Productivity and Trust Paranoia Among It Employees

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Abstract

There have been several turbulences and four big recessions (1975, 1982, 1991, and 2009) in the world throughout the previous seven decades that greatly impacted consumer spending, the labour market, global GDP, and the wider economic landscape. However, compared to these financial crises, and particularly the one of 2008–2009, the recent COVID-19 pandemic significantly hindered global economic growth as well as productivity at work and quality of life. During this global pandemic, a few sectors, like education and information technology (IT), developed alternative working arrangements such as remote working, whereas other industries and sectors were badly hit and saw temporary shutdowns. The pandemic brought abrupt changes in work cultures, conventions, practices, leadership, and people's choices at work, in addition to requiring professionals all around the world to work remotely in order to ensure business continuity. In this context, this article through by using political economy perspective aims to analyse the concerns of Indian IT sector employees and their transition from cubicles to homes which is scarcely researched. More specifically, it aims to analyse the concerns related to work life, work productivity and trust paranoia among IT workers, as well as the collaboration strategies employed by the IT professionals to work more productively together during and post-pandemic.

Keywords: *Hybrid Workers, India, IT Companies, Organisational Culture, Remote Workers*

I.   Introduction:

In December 2019, Wuhan, a city in China, saw the emergence of the extremely contagious coronavirus, and it was later, on March 11, 2020, that the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Coronavirus Sars-Cov-2 a global pandemic, when the new coronavirus had started spreading faster in many countries. As a response to it, many countries went into absolute lockdown to try to stop the pandemic from escalating. Governments all over the world implemented stringent prevention measures in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's catastrophic effects on the physical wellness of individuals as well as on public health and social institutions.

There were variations between nations, even in terms of the several COVID-19 pandemic phases. Some people were unable to leave their homes, while lockdowns in other nations were brief and only affected a small portion of the economy. It was in this situation "working from home or remote working" was introduced to many countries and sectors of the global economies. As for instance, the move to remote working was mostly practicable for office-based employment and not for production facilities or factories. Based on the distinct duties and characteristics of various sorts of professions 'ILO policy brief' released in 2020 revealed that only 20 to 34% of the labour force could work at home. While this number appears small yet significant it forced many others to switch from office-based employment to full-time work from home. This was followed by divergent phases where workers had to remain at home, while other times they might return to the office either fully or partially to work. Rise of home offices became a "new normal" during and in the post-pandemic phase. A significant increase of digital platforms, virtual interactions, tele-mediated relationships have transformed the notion of 'space', 'social engagement', and 'Working patterns'.

The idea of remote work or working from home, for instance, was predominantly practised in a few northern nations and industries prior to the pandemic outbreak. The pandemic, however, upheaved the 'world economic systems', forcing them into a comparable condition and adopting a shared work ethic and methods to get through the pandemic. Southern nations like India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, etc. also embraced working from home as the 'new normal' during the pandemic. On March

25, 2020, the Indian government announced a 21-day national lockdown, which had a substantial influence on the Indian economy, society, and people. Due to the severity of the pandemic, the majority of non-essential businesses and industries in India shut down or evolved new ways to run their operations. Sectors like aviation, tourism, and retail were most impacted, but others, like education and information technology (IT), set up alternative work arrangements such as remote working. In the second quarter of 2021, many knowledge workers adopted and adapted themselves to telecommuting following the SOP, regulations enacted by the Government of India and the State Governments to combat the epidemic. The paper by adopting 'political economy perspective' endeavours to examine the transformative responses of 'remote work' practices and digitalization through the case of Indian IT sector.

The Indian Information Technology Sector (IT Sector), which includes software development, consultancies, online services, business process outsourcing, and software management, is a major component and driver of Indian economic growth. The reasons behind its global outperformance are; abundant talent, development of urban infrastructure, operational excellence, conducive business environment, and continuous growth in the domestic IT sector https://indiaeducation.net/computers-it/the-future-scope-of-the-it-industry-in-india/ . In the past few decades, the performance of the Indian IT sector has been exceptionally good, as a result of which India's GDP grew by 8.7 percent in 2021–2022, adding nearly 5.5 lakh jobs in 2022. According to eNews Minute (2021), the IT industry is one of the foundations of contemporary India, delivering an approximate 8% relative share of the country's GDP and supporting over four million direct and ten million indirect jobs.

Globally, a pronounced rise in attrition rates and salary reductions was reported in the IT sector. The Indian IT sector was affected too but was quick to recover from the pandemic shock and is seeing exponential growth in 2023, barring a few occasional dips. The recent trend reports suggest that by 2025, the Indian IT sector will scale further to US$19.93 billion by 2025 and create employment opportunities for nearly 14 million people by 2023 adding US$ 380 billion to India's GDP (https://www.ibef.org). On the other hand, contrasting reports reflect dysfunctional turnover in the Indian IT sector due to the dissatisfaction and problems faced by the employees, pointing towards

increasing attrition rates of some 20–22 lakh employees leaving their jobs by 2025. Various factors contributed to this trend as for instance employees demanding salary hikes, service benefits, employees feelings about work and life, change in priorities, desire for flexibility, career growth, employee value proposition, re-evaluation of their careers etc (https://hr.economictimes). Some of these needs, changes, and commotion emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed IT workers from offices to home settings, providing them with an experimental space to re-think and design their work and personal lives, set new work routines, and explore new work opportunities, which is leading to trust deficiencies in organizations.

Digitalization and Evolution of workspaces

The concept of 'workspace' has a long and eventful history. Although, the earliest record of the office building date back to 1729 in London. The references of segregation of workspace and residential space in Indian context also has a reference in the Arthshastra (as vastuchidra and vastubibhaga). However, the modern concept of office gained much popularity from 1930 onwards. Several innovative architectural designs of workspace got experimented with till 1960s to make offices/ workspaces more comfortable and productive for the employees. The concept of 'cubicles' was introduced in 60s to add more privacy, sociability and comfort to the employees. With the introduction of portable work devices like laptops, the concept of workspace saw a change again, as it made workspace portable and no longer had it required employees to be seated in the same cubicle or office space.

Likewise, the practicing of working from locations other than one's office is not new. There is a recorded history of tele-work/telecommuting/ remote[1] work from 1970s which was practiced at a small scale as for experimental purpose (over five IBM employees) and was later expanded to other employees. However, with the technological innovation especially the digital revolution remote working became more common from 1990 onwards among the Americans and among the academicians who started experimenting with the virtual conferencing. Hence, working from home

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[1] Refers to a flexible working arrangement (temporary, permanent, full time, part time, occasional, frequent) which allows workers/employees to work offsite.

was largely confined to fewer regions (i.e. Northern regions) and fewer sectors of the economy. It was for the first time in the history of work that COVID-19 pandemic disrupted lives on a global scale, encouraging people and governments to opt for the mass experimentation of "working from home- WFH" in number of sectors, at local and global levels, make exchanges leading to the evolution of work cultures and new working methods especially in the developing economies.

Sociologically speaking, the advent of WFH together with the extensive integration of digital technologies has profoundly changed our societal understanding of 'space' and its 'utilization'. The old-fashioned delineations between 'Home' and 'Office' which were once considered as distinct spheres are today becoming blurred as professionals engage in work and related activities from their residences. This digitalization and virtualization of 'work space' has led to transcending of limitations of 'proximity' and developing of new forms of social interactions and collaborations. Examining these developments by refereeing to the works of intellectuals such as Weber, Giddens and Wallerstein presents a nuanced view of the shifting standards in the workplace. Weber's concept of bureaucracy and rationalisation helps us comprehend how digitization of work creates new bureaucratic structures and rationalised processes, hence revolutionising office settings. Gidden's 'dis-embedding' of social relations describes the separation from physical workplaces enabled by remote labour and digital communication tools. Wallersteins 'World System Analysis' emphasizes on the interdependence of regions within a global system bringing in transformation and dissemination of new patterns and practices of work, skills and economies.

II.   Review of Literature:

There are many studies those conducted during and after the pandemic situation that indicate positive characteristics of digitalization and remote working in the developing world. Many of these studies focus on the positive outcomes when people have a choice over where to work and focus on the negative outcomes when people have no such choices. Mixed studies pertaining to impacts of remote working came up during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these studies point towards the integration of new technologies, adoption of new work values, and protection of the environment. Baudot et.al., (2020) in his research on Amazon employees (US) reveals that PR and

the PR of their subordinates improved during remote working and employees were more willing to spend more time on tasks in WFH by saving commuting. Likewise, Patanjali and Bhatta (2022) also find the same. On the other hand, Toscano and Zappala (2020) find it otherwise. Battisti, Alfiero and Leonidou (2022) using mixed method exploratory design interviewed 976 workers who shared negative experiences- economic and financial costs and impacts due to the additional costs incurred for digital technology and platforms and for utilities as well as the non-payment of overtime and meal vouchers, which are higher than the savings in commuting costs and out-of-pocket expenses. The transition to remote working had not been smooth for developing economies, which also faced challenges pertaining to a shortage of technological infrastructure, digital literacy, social disparities, the non-readiness of various sectors for online working, and a varied home environment conducive to working from home.

i)   Indian IT sector during the Pandemic

The IT (information technology) sector is essential to the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century, which is technology-based. India has become recognized as an economy based on knowledge on an international level thanks to its strong IT sector. The core elements of the IT sector are IT services, services that use IT (ITES), e-commerce (via the internet business), programs, and hardware goods.

Additionally, this industry makes a substantial contribution to the creation of the infrastructure required for the storage, processing, and communication of information for essential business operations and other organizations.

The idea of working remotely has gained popularity as a competitive alternative to typical office-based labor in recent years. More and more businesses are implementing remote work policies in an effort to recruit and keep top personnel as a result of technological improvements and shifting views toward work-life balance. The IT industry, where innovations in technology are at the heart of industrial growth, has seen a particularly high prevalence of this trend.

The COVID-19 epidemic has significantly changed how we live and work. In order to maintain business continuity, several firms have been compelled to switch to remote work due to the unprecedented shutdowns and social segregation measures. Given its dependence on digital and technological means of communication, the IT

industry was at the cutting edge of this transformation in particular. The breaks between work days give remote workers time to engage in family-related and recreational activities, making it easier for them to combine work and personal commitments.Our working practices have changed as a result of remote work in a number of ways, such the blurring of personal and professional lines, a change in communication methods, and adjustments to daily schedules. While the flexibility and cost-saving advantages of remote work have been lauded, its effects on worker satisfaction with work and efficiency need to be investigated.

The advantage of working remotely is that an employee can select tasks that precisely combine their professional and personal lives. For face-to-face peer discussions, some employees, however, prefer to fly to their place of work once a month. This enables them to attend office meetings in person while working mostly from house one day per week.For the location, company, or worker, coworking spaces and sharing economics are growing. The cooperatives are hubs for productivity, connectivity, and technology and provide excellent chances for community task completion. Between full administrative centres and remote or at-home employment are the coworking spaces. The pandemic forced IT workers to work remotely.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a huge surge in demand for online remote employment from home in 2020–21. Due to this unforeseen circumstance, people and organizations have been obliged to quickly train staff and adopt online working practices in an effort to retain the exact same level of efficiency as working in an office. The poll was done among those who work from home to determine the opportunities and challenges that come with this shift in work habits. Many employees initially had a hard time adjusting to using online resources and fitting work hours around everyday activities and family obligations.The results, however, demonstrate that the respondents were able to gain the expertise and experience required for digital working in a short amount of time by utilizing tools like communication platforms and video conferencing. The benefit of not having to travel while employed remotely from home was acknowledged by a sizable percentage of respondents, who also noted that this has a good effect on the planet and CO2 emissions. However, Some negatives have been noted, such as the absence of in-person conversations and informal gatherings during business hours.

Offices are any locations set aside by employers for the performance of work, typically white collar jobs. Working at an office involves formal procedures including spending a lot of time in one area and one group.As a result, it has drawbacks like rigidity, formality, growing ennui, and intense competitiveness. The physical layout of the office has a significant impact on how employees think. Spending a significant amount of time sharing, working, and collaborating fosters friendly social interactions that frequently extend beyond the realm of work and foster mutual trust and assistance.All of these desired outcomes— discipline, timeliness, hierarchy, loyalty, transparency, etc.—are the result of this influence.The psychological effects of peer support on an employee's life are profound. can complete their job in their own space, away from interruptions and stressful environments, without sacrificing quality or productivity. If the office becomes a "Home of Work" or even farther, "Working from Home," the demands of a workplace are much less felt. With more women participating in the workforce today, this model allows for scheduling flexibility, adjustment to work pressures, better coordination with household duties, fulfillment of the gender positions and duties, and compliance with gender demands like pregnancy, maternity, and happy families without sacrificing output or efficiency. With this new perspective on the workplace, it is possible to imagine that by the turn of the century, more women will be working from home and fewer industries will need them.

IT firms like TCS, Infosys, and Wipro, & Tech Mahindra had permitted their workers at their international offices to travel back to India and use Work-From-Home (WFH) options. The abrupt lockdown situation forced many IT sector enterprises to speed their digital transition, despite some initial setbacks caused by the government's cooperation in loosening the laws to encourage remote working circumstances. According to Mint (2020), IT organizations demonstrated their adaptability by accepting the new normal and allowing almost ninety-eight percent of the IT workers to work from home or in a hybrid setting. A mixed workforce strategy that offers the radical flexibility needed to develop organizational resilience has been accepted by the Indian IT (information technology) industry as a result of the pandemic. Likewise, the National Association of Software and Services in the Indian IT Industry

Companies (NASSCOM) are developing an approach to address the work environment that is hybrid and its effects on a number of industry-related topics. The first step towards adopting this paradigm shift from Work-From-Office to Work-From-Home has already been taken by a number of industry leaders. The majority of IT organizations were able to reconsider an ongoing shift in their work tactics thanks to the taste of working from home during the shutdown period.

According to Mishra & Ishwar (2020), the only significant player in the industry, Tata Consultancy Service (TCS), planned to permanently implement a 25/25 approach to remote work, allowing 75% of their 450,000 workers to work from home at any given time. Infosys, another major player in the IT industry, has announced that its eventual place of employment will be a hybrid, providing employees the flexibility either Work-From-Home (WFH for or Work-From-Anywhere (WFA). Knowledge workers today frequently use work strategies including working-from-home (WFH), work-from-anywhere (WFA), a home office, and hybrid work, notably in the IT sector.

The majority of Indian IT (information technology) sector organizations have been able to embrace various forms of remote working and guarantee uninterrupted customer deliverables despite the difficult circumstances, infrastructural obstacles, and lack of sophisticated technological and digital skills. India had made it possible to work remotely. However, there are numerous difficulties with employee welfare and improved digital readiness that will create bottlenecks in the next years. With remote work becoming the "new normal" for many companies, employees are facing more difficulties, including anxiety, stress from technology, loneliness and lack of social interaction, occupational load, unproductive work habits, fatigue, burnout, and increased turnover intentions. Even though the COVID-19 epidemic occurred more than two years ago, certain firms around the world continue to have a hybrid work culture. Employees still aren't able to perceive and convey with confidence how handy working from home is. It is not the best course of action to perform most of the tasks remotely.Determining what kind of job can be done online or remotely is urgently needed. The type of job can also affect how successfully and how easily it can be done online. The organizations can evaluate the current job descriptions and decide whether remote employment is appropriate in a pandemic situation.

To maximize production from remote working, it is necessary to switch jobs. According to the authors, a number of organizations are not equipped to carry out some types of remote labor. It is crucial to set limits for employee distractions and ensure that they are kept to a minimum while they are working. establishing some designated workstations close to the employee's home or a different workspace inside the home for those who work full-time at aIt's important to stretch quietly and undisturbed. To be as productive as possible while working remotely, the personnel should schedule their daily tasks and domestic chores in advance. The household duties might be shared based on work schedules if both spouses (wife and husband) and additional relatives work from home so that no one person bears the full burden.Although numerous studies on working from home and its effects on staff have been conducted, the authors focused on Hyderabad Metro, India, in which more than 1 million people work in IT and ITES, to examine the effects of remote employed and stress at work on satisfaction with work, motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, and performance. The study showed that aspects of remote work, such as teamwork and employee self-sufficiency, had a statistically significant impact on job satisfaction, motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, and employee performance. Our analysis indicates that workplace stress is significantly higher and affects both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction. Several studies have suggested that remote work has raised occupational stress. motivation and productivity at work. Our findings are consistent with a research by Prasad et al. (2020a,b) upon the impact of stress at work and remote working on employees' wellbeing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, that included polling IT professionals in the Hyderabad Metro area. According to this study, remote work and workplace stress have statistically significant effects on performance and job satisfaction. According to Subha et al. (2021), women, particularly women IT professionals who work remotely, have significant stress levels. Additionally, there is a notable lack of relaxation to recharge due to the worry of job uncertainty.

III.   Conclusion

Of course, the many lockdowns or times when various limitations were placed were stressful events in and of themselves. However, throughout this phase, there was a drive toward remote work and, generally, new modes of working connected to technology for communication and information

(ICT), which produced expertise and knowledge that should be seized upon. This stage is therefore crucial because even if the period of radical transformation may be passed, changes brought on by the widespread use of remote work will persist. The way work is organized has drastically changed, with different schemes being used depending on several factors, including the prevalence of ICT and the employees' skill levels prior to the pandemic, as well as the real viability of this transition given the firms' respective industries.

IV.   Discussion

Wallerstein's 'World System' analysis provides us with valuable insights to understand how the pandemic acted as a catalyst in blurring the boundaries between the core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral regions, highlighting the need for global solidarity, which might lead to an equitable distribution of opportunities in the post-pandemic world, reshaping the dynamics of the global economy in the long run, and giving a 'chance' to non-core regions to seize a chance. The pandemic provided a chance for non-core countries like India and China to seize this opportunity to advance their economies and change their position in the global economic landscape. At the same time, the use of Wallerstein's Analysis to understand the impact of the pandemic also helps us identify obstacles facing developing economies and suggest areas for improvement. Against this backdrop, this study examines the impacts of remote work on the work lives of employees in the Indian information technology (IT) sector.

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