# Psychological Participation and Workplace Flexibility among Employees of Various Sectors

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**Abstract**

Many Organisations are encouraging Work from Home (WfH) which makes them global besides saving their cost. Environmental benefits through minimal commute help them contribute to Corporate Social Responsibility too. Studying employees' perspectives on WfH shall be useful in implementation of this idea. The present study measured psychological participation of 124 employees working from home, office and mixed mode. The study conforms to no significant difference amongst working in aforesaid three modes.

**Keywords:** Participation, Decision Making, Involvement, Workplace Flexibility, Work from Home.

## Introduction

Employees' psychological participation is conceptually understood as a state where they are in their job and affiliated various organisational process psychologically, leading to the instilling in them a belief of being an integrative part of their workplace. The benefits of such participation can be traced to the suggestions given in the Theory of Scientific Management (Taylor, 1911) wherein it is recommended to scientifically analyse a job, and then systematically assign a right job-fit employee to it. Such an initiative would lead to maximum participation of employees, resulting in increased productivity of that organisation.

This participation of an employee has been bifurcated by Vroom (1960) in two categories, namely psychological participation and objective participation. The former is referred as the degree of influence that employees feel they have on decision-making. On the other hand, the latter- objective participation is referred as the actual influence the employees are having on decision-making. The employees' participation has been empirically observed being connected to a wide array of workplace factors. Level of participation is associated with quality of work environment and the democratic framework of an organisational culture, with highest level of participation obtained when good work environment is provided to employees and also the democratic principles in management are followed by the competent authorities (Khudsen et al., 2011).

Participation also increases employees' solidarity and is linked with their concern towards organisational justice (Hodson et al., 1994). The

other benefits of participation are employee commitment and better industrial relations (Uma, 2015). Employees' Involvement, being a building block of participation, is affected by the prevalent organisational culture (Marchington et al., 1994). Similarly, employees' participation is also a derivative of degree to which employee take part in the decision-making processes of their organisation. The importance of decision-making process has been clearly indicated by Miller and Lee (2001) who have suggested in their study that it has a positive impact on the financial performance of an organisation when such decisions are taken by the capable and motivated human resource persons. Participation of employees in decision-making also assists the corresponding implementation with ease, as they feel it natural to perceive their involvement throughout the ongoing process. This involvement caters to the need of enhancing the creativity of employees as members of their workplace group (Darr, 1966).This was also indicated by Subrahmanyam and Hamdamin (2019) who in their study on hospitals found that supportive organisational culture and strategy success are significantly related.

The concept of employees' involvement has been considered as cumulative result of mental and emotional involvement in their workplace-group. Sharing of responsibility according to the goals of the workplace-group arises from this involvement (Davis, 1962). With the derived benefits as aforesaid, the employees' participation is deducted to be an important aspect of focus worth consideration by the leaders of an organisation. Empowerment of employees by leadership, a practice to enhance employees perceive more inclusion, lead to increase in job performance among employees, and further mediated by job satisfaction (Mir and Rainayee, 2015). Prentice (1961) is of the view that a feature of successful leadership is to be capable of enhancing employees' participation in a manner which integrates the individual needs and interest of the subordinates, resulting in strengthening the backbone of a workplace-group. The evidences, both literary and empirical, are supportive of establishing the fact that employees' psychological participation is supposed to be an important factor of consideration for organisations.

In the year 2019, the world saw an outbreak of Corona Virus Disease-19 (Covid-19) which was declared the pandemic in the first quarter of year-2020. It led to the imposition of lockdown by many countries of the world so as to curb the spread of this deadly disease. However, it was also realised that economic activities should not be put at halt. For this purpose, the flexibility of workplace was viewed as a solution. Subsequently those sectors the employees of which could work from home, moved to that option.

A report by International Labour Organisation (2020) states that during that initial period of pandemic, 81% of the total work force of the world was affected, directly or indirectly, due to closure and change in work location. Consequently, the requirement of switching the workplaces over to home-based work for the employees, was felt. The data available for the period prior to the outbreak of pandemic is reflective of the fact that only 7.9% of the global workplace was functional in home-based work mode (Berg et al., 2020). The mode of working from home cannot be solely linked to the advent of just the pandemic.

With the recent developments in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the alternative of work from home (WfH) to that of work from office (WfO) was already there in pipeline, irrespective of the disease. The WfH mode can conceptually be seen operating in synchronisation with the global efforts to check the environmental pollution, for the employees will be less required to commute to offices and so fuel consumption on this count will be minimised. Thus, the bringing down the release of harmful gases in the environment may be possible to a great extent. This idea was supported in a study which suggests that the advantages of WfH are reduction in fatigue of employees as they will be saving time which was earlier required in commuting to their office. This condition, in turn, shall also have beneficial effect on the environment (Allen et al., 2015). The developing trend of ICT supported work and resultant environmental benefits may pave the way to the deduction that WfH shall not diminish with the eradication of pandemic, but will continue to be practiced in the coming years.

With such evidences, the linkages of WfH to macro factors such as economy and environment have gained considerable importance. In this regard, the need to study the micro factor- the employee also arises. For the purpose, the physiological health relations of WfH have been studied and it is found that WfH contributes to poor postural habits as well as the musculoskeletal disorders (Moretti et al., 2020).

Similarly, when we narrow down to studying that micro factor, the psychological factors of the employees also become an area of interest, apart from their physical health. The feelings of uncertainty and stress arising from the need to adapt to the new ICT based work system has been found evident amongst employees being subjected to WfH during the pandemic (Oakman et al., 2020,). Employees also

perceived a reduction in their level of productivity while working from home (Chapman and Thamrin, 2020). However, WfH also leads to reduced work life conflict and can enable employees to work for longer hours. Also, the condition of flexible workplace coupled with flexible work schedule has been suggested for better productivity (Hill et al.,2010). A concern with WfH is that employees could not disengage themselves mentally from official procedures due to presence of internet and its derivates as e-mail and official social media through which duties are assigned to them even when they are off the job (Frits and Jex, 2011; Vergel and Munij, 2014).

With the aforementioned factors in consideration, studying as well as comparing WfH and WfO becomes an arena of further exploration. It may help in understanding the psychology of employees provided with workplace flexibility. The foremost factors which come into focus are changes in degree and mode of communication with co-workers as well as supervisors in addition to the changes in ergonomics, active participation in decision-making and gathering the opinion of employees in routine problem solving, which would otherwise have a different modus operandi than working from office. With a global outlook towards implementation of workplace flexibility arising out of its macro advantages, the studies focusing on micro factors shall be contributory to fundamentals of policy formation.

**Objectives**

1. To study psychological participation

2. To study the psychological correlates of employees working in various modes.

3. To compare the data of employees working in various work modes.

**Hypotheses**

H1: There will be no statistical significant difference in psychological participation score of employees who work from home and those who work from office.

H2: There will be no statistical significant difference in psychological participation score of employees who work from office and those who work in mixed mode.

H3: There will be no statistical significant difference in psychological participation score of employees who work from home and those who work in mixed mode.

**Research Methodology**

The present study, which is a part of Ph.D. thesis, aims to compare the psychological participation of employees working from home, working from office and those working in a mixed mode. The idea of mixed mode has been induced keeping in view the roaster system of attendance being followed by many organisations during the crucial time of pandemic. The mixed mode has enabled precise data collection from respondents who were following the roaster system. Since no significant literary evidences were found having studied psychological participation with such characteristics, the study has null hypotheses.

**Sample Description**

The data was collected from 132 respondents. Owing to inadequate entries, 8 responses were removed from the data. After data cleaning, a total of 124 responses (N=124) were taken as sample for the study. Data was collected from employees working in a wide array of organisation, which were Banking and Finance, Defence and Security, Education, Health and Pharma, Hotel and Tourism, Information Technology, Media and Communication and Service sector. The employees were both from public and private sector. The sample characteristics are presented below-

**Table 1**

**Sample Characteristics**

| Sample | Male | Female | WfO | WfH | Mixed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Sample (N=124) | 79 | 45 | 62 | 48 | 14 |
| Public Sector ($n_{pbc}$=57) | 45 | 12 | 52 | 1 | 4 |
| Private Sector ($n_{pvt}$=67) | 34 | 33 | 10 | 47 | 10 |

*Notes:* WfH=Work from Home and WfO=Work from Office

**Sampling**

The data was collected through internet so as to adhere to guidelines of the government in pandemic time. Also, in order to ensure minimum physical paper touch and social distancing, online mode of data collection was most suited. The same also helped a lot of cost, time and contributed to environmental benefits as minimum paper usage was ensured in the study. Non-Probability – Purposive Sampling Technique was used to collect data.

**Tool Used**

Psychological Participation Index (Pestonjee D.M. and Singh A.P, 2019) : It has 15 items from four dimensions as, Decision Making (5 items), Autonomy (5 items), Opinion-Seeking (3 items) and Involvement (2 items). The minimum possible score on the tool is 15 and maximum is 75. The reliability of the index was calculated using Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficient (r=0.83).The internal validity of the items have been calculated by point bi-serial coefficient of correlation (rphi=0.133). Concurrent Validity and inter-correlations among the four dimensions were also obtained.

**Statistics**

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

**Procedure**

After performing a literature review of the area, the variable and sample to be studied was selected. A standardized measure was selected for administration. Ethical considerations were taken care of and hence consent was received from the respondents and they were informed about the confidentiality of the research. Data was collected through internet followed by, data cleaning, scoring and data analysis. Statistical Test were performed on 0.05 significance level. Results from those tests were obtained and recorded. Those respondents who opted to know their results were informed of their score through e-mail.

**Results**

The results from statistical analysis of data are computed below;

## Table 2

## Results

| Employee Category | Mean | Median | Mode | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work from Office | 50.96 | 51 | 48,49 | 8.89 |
| Work from Home | 50.68 | 51 | 34 | 8.07 |
| Mixed | 46.07 | 49 | 50,56,52 | 10.29 |
| Public Sector | 50.66 | 51 | 49 | 8.46 |
| Private Sector | 50 | 51 | 52 | 9.15 |
| Male | 49.94 | 50 | 53,45,50,51 | 8.17 |
| Female | 50.93 | 51 | 52 | 9.89 |

The obtained data was further analysed with inferential statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

**The results were used to test the hypotheses. They are presented below as;**

R1 : There is no statistically significant difference between WfO mode and WfH mode employees in their score of psychological participation. Hence the null hypothesis (H1) is accepted.

R2 :There is no statistically significant difference between WfO mode and mixed mode employees in their score of psychological participation. Hence the null hypothesis (H2) is accepted.

R3 :There is no statistically significant difference between WfH mode and mixed mode employees in their score of psychological participation. Hence the null hypothesis (H3) is accepted.

R4 :There is no statistically significant difference between Public and Private sector employees in their score of psychological participation.

Also, the statistical analysis of the data revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female employees in their score of Psychological Participation.

**Discussion**

The importance of Employees' Psychological Participation at their workplace has been well signified in the studies of Organisational Psychology, with its integrated bases in a theoretical concepts and research literatures. In the present study, participation was conceptualised as a state determinant of the four factors functioning at organisation which are- employees' participation in decision-making, freedom for autonomy, the consideration of their opinion and their overall involvement at the workplace.

Corona Virus Disease–19 (Covid-19) hit the world in the year 2019. The disease is communicable by coming in close contact with an infected person. Since it was declared a pandemic in the first quarter of 2020, it became a major health concern globally. In order to exercise check on the spread, the most immediate and effective solution was minimising the movement of people. This was attained through imposition of lockdown in most of the countries thereby permitting minimum possible movement of people for the essential services only which, on the whole, was targeted towards ensuring social distancing in the best way possible. However, on the other hand, lockdown was not seen encouraging and healthy for the global economy.

With a view to introducing a plausible solution for taking care of the health of economy and human resources both, the employees were shifted to work from home mode wherever applicable and possible. For the purpose, most of the organisations provided the facility of workplace flexibility to their employees. A prominent sector to operate in Work from Home (WfH) mode is Information Technology (IT) as their employees generally require a computer and internet facility which can be easily established in home.

Further, the organisations attached to essential service sector, such as Health, continued engaging most of their employees in WfO or Field Work mode. Some organisations- which could carry out their activities with a roaster system of attendance successfully- switched to mixed mode where employees worked from office and home both.

With the rising environmental concerns, WfH mode has been seen as the most sought-after mode of work, as it paves the way to minimum physical presence of employees at workplace. This saves the non-renewable resources as lesser fuel is consumed in their commute from and to the workplace. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilitates the employees in WfH mode very well. The application of ICT in WfH is also in synchronisation with the vision of globalised and connected economies. It also encourages further research and development in the field of ICT.

With such benefits, it is derived that WfH can be seen as a future mode of working irrespective of waning down of pandemic in the days to come. Various organisations also see to WfH as they not only can save their cost involved in running a physical office but also can move to becoming a global organisation with the help of ICT connected services. It can also be seen as contributing to building their positive image through a vision for Corporate Social Responsibility with environmental benefits of WfH in consideration. This vision of future can be more effective if we study WfH-employees on their individual parameters which correspond to Organisational Psychology.

As evident from the results of this study, there does not exist any significant difference in the perception of psychological participation amongst employees engaged in WfH, WfO and Mixed mode. By the concept we defined psychological participation in the study, we can derive that cumulatively, and employees do not perceive changes in their consideration for decision-making, autonomy, opinion seeking in problem-solving and the overall involvement at the workplace. Conclusively, this study is supportive of the idea of adopting WfH as a vision for future work mode as it has a positive outlook towards the management of our global environmental concern besides benefitting the organisations in many ways.

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