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Virtual Employee Engagement in Service Sector: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This research paper attempts to provide a greater understanding of COVID -19's influence on the workplace during this time of difficulty. The study brings a deep insight into the concepts and practices of online employee engagement related to work from home policy due COVID-19. The study aims to determine the challenges faced by organisations and provide suggestions to tackle such problems.

Design/methodology/approach – For the purpose of this study, interviews that were structured and unstructured both were arranged with 54 employees who were involved in remote working during covid-19. Snowball sampling technique was used for the purpose of selecting candidates to be interviewed. Participants of the study were employed at different levels and were from different sectors (education, IT, finance, marketing, project management etc.)

Findings -Due to the pandemic's destructive socioeconomic impact, many firms used cost-cutting measures including lowering employee benefits, limiting corporate operations, and laying off workers. Employees were concerned about the possibility of being laid off, which negatively impacted their job engagement levels.

Research limitations/implications-The study was conducted assuming a small sample of only 54 participants which might not truly represent the whole population.

Practical implications -The organisations as a whole and managers should "discover new ways to manage, create and innovative career paths, and put in place suitable support mechanisms for remote workers.

Originality/value – The paper is an original study of impact of COVID 19 on employees.

Keywords: Employee engagement, COVID-19, Work form home, remote working.

INTRODUCTION

India is the country with rapidly growing Service sector which has the greatest level of labour productivity according to IFEB. The service sector in India remains at highest value in its contribution to India's economic growth, accounting 53 % Gross value added in financial year 2022. India can Provide specific skill set that bring competitive advantage to the country and makes it different from all others on the globe. The services industry in India has the potential to uncover a multi-trillion-dollar opportunity that can provide symbiotic growth for all nations, thanks to many government efforts. The non-financial services section of India's service sector, which employed 128.4 million Indians in the financial year 2021, has the highest number of employees among the three segments (Statista 2021). The other two segments, on the other hand, each had 10 million employees. Being significant in numbers, the service sector employees are dealing with a drastic change of remote work due to the pandemic.

Work from home has impacted the workplace tremendously as the everyday routines of millions of people were disrupted heavily. In order to contain the spread of Covid-19, countries around the globe implemented various measures like severe lockdowns to avoid crowds or social gatherings. The affected countries were required to halt socio-economic activities in order to cease the growing covid cases. (Kaushik and Guleria 2020). Coping up with such protective health measures businesses had to make a drastic move by adopting the work from home or remote working policy. Due to the unavailability of offices to carry forward usual routine tasks, remote working became the only resort. Millions of employees irrespective of their job roles were forced to become remote workers, which became a de facto distant working experiment worldwide. In a short span of time, the covid upsurge redefined 'normal' for employees across the globe. The shift in the employee culture with the change in the workspace while keeping engaged with their obligations and goals is tremendous.

Every change has some positive and negative outcomes and similarly it was in the context of the work-from-home regime. According to research employees had gained much from remote working. Remote working brings ease in maintaining balance between work demands and family duties. Additionally, it gives the freedom of working from favourable locations and without much time restrictions. Due to less travel time, employees often take satisfaction in saving travel expense money during work-from-home.

On the other hand, due to lack of resources and proper work space at home, lack of job security, and imbalance between family and work life, the remote work environment has some negative consequences on the employees. Duran and Sanchez (2021) added that workers face stressful situations during work from policy such as work overloads, longer working hours, less rest time, layoff, pay cuts and furloughs resulting in economic loss. The anxieties that employees go through can be alleviated through positive psychology techniques such as psychological safety, positivity, and resiliency.

Employers can play a key role in welcoming such strategies to their virtual workplace for better results (Kaushik and Guleria 2020). Existing researches provides An understanding of strategies for shouldering human resource amid these situations, such as making people the priority, giving due importance to team work and effectual communication embracing straight forward and a humble approach of leadership (Nembhard etal. 2021), offering training sessions and incentives to engage personnel, as well as ensuring that teleworking technologies are available (Sulaiman et al, 2020).

Previous research conducted by Chanana and Sangeeta in 2020 argue that due to certain remote working issues as discussed above, employees were not able to focus on their daily tasks, which hints toward the importance of virtual employee engagement activities.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

According to Burnet (2004), in order to achieve a successful workplace performance, the psychological environment of an organisation is the most essential refers to employees' devotion to their jobs and organisations, has become a valuable asset for small and medium-sized businesses looking to adapt to a changing environment (Rasool, 2021 etal).

Employee engagement is popular because of its possible association to job-related behaviour, attitudes, job intention, employee health, well-being, and personality. (Schaufeli 2013). One of the most extensively used HR concepts is employee engagement (Robinson et al. 2004). Khan coined the term "employee engagement" in 1990, after conducting a study on Identity Theory in which Khan compared a highly organised and formal organisation to a loose and informal summer camp. Employees who work with greater interest and flexibility are more engaged, according to Khan's findings. After years of research on how workers' opinions affect organisational outcomes, Gallup.inc, an American analytical and advisory agency, produced a Q12, questionnaire survey on employee engagement ("First break all the rules" 1999, Bukingham and Coffman).

Employee engagement has been characterised by a variety of academics, and it can be generalised from these studies that it is an employee's emotional and intellectual commitment towards their organisation (Baumuk 2004; Rich man 2006; Shaw;2005). Khan (1990, p.694). It has also been defined as "personal involvement," which entails an employee's physical, cognitive, and emotional devotion towards their tasks. Energy, participation, and effectiveness are the three components of engagement, according to Maslach et al. (2001). Schaufeli et al. (2002, p.74), which characterised engagement as good, gratifying work-related behaviour and defined it as energy, devotion, and absorption. The great Contributor to Employee Engegemnt Schaufeli et al. (2002, p.74) went on to describe it as a thoughtful state of Mind that is no Just focused on any Single item, event, Individual, or conduct. It refers to a person's relationship with a firm (Lucey, Baleman and Hines 2005). .

Definition of employee engagement is still a controversial issue. There are lots of definitions of employee engagement, Macey and Schneider (2008) figured out that all of them conclude that employee engagement is a desirable element and it has an organizational purpose, it poses psychological and behavioral sides that embroils energy, enthusiasm and focused efforts.

According to Sarkar (2020), it has been noticed that during the lockdown, in order to keep the children of the employees occupied, family engagement is also added by the firms.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND REMOTE WORKING

Overall, it can be concluded that employees find working remotely a favourable alternative as they are able to maintain their family and work life, save money on travel, and spend less time travelling. Despite this, remote working has a number of drawbacks, including faulty transmission of Information, increased interference, lower-level motivation to work, a lack individual cooperation, issues related to security of data, and the issues with performance management and evaluation. (Golden and Gajendran, 2019; Vander Elst et al., 2017). Such matters are of big concern to the employer. Remote working during covid 19 has impacted the work engagement of an employee. Employees' job engagement may decline as a result of fewer possibilities for participation at workplace and competing work and nonwork demands (Adisa, T., Ogbonnaya, C. and Adekoya, O. D. 2021).In order to sustain a healthy business in the times of pandemic the employee must be proficient and buoyant, and their engagement is important. (Kumar,2021).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The single thing that competitive firms cannot duplicate or mimic is people. If properly managed and engaged, it is regarded as the most valuable asset. Employee engagement is considered as the most significant indicator of employee's viability. Employee Engagement is a topic of great interest to researchers in human resource. Different researchers have given a number of definitions of employee engagement. According to the research by Jena and others, (Jena, Pradhan, & Panigrahy, 2018) an engaged employee shows commendable interpersonal rapport among other employees, is optimistic, and shows a higher performance level in the organization. Bakker et al. (2011) defined engagement as an umbrella concept comprising employee commitment, work happiness, organisational citizenship behaviour, and employee turnover intentions. Employees that have a good attitude toward their company and are dedicated to attaining the company's objectives for the benefit of its peers, stakeholders, and consumers (Sarah Cook,2008). Different researchers

have defined employee Engagement in their own way while the exact definition of employee engagement is still not clear. As employee engagement is considered a crucial factor for employee productivity and performance, at the hard times of covid-19 engagement of workforce was a very challenging task as the organisations have to switch work from home policy. Andrew and Saudah (2012) explained that employee engagement is often used as a tool that helps in changing the behaviours, intentions, and attitudes of the employees to enhance job performance of the employees.

A few studies have conducted to see the impact of remote working policy adopted due to the covid-19 pandemic on employees' performance and productivity. Robison (2009) studied how to lead in tumultuous times and keep staff motivated and interested during transitions, the author also suggested various ways in which employee engagement can be increased, such as- declaring required goals and deadlines to the employee, providing them with necessary equipment and resources, offering them required freedom, acknowledging their efforts, and encouraging their growth.

The V5 model of employee engagement as discussed by Kumar P. (2021) focuses on five major pillars of employee engagement, which are virtue, vision, voice, variety, and value. In order to revitalise the organisation, it is possible to redesign and reimplement these features of the employee engagement model. This principle is relevant to all organisations, including educational institutions, as explained in this article. In concern with COVID - 19 circumstance, Risley (2020) stresses the critical factors of measuring employee performance and employee involvement and maximising performance to seek best Strategies. Through learning and expanding intellect, the author has highlighted the notion of a growth mindset. Status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and justice are five major areas where dual motivation plays a role, according to the study. Work-life balance can be achieved either through a regular schedule or an intermittent remote schedule. Chanana and sangeeta (2020) in their article focused on the employee engagement practices in different organisations during the coronavirus pandemic. The article stated that despite struggling with the pandemic, organizations keep looking for an efficient way to engage employees. Organizations practice various techniques like webinars, online weekly sessions, team virtual meetups, online game sessions, family engagement practices, virtual competitions, team building virtual activities, virtual learning, online courses, communication exercises, live sessions, and appreciation sessions.

The current study is concentrated on the importance of engaging employees in organisations. The challenges that are faced by organisations during covid pandemic to keep their workforce engaged, further suggestions are provided including creative and innovative ways in which employees can easily do work from home along with staying committed, contended, and motivated during their remote work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper attempts to provide a greater understanding of COVID -19's influence on the workplace during this time of difficulty. The study brings a deep insight into the concepts and practices of online employee engagement related to work from home policy due COVID-19. The study aims to determine the challenges faced by organisations and provide suggestions to tackle such problems.

For the purpose of this study, interviews that were structured and unstructured both were arranged with 54 employees who were involved in remote working during covid-19. Snowball sampling technique was used for the purpose of selecting candidates to be interviewed. A purposive sampling approach was used to make sure that the sample was representative of the research population, which bolstered our recruiting strategy (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The study included both male and female participants resident of India who were working from home during covid pandemic. Participants willingly talk through their experiences both work-related as well as non-work-related in the relation of pandemic during semi-structured interviews. Participants of the study were employed at different levels and were from different sectors (education, IT, finance, marketing, project management etc.), and the home scenario of each employee was also different. The semi-structured interview took place between September and December 2021. All interviews were conducted through telephonic or over face-to-face online calls. The purpose of the interview was explained briefly to the participants: a free and comfortable environment was provided to them to share their views. The interviews largely focused on how the individual's levels of engagement might have impacted in an unfavourable way since they were made to work from home owing to the Covid-19 lockdown limitations. The participants were asked several questions such as what they understand about employee engagement, how covid-19 has impacted their performance, what initiatives are taken by their organisation to keep them engaged etc. (Adisa, T., Ogbonnaya, C. and Adekoya, O. D. 2021).

The information collected from all the participants was studied thoroughly. In addition to the information collected through semi-structured interviews, various articles and blogs are also studied to provide support to our findings.

DISCUSSION

According to an article measuring employee engagement during covid crises by Kathryn Tyler (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic sparked drastic changes as millions of employees started working from home. It now becomes more vital than ever to gauge employee opinion and solicit feedback. Working from home can be both easy and economical. Unfortunately, there are a number of disconcerting elements, and the productivity may be far lower than when working in an office. When one of the employees who was financial analyst was asked about what problems were being faced during work from home he answered,

"The number of phone calls, emails, online meetings, and training sessions I received increased dramatically... I was on the edge of collapsing at one point. It had a significant impact on my health and involvement... The chores were massive, and I found myself less inspired to work at times."

Motivation inspires people to keep moving forward to achieve their objectives External source of inspiration coming from co-workers with similar objective or purpose, pep talk from a boss, etc., impacts productivity positively. On the other hand, working from home devoid an employee of an inspiring

setting and negatively impacts their productivity. The family environment is not the same for everyone, especially for women being married and having kids at home, making remote working more difficult. An employee who was working in an IT company said.

"With everyone locked up at home, it was impossible to be totally involved in work tasks. It was difficult to stay engaged in the work as I had to attend to household work duties (which got more rigorous), domestic chores, and helping the children with their online schooling... I'd be working on my laptop when one of the kids would beg for help with academics and another for lunch or anything. It was physically, psychologically, and emotionally demanding, and it was really tough to focus and stay involved. Because the kids were in school, the second lockdown was a little better."

While it was a great relief to the working parents to work from their respective places and keep their family safe, they had to compete with their work and family life all together. This brings more of gender Role into light as women in the house were expected to look after household tasks. Women were disproportionately responsible for additional household burden along with work-related duties ranging from everyday scheduling, schooling, domestic chores, and taking more care for the family during these hard times. Women feel worn out more than a man, which has destroyed their experience of remote working. In a survey done by McKinsey, 79 percent of male members accepted they had positive experience during the remote working at times of epidemic, in comparison to just 37 percent of Working Female. Remote working sounded difficult for a married woman with children.

The physical arrangement and availability of resources needed for remote working was another difficulty for the employees. An employee working in an educational institute said,

"The abrupt transition from a home to a work setting was strange, and I struggled to adjust. I tried to turn one of my home's rooms into an office, but it didn't work out. Apart from the many interruptions from the children, my mind simply refused to transfer to an institutional setting. It was tough for me to convert it to a work setting because it is my house, and it can only be my home... It had an impact on my concentration, engagement, and productivity."

The lack of availability of proper resources such as laptops, internet connection, proper physical space to work at and other resources required in remote working concerning the particular job requirements was another reason to make the workers disengaged. During the work from office times, many businesses prioritise ergonomics when purchasing seats and desks. These small steps helped to limit concerns related to physical discomfort otherwise they could result in low productivity and high absenteeism. Remote workers could have long-term physical discomfort due to inadequate working environment at home.

According to an article published by Harvard business review on 'presenteeism', it is the problem of workers being in their workspace but not fully working due to illness or other medical conditions, which can reduce individual output by one-third or more. In fact, it appears that presenteeism is a much more expensive problem than its productivity-decreasing equivalent, absenteeism. Presenteeism is obvious, when an employee does not show up for work, it is easily understood by how much the performance of an employee is affected by their medical condition. One of the employees who was part of our study expressed that,

"Every day, I work for at least twelve to fourteen hours online. This kind of virtual working is not natural. I felt monitored and pressured, and it significantly affected my interest and energy to work hard. It's difficult to think about virtual meetings, virtual collaborations, virtual training sessions, and online supervision. It's as if I'm trapped in a bubble, and it's had a detrimental impact on my work involvement. I'm also being watched, so I have to keep my computer logged on at all times. That demotivated me and had a negative impact on my work involvement."

Presenteeism is a sickness to organisations and it has been observed during our study that remote working has promoted this sickness, during work from home, employees have to work for longer hours than usual office hours. They are being monitored all the time and hence feel pressured to stay online even during ill health. This has reduced their productivity and engagement level in work.

While many people find working from home to be helpful, other people still struggle with aspects of remote work, particularly work-life balance. People all over the world have negotiated with new realities at work including home-schooling, partners working from home, or disrupted daily routines. One of our responded in this context that,

"During work from home I was present at home but not actually at home. Work-life balance is almost impossible in remote working. Your family will expect you to engage in family activities but You won't be able to do it since your boss doesn't care if you have a work-life balance. They say they do and talk a lot about work/life balance as if it's your fault you don't have it, but in the end, it's all about the company's bottom line. They are unconcerned about your bottom line."

During situations when the employee is overworked and exhausted, if the work-life balance it is difficult to give high performance lack of understanding, the direct emotional communication goes missing. Communication became one of the major problems during remote working. Some of our respondents to this commented,

"The most obvious issue when working with an offshore development service provider is the language barrier. Despite the fact that many organisations have chosen nearshoring, which implies outsourcing a company to a nearby country, there are still occasions where the customer and the vendor do not speak the same language, resulting in the language barrier being the most significant challenge while working remotely".

During the remote work the flow of communication and the emotional understanding is very little, which does not imply that it is not important. They are on the other hand very important pillars of work environment. Teams and groups that are co-located have direct communication so it is easy for them to understand each other's attitude, emption and the perspective in which the communication is being carried. Such communication is made effective with

the help of the tone in which the person is talking, his facial expression, speeches and several different means. This type of non-verbal communication is difficult in to understand in remote working through computer screens with poor connections.

FINDINGS

Non-remote employees may be more susceptible to infectious illnesses like COVID-19 because they deal directly with consumers and co-workers. During a pandemic, physical closeness is an exceptionally expensive employment quality and the key significant purpose of remote work in general may be the capacity to avoid dangers to respiratory health. Considering the maintenance of good health of their employees and their families most of the organisation switched to remote working policy. Employees had their own experience while remote working. The findings were made on the basis of true experience shared by the respondents in the real scenario and efforts are made to analyse them using a critical thinking approach.

Due to a lack of training and preparation, the job performance and employee engagement of a high-performing employee may suffer. Some of the reasons that drastically impact remote working are:

Absence of face-to-face interaction has made communication even more difficult. Keeping employees in a loop and making them feel included became difficult which badly needed more team building activities. Distracting pings and a long chain of emails contributed to loss of focus and low productivity. Trust building was a difficult task during virtual meetings or on emails. Remote employees face communication issues as team communication suffers due to a lack of openness, no teamwork, no brainstorming sessions, or physical interaction with peers. As a result, employee engagement suffers and it becomes difficult to maintain a similar involvement level, which leads to low workflow.

Remote employees face a lack of social connection. Isolation makes employees feel less belonging and may lead them in quitting the firm. According to an article published by Forbes (Modi 2019) loneliness and isolation have far-impacting consequences and manifest in multiple ways including poor decision making and increased stress.

At home, there are a multiplicity of distractions that may take employees away from their jobs at any time, negatively impacting their productivity. one of the most frequent reason which has been stated in Buffer's 2019 remote working study was the distractions in working from home place. Multiple roles and household odd jobs contributed to distraction while remote working. Working from home has its downsides, and more than 50 percent of respondents conveyed that they felt managing work-from-home was more difficult as it was impossible to keep their personal lives and work lives distinct. Not able to work with concentration will surely make an employee unengaged which will lead to inefficiencies.

Not being well equipped to adopt work from home policy was another major finding of our study. 50 percent of respondents conveyed that they felt managing work-from-home was more difficult as it was impossible to keep their personal lives and work lives distinct. Lack of proper training to adopt and accept the work from home policy was difficult for some of the respondents.

Many employees experienced 'online presenteeism,' which can be explained as situation in which an employee is under stress to keep himself present all the time and answer all the work-related duties. Online presenteeism includes longer working hours, pressure to fulfil all the obligations in real time attending virtual meeting and answering emails.

Furthermore, several participants felt burdened to be visible online all the time in order to make it look like they are not lingering on their work obligation since they worked from home. The participants claimed that their workloads had increased.

Job uncertainty was identified as a significant driver of low levels of work engagement amongst the participants of the study. Due to the pandemic's destructive socioeconomic impact, many firms used cost-cutting measures including lowering employee benefits, limiting corporate operations, and laying off workers. As a result, many workers have encountered increased uncertainty about their career prospects. Employees were concerned about the possibility of being laid off, which negatively impacted their job engagement levels.

These adjustments raised the amount of effort individuals had to put into their occupations, resulting in lower levels of work engagement. These all findings and challenges are big hurdles in keeping employees engaged in their work and keeping them working efficiently. Timely preventive measures should be taken by an organisation to keep track of the engagement of the employees while remote working and bring instant solutions to the challenges faced by them.

SUGGESTIONS

Although it is essential to form rigid remote-work policies and provide training in advance, the expected level of preparation may not be possible to achieve in situations of crisis or unstable conditions. Durán and Sánchez (2021) in an article concluded that Managers should concentrate on providing a remote working environment for employees to re-establish a balance between work and the family responsiblities in this new situation so as to promote engagement of the employees. They presented a model with five primary aspects (conciliation, confidence, cultivation, communication, and compensation) that companies need to address in order to bridge the gap between employees' commitment and engagement while the employees deal with the worldwide disruption created by the outbreak.

A few provisions should be taken to allow remote working, such as having the necessary technologies in place for collaboration and workload management, and ensuring that these tools are successfully adopted throughout the organisation. According to Manjaree and Perera (2021) to enhance

employee engagement, the organisation must invest in technical innovations and clearly defined technological infrastructure in order to improve efficiency and timely delivery of academic and non-academic work at a remote working environment. Provide resources and technology to individuals who are just getting started with remote work to make the transition easier.

To guarantee that employees are working at their best, provide knowledge about and access to ergonomic workstations. Provide staff with the necessary training requires to work from home and how to use the technology to work from home.Working in isolation makes it difficult for employees to accept, acknowledge, and understand new work tools and technology; but, if they are guided through it ahead of time, it streamlines workflow and allows employees to finish their responsibilities more quickly.

Through the use of effective communication tools, employee engagement can be enhanced in a virtual workplace. The organisational management should motivate employees to use such communication tools for both work-related discussions and informal discussions. The organisation should also stress the need for personal interactions among co-workers and managers for a positive workspace (Duran and Sanchez, 2021).

By creating a positive workspace employees feel obligated to work when they know it will benefit them. (Amason etal, 1995 and Beehr etal 1992) suggested that in a workplace that is connected via interpersonal trust, the stress of the workplace minimises, and it promotes psychological well-being among the employees. The attitudes, expectations, and motivation can be improved through in-house training. If the employees feel their health is also protected, they feel more engaged.

(Fan et al., 2020) In order to increase employee engagement, employers need to encourage their employees to keep a healthy setting at home, stick to a schedule, and demarcate home and work time. In order to increase collaborative communication, entertaining activities should be set up virtually that reduce absenteeism and increase productivity. Talukdar (2020) recommended five effective techniques to increase employee engagement such as building stronger communication with remote teams, instant praise cheer, ensuring flexibility, developing a virtual community, and finally team events.

CONCLUSION

The businesses that prefer physical business spaces, the remote working or flexible working will remain an alternative to it for some time. As a result, it seems that remote working is here to stay. While remote working may be a new normal, it is by no means a foregone conclusion in the present. Social union, information sharing, being supported by one's own supervisor, communication, shared purpose and vision, and mutual understanding influence employee engagement and effective results. Employers must be aware of their employees' needs and desires. Employers must promote the Distinctive of work culture to maintain employee engagement and performance. Employers are supposed to invest in individual consideration behaviour, they can mitigate the negative effects of rising COVID-19 cases on employee engagement and, in certain cases, even increase it. With all the discussion regarding remote working, it is concluded that the employer and employee should be given proper training to tackle such crises. Being prepared for such a time will make it easier to adopt such a change.

IMPLICATIONS

Our findings will surely support employees' endeavours to cope with their considerably transformed work culture, which are likely to have gradual socio-psychological, physical, and technical impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020). Entrepreneurs frequently face difficult working conditions, such as enormous uncertainty and responsibility (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). It indicates the need to adapt to new surroundings quickly and easily (Rauch et al., 2018).

The organisations as a whole and managers should "discover new ways to manage, create and innovative career paths, and put in place suitable support mechanisms for remote workers," according to Baruch (2000). Managers should use more supportive management methods, such as talking with subordinates using motivational words, especially in this unique situation (Madlock, 2013), establishing trust among a remote team (Grant et al., 2013), and information sharing rather than strict supervision (Lautsch et al., 2009).

Employees and management should know the difficulties that come with working remotely. During this uneasy time of pandemic COVID19, all organisations should employ unique and creative employee engagement practices in order to retain employees that are devoted, motivated, engaged, and happy (Chanana and Sangeeta, 2020). Kumar (2021) said to keep the workforce happy and engaged Pay attention to your employees' worries and issues at work.

Listen to them with open ears, and accept their ideas and suggestions from them in order to make their work go more smoothly and stress-free.For the sake of the organisation, amplify their voice.

LIMITATIONS

While the current study has added to valuable knowledge over how remote working affects employee engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic and acknowledged that remote working is not without flaws. The study was conducted assuming a small sample of only 54 participants which might not truly represent the whole population. As a result, upcoming research may be interested in pursuing a large-scale quantitative approach with a larger sample size to supplement the findings. Another potential limitation of the present study conducted is the use of merely virtual platforms for conducting interviews (e.g., Skype, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom,). Such platforms raise potential concerns about nonverbal cues, research ethics, and researcher–participant

bias, all of which can be avoided during face-to-face interviews. Nonetheless, it was impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews because of the existing Covid-19 lockdown and social distancing restrictions.

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