Learning and Unlearning of Corporate Professionals During Covid 19: Discovery of 'Self' And Benefits of Working from Home

[1] **Dr. Sapna Sharma,**   [2] **Ms. Richa Sharma**
[1, 2]Assistant Professor,
[1]Amity University, Gurugram
[2]GGDSD College, Chandigarh
Email: [1] sapnajoshi2009@gmail.com   [2] rs1richa@gmail.com

Abstract: *COVID 19 is not an individual sickness but a societal illness and this is the reason it is not labelled as a disease but a pandemic. Disease defines us, it narrates us. We know about its arrival but are completely unsure about its departure. What we are aware of, is its act. When the global focus has mostly been on testing, finding a cure and preventing transmission; people are going through countless psychological problems in adjusting to the current lifestyles and working from home is one of them. Covid- 19 has certainly instigated extraordinary chaos in human lives and this has necessitated every country to enforce the lockdown. Organizations have moved towards the option of working from home. Given the rapid acceleration of transmission and the lack of preparedness to prevent and treat this virus, the negative impacts of COVID-19 are rippling through every facet of society. But the attempt of present paper is to explore the positivity and creativity of individuals, especially corporate professionals, during this time of crisis. It also attempts to analyse various facets of work from home by bringing out the best of corporate professionals during this worst time.*

Key Words: *Lockdown, Positivity, Creativity.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The grass needs cutting,
I must mend the gate.
I'm expecting a parcel;
I hope it's not late.
I must get a wash on.
There's the ironing too.
The gas bill needs paying.
There's so much to do.
I must send that email.
I can't really moan,
This is the life,
When you're working from home.

(Johnson, 2017)

Covid-19 pandemic is proved to be one of the reasons for bringing changes in human behaviour. There is confusion about the meaning of the word *pandemic* and how to recognize pandemics when they occur. Any assumption that the term pandemic had an agreed-upon meaning was quickly undermined by debates. In 17th and 18th centuries, the terms epidemic and pandemic were used vaguely and often interchangeably in various social and medical contexts. As the corona virus has spread throughout the world over the past few months, pandemic-themed reading lists have appeared in all manner of outlets. It has become a common observation that the corona virus outbreak makes it feel like we're living in a dystopian novel right now. Even the name Covid-19 – the blunt two syllables, filled with hard consonants and a number at the end is straight out of science fiction. It is an unwelcomed new territory for us but humanity has been here before many times and has written about it. Technological change has repeatedly shaped and reshaped the

relationship between work and home. Over the past few months, corona virus pandemic has forced millions of employees in the world to begin working from home. The home-work boundaries of most office workers approximate the dominant cultural pattern and mental 'fences' that separate home and work. These are reinforced by the daily routine. Morning routines like dressing for work, saying goodbye to family, travelling, traffic, greeting co-workers assist with the mental transition from the family to the work domain and the same process reverses in the evening (Carrie A Bulger (2007). Savić (2020) defined work from home in general terms as employees working outside company offices. It includes the four basic features:

1.   A person who is an employee or staff member of an organization
2.   There should be actual engagement with an organization
3.   Work being completed outside the organization's physical premises
4.   Telecommunication with the employer

2. DISCUSSION:

Work from home is gradually becoming a part of life and people are becoming habitual to it. It has provided a solution to deal with Covid-19 pandemic crisis situation to maximum possible extent. In order to gain insight into behavioural and professional changes as a result of work from home during this pandemic, a study on 500 industry professionals is conducted with an online survey. The results concluded that more than 53% of the total respondents consider working from home optimistic, 16 % found it pessimistic and 31% provided a neutral opinion. The survey also enquired from respondents   about the support they received during the first week of work from home and 69% felt 'extremely supported'. The survey included reasons of motivation to continue work from home and 51 % professionals reported the biggest motivation is time saved due to lack of commuting. More than 37 % respondents said that work from home has resulted in more family time while others mentioned that they can devote more time on health or fitness, no time wastage in dressing up for work, more sleep, fewer interruptions, more attention to kids and elderly parents, no office poilitics, not worrying about lunch,etc (Patwa, 2020).

Work from home started in 1980's when both the employer and employee were captivated with the concept of working from home. Global trends indicated popularity of this model of working (Garg & Rijst, 2015). A study proposed by Rupietta & Beckmann (2016) mentions that work from home positively affects the work effort as people who work from home more regularly deliver better results.

During the current lockdown , no doubt work from home has changed the style of working of corporate employees but this approoach has also uncovered the sparks of creativity among them. These creative initaitives are undertaken either to nurture oneself for professional growth or to resolve the long pending organizational matters, above all this creativity was mainly self-initiated. In-depth interviews were conducted between 13th to 17th April 2020 with twenty four middle and senior level managers from manufacturing and technology driven service sector. They supported work from home and said that it has immensly helped the employees. Employees utilised spare time to learn various new skills and got themselves enrolled for online classes. They also tried to resolve the pending issues of the organizations which they were unable to do earlier (Jaiswal & Arun, 2020).

Work from home has also brought the families together during this current lockdown as analysed in a survey which was carried out by the Telangana Information Technology Association (TITA). This was done with 500 respondents in 150 projects over a month. It revealed that 89 % of the total respondents claimed that work from home has led to enhance family relationships and strengthening the bond with their spouses. They further stated that they could spend a good quality time with their relatives due to work from home. Global President of TITA Sandeep Kumar Makthala stated that work from home has helped many couples to resolve their issues which could otherwise had led towards divorce and marital discards (TECHGIG, 2020).Pandya and Pandya (2020) mentioned four factors that show an influence on human behaviour during current lockdown. For this, 170 respondents of Ahmadabad and Gandhinagar were selected randomly and data was collected from them through questionnaire. First factor highlighted the positive effect on human behaviour which said that people enjoy more with their families during this phase as compared to other days. They utilise spare time to pursue their hobbies like reading books, music, singing, writing poems-story, painting, cooking which brought them closer to their families. They also helped the females in the house, may be their mother, sister or wife, in their daily work load. They also showed their creativity in cooking and in other unexplored areas. Second factor resulted in the fact that there is reduction in air, noise and water pollution due to lockdown. Third

factor talked about *Atmanirbhar Bharat* while fourth one discussed the importance of essential products and also reported that expenses of households have decreased owing to lockdown.

Work from home is the dream for millennial generation as they do not like to wake up early in the morning because of their late night schedules of watching T.V., surfing on internet etc. Present module of work from home has come as a blessing in disguise for such individuals who get up late , face the problem of traffic on road, reach office late and have to bear the repercussions. Besides this, level of stress has been reduced through work from home. No negative stress increases the productivity which leads to timely completion of task. Further work from home has led to the reduction of transportation and gasoline cost (Purwanto, et al., 2020)

Work from home, apart from providing work life balance and saving time for families, also provides a comfortable zone to the employess as it eliminates the supervision system that makes them conscious in office when they are being supervised by their managers. Thus with the removal of this obstacle of supervision, workers can focus more on their work tasks in a productive and efficient way (Mustajab, et al., 2020).

Another study shows positive impact on health and mental well-being due to work from home.This statement is supported with the research results which conclude that there is 0.5 percent decrease in sickness rate when people are doing work from home. Further there is an improvment in mental well-being of employees as they come closer to their children due to extra time (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020). Various studies also conclude that work from home improves health of employees in a variety of ways ; extra time for physical activities; taking healthier diet; fast recovery from illness and as a result contributes towards the reduction in sick leaves (Church, 2015 ; Nordin et al.,2016 ; Courtney, 2020).

Another research by Abioro et al.(2018) examines that in order to achieve the high levels of performance and employees' productivity, Nigerian University paid greater attention to work life balance where work life balance was measured with the help of flexitime, job sharing and telework. Findings conclude that these variables are associated with the employee's productivity in a moderate positive manner. Primary data is collected through questionnaire from three hundred and forty one respondents. Thus, work from home, by facilitating the flexible schedule for the employees, provides better work life balance where they can start the work as per their convenience and also can finish their task in a flexible manner. Work from home assists the companies and employees to put more focus on those areas what really matter (Courtney, 2020).

Many companies such as Amazon, Dell and Xerox have offered work from home as they consider it an opportunity for an employee to become more flexible while making a choice of time and space(Nordin et al., 2016). Because of the flexible and remote working hours, employees are able to devote time for their hobbies and interests(Courtney, 2020). Many studies conclude that women managers and women professionals are most interested to do work from home as they can take care of their families due to this module. Elderly people would like to opt for work from home. Overall job satisfaction increases with the work from home irrespective of hours worked((Dockery & Bawa, 2014 ; Church, 2015)

Language becomes the means to achieve a measure of understanding of that which defies reason. We attempt to convert the experience into narrative and thereby gain a measure of control over not only the event but also our response to the same. This generates a sense of logic or, to use an obsolete word, justice. It becomes a means to revive the self and its substance experience. As Cathy Caruth writes in the introduction to her book *Unclaimed Experience,* *"Literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at this specific point at which knowing and unknowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet."* (Caruth, 2016)

During this pandemic, some of the professionals took this as an opportunity to explore their hidden talent to show the world other side of their personality. Ashudeep Chadha, Founder and Group Chief Executive Officer at *On Demand Agility* expressed her emotions about this lockdown period in her poem **"Let's Parent our Minds"**

Board meetings

Hard resolutions

Thundering bottom lines

Flying flights and still no light

Chasing investors to sit on a side

Asking me to train my adult mind

And think alike as the time needs to be revived."(Chadha, 2020)

Ajay Gupta, Founder of *Rishihood University* and *Bachpan Schools*, discovers his life during this lockdown period in his poem "Zindgi"

"Aey zindgi, chal saath chal,

Haath pakad ke chal, gunguna ke chal

Masti se chal, ab saath chal

Waada karke chal aasmaan pe chal

"Dear life, let's walk together

Walking, holding hands, walking, while singing

Move in leisure, now let's go together

Walk with promise, let's touch the sky!" (Gupta, 2020)

Aditi Ganesh 30-year-old techie says "*I needed motivation during the lockdown. So I gave myself the task of writing a small verse daily. The fact that others related to it and gave me feedback, made me write more and it stayed on as a habit,*" Nineteen-year-old Betilda shares, "*For an extrovert like me, being confined at home caused frustration and anxiety. Poetry gave me the confidence to share my work on a public forum and get out of my comfort zone.*"(Chakravorty, 2020) Psychologist, Sharanya Jithin decodes that writing is scientifically proven to help people understand themselves better. She explains. "*In therapy, we use writing to help our clients deal with their unresolved issues and pent-up emotions. In the current scenario, writing helps one reduce the lurking anxiety that's fuelled by the uncertainties of life. Writing helps one channelize their emotions and visualize how they're feeling. This is the best way of self-care in order to keep a check on our emotions and thoughts.*"(Chakravorty, 2020) Role of working mothers have also changed as they struggle to manage both the worlds- personal and professional. Angelee Deodhar writes:

"Teleconference call
My presentation forgotten
I breast feed the baby" (Deodhar, 2017)

3. CONCLUSION:
Although Covid-19 necessitated work from home for every organization but considering its countless advantages and positive aspects, it is unquestionable that this module holds a bundle of benefits for employees. Further, literature may not play a scientific role in dealing with diseases and pandemics but it surely is a way to share our humanistic concerns. In a pandemic, we see hysteria and passions being whipped up around specific communities which are targeted as causal agents. The present paper has attempted to discuss benefits of work from home, its advantages, benefits and future of this module. It further attempts to discuss role of literature and humanities during the tough times of pandemics and how human beings are concerned about this phenomenon.We cannot expect Covid-19 to be

the last pandemic to strike humanity. Therefore, if the current neo-liberal order prevails with all its attached values and institutions, the future outcome from a similar outbreak cannot be the same. Some change can be reasonably anticipated. Which force will prevail and what could be the contours of a desirable alternative? How the worldwide catastrophe wrecked by the novel corona virus will transform mindsets, societies, politics and economies? It will finally depend on the interplay of spirit of innovation and the sense of community among fellow humans.

REFERENCES:
1. Abioro, M. A., Oladejo, D. A., & Ashogbon, F. O. (2018). Work life balance practices and employees productivity in the Nigerian university system. *CRAWFORD JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES, VIII*(II), 49-59.

2. Carrie A Bulger, R. A. (2007, November). Work and Personal Life Boundary Management: Boundary Strength, Work/Personal Life Balance, and the Segmentation-Integration Continuum. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* , pp. 365-75.

3. Caruth, C. (2016). *Unclaimed Experience – Trauma, Narrative and History* . New York: Johns Hopkins University Press.

4. Chadha, A. (2020, May). https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ashu-chadha-97990012_home-workfromhome-inthistogetheron-activity-6663561235155554304-bmkl. New Delhi, India.

5. Chakravorty, J. (2020, July 9). *health-fitness/de-stress/poetry-sessions-ensure-mental-health-amidst-covid-19.* Retrieved July 20, 2020, from timesofindia.indiatimes.com: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/health-fitness/de-stress/poetry-sessions-ensure-mental-health-amidst-covid-19/articleshow/76859419.cms

6. Church, N. F. (2015). Gauging Perceived Benefits from 'Working from Home' as a Job Benefit. *International Journal of Business and Economic Development, 3* (3).

7. Courtney, E. (2020, June 1). *The Benefits of Working From Home: Why The Pandemic Isn't the Only Reason to Work Remotely*. Retrieved July 28, 2020, from Flexjobs: https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/benefits-of-remote-work/

8. Deodhar, A. (2017, 08 09). Retrieved 05 25, 2020, from www.thehaikufoundation.org: https://www.thehaikufoundation.org/2017/08/09/haiku-in-the-workplace-working-from-home/

9. Dockery , A., & Bawa, S. (2014). Is Working from Home Good Work or Bad Work ? Evidence from Australian Employees. *AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF LABOUR ECONOMICS, 17* (2), 163-190.

10. Garg, A. K., & Rijst, J. v. (2015). The benefits and pitfalls of employees working from home: Study of a private company in South Africa. *Corporate Board: Role, Duties & Composition, 11* (2).

11. Gupta, A. (2020). Aey Zindgi. *https://www.facebook.com/100004960959762/posts/1333900796785273/* .
12. Haq, A. (2012, March Sunday). *Caught between the old and the new* . Retrieved from www.dawn.com.

13. Jaiswal, A., & Arun, C. J. (2020). Unlocking the COVID-19 Lockdown: Work from Home and Its Impact on Employees.

14. Johnson, P. J. (2017, June). Retrieved July 30, 2020, from https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/working-from-home: https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/working-from-home

15. Mustajab, D., Bauw, A., Rasyid, A., Irawan, A., Akbar, M. A., & Hamid, M. A. (2020). Working from Home Phenomenon as an Effort to Prevent COVID-19 Attacks and Its Impacts on Work Productivity. *THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF APPLIED BUSINESS* , 13-21.

16. Nordin, N. N., Baidzowi , M. F., & Razak, R. A. (2016). Understanding the work at home concept, its benefits and challenges towards employees. *e-Proceeding of the Social Sciences Research ICSSR 2016*. Retrieved from http://worldconferences.net/home

17. Pandya, P. R., & Pandya, K. (2020). A Lockdown: Study on Human Behavior. *Mukt Shabd Journal, IX*(VI).

18. Patwa, P. (2020, May 14). *Is Work from Home the New Lifestyle Change That Young India Was Seeking?* Retrieved July 28, 2020, from Entrepreneur India: https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/350630

19. PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2020). *The costs and benefits of working from home.* pwc. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from https://www.pwc.nl/nl/actueel-publicaties/assets/pdfs/pwc-the-costs-and-benefits-of-working-from-home.pdf

20. Purwanto, A., Asbari, M., Fahlevi, M., Mufid, A., Agistiawati, E., Cahyono, Y., et al. (2020). Impact of Work From Home (WFH) on Indonesian Teachers Performance During the Covid-19 Pandemic : An Exploratory Study. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology, 29* (5), 6235-6244.

21. Rupietta, K., & Beckmann, M. (2016). Working from home: What is the effect on employees' effort? (No. 2016/07). *WWZ Working Paper* .

22. Savić, D. (2020). COVID-19 and Work from Home: Digital Transformation of the Workforce. *Grey Journal (TGJ), 16* (2).

23. Sheh, H. (2020, 18 May). Gulzar pens poem on the Covid-19 migrant crisis. Mumbai, Maharashrtra, India.

24. TECHGIG. (2020, June 16). *Work From Home is strengthening family bonding among techies, says survey*. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from TECHGIG: https://content.techgig.com/work-from-home-is-strengthening-family-bonding-among-techies-says-survey/articleshow/76406625.cms

25. Thorstensson, E. (2020). The Influence of Working from Home on Employees's Productivity ; Comparative document analysis between the years.