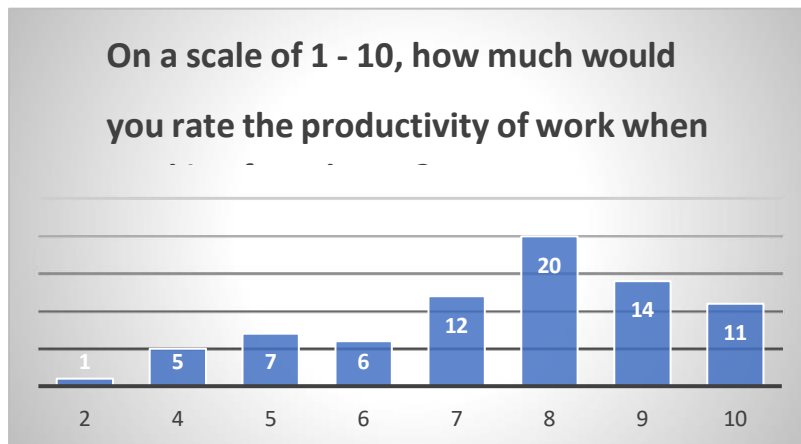
This scale chart is used to represent the rating of productivity when working from home, about 20 respondents have chosen 8 on 10, 14 respondents have chosen 9 on 10 and 11 have chosen 10 on 10. This clearly shows that employee productivity level increases when working from home and the major driver for the productivity as they feel that they are saving time, travel and energy, the next two majorities are they feel that they have a comfortable environment and there are no office distractions.

Impact of quality when working from home

From the below responses, it is evident that the employee feels that the quality of work increases when working from home. The agreed percentage of quality increase is 68% and 32% feels that remote work has no impact on the quality. On seeing the scale chart, majority of the respondents has chosen the 7-10 scale which is clearly showing that quality increases when working from home.

Do you think quality of work improves when working from home?

68%

No

Yes

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On a scale of 1- 10, how much would you rate the quality of work when working from

Employee Satisfaction and Retention doing remote work

This question was asked to know whether work from home option increases satisfaction in any way. To interpret the answer to this question the survey response of 41% and 38% of strongly agree and agree clearly specifies that employee level of satisfaction increases working from home. They disagree and strongly disagree percentage is 17% and 4% which are very less when compared to the employees who agree that they are satisfied working from home.

"Work from home practice increases job satisfaction of an employee". What is your opinion on the above statement?

Overall opinion on Work from home
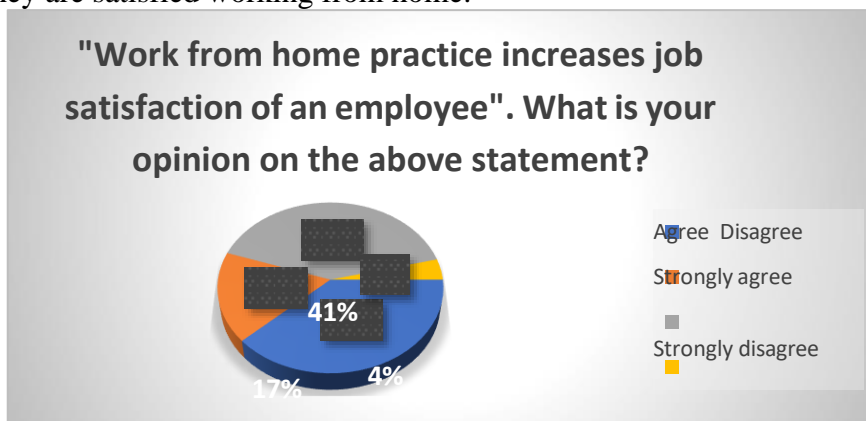
What is your overall opinion on work from home practice?
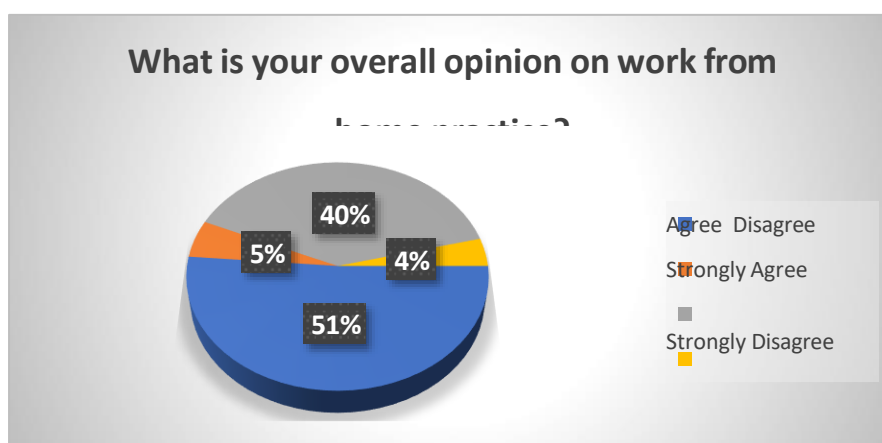
Finally, this question was designed to know the overall opinion of the employees who are using this option, Major percentage is for agreeing and strongly agree to have of about 40% and 50%, and Overall 91% of the employees are happier choosing this option. Only 9% of the employees disagreed to this point. Overall most of the employees were very satisfied with this option

Correlation Analysis

Hypothesis 1:

H0: Working from home practice has no positive and significant impact on a company's productivity in the IT industry in Madurai

Ha: Working from home practice has a positive and significant impact on a company's productivity in the IT industry in Madurai

Correlations		Work from Home	Increase in Productivity
Work from Home	Pearson Correlation	1	.638**
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.000
	N	76	76
Increase in Productivity	Pearson Correlation	.638**	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	
	N	76	76
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			

The alternate hypothesis is accepted since; the significance value is less than 0.05. Thus, there is a positive impact on the productivity when working from home.

Hypothesis 2:

H0: Working from home practice has no positive and significant impact on the employee's quality of work in the IT industry in Madurai

Ha: Working from home practice has a positive and significant impact on the employee's quality of work in the IT industry in Madurai.

Correlations			
		Work from Home	Increase in Quality of Work
Work from Home	Pearson Correlation	1	.563**
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.000
	N	76	76
Increase in Quality of Work	Pearson Correlation	.563**	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	
	N	76	76
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-taled)			

The alternate hypothesis is accepted since; the significance value is less than 0.05. Thus, there is a positive impact on the quality of work when working from home.

Hypothesis 3:

H0: Working from home practice has no positive and significant impact on the employee satisfaction in the IT industry in Madurai.

Ha: Working from home practice has a positive and significant impact on employee satisfaction in the IT industry in Madurai.

Correlations			
		Work from Home	Employee Satisfaction
Work from Home	Pearson Correlation	1	.721**
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.000
	N	76	76
Employee Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.721**	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	

	N	76	76

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-taled)

The alternate hypothesis is accepted since , the significance value is less than 0.05. Thus, there is an impact on employee satisfaction when employees work from home.

Hypothesis 4:

H0: Working from home practice has no positive and significant impact on the employee retention in the IT industry in Madurai.

Ha: Working from home practice has a positive and significant impact on employee retention in the IT industry in Madurai.

Correlations			
		Work from Home	Employee Retention
Work from Home	Pearson Correlation	1	.588**
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.000
	N	76	76
Employee Retention	Pearson Correlation	.588**	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	
	N	76	76
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			

The alternate hypothesis is accepted since, the significance value is less than 0.05. Thus, there is an impact on the employee retention in companies following working from home policy.

Findings of the Research

The information collected from the managers revealed that employees are more productive when working at home as compared to working in an office environment. The outcomes highlighted that remote working save time from traffic and protect the employee from the stress that is caused by traffic and long-distance travel. O'Toole, suggest that employees who work at home offer more work hours, get fewer breaks and have seen to take fewer sick leaves (O'Toole, 2012). In order to gain insights into a company's perspective of making use of the working from home policy, this qualitative study used 3 themes which arose from the data analysis. They are, 'Impact of Remote work

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on Productivity and Quality of work', 'Remote work and its influences on Employee Satisfaction & Retention' and 'Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work'.

Conclusion

The paper addresses the impact of Remote Work on the IT sector in India. Information and communication technology have paved a way for people to work more effectively and efficiently without being physically present at their desks in the office.

The aim of the research was to understand the impact of remote work on factors like productivity, quality of work, employee satisfaction and employee retention from perspectives of an employee and company. With respect to this research, the researcher gained insights on the remote work practices across the globe and specifically in Madurai, India. In order to gain further knowledge of remote work, the researcher made literature reviews with a thematic approach and performed qualitative research by conducting Skype interviews with the managers who are company representatives. Quantitative research was also performed by conducting a survey to employees across three companies to get the employees' perspective.

The hypothesis created was proved with the use of correlation testing on the findings from the quantitative research. The findings revealed that from an employees' perspective, working remotely has a positive impact on the productivity and quality of work. The findings also revealed that employee satisfaction can be impacted positively when the employees are working from home. The research also supported the objective that remote work is a key factor in the increase in employee retention.

The qualitative research conducted to get a company's perspective has revealed that companies in Madurai have encouraged the employees to work from home as they have found it advantageous for the company. The research has emphasized that working remotely has improved the productivity and quality of work of an employee as it is being tracked by the employers. The study has revealed that employee satisfaction has had a positive impact due to the practice of work from home. The research also says that the employers believe that allowing their employees to work from home has helped to retain them. This means that remote work has a positive impact on employee retention from a company's perspective.

Overall, the research is concluded with a recommendation to the IT sector companies in Madurai, India to adopt the working from home practice as it has a positive impact on key factors to the company's success such as productivity, quality of work, employee satisfaction and employee retention.

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