The Effect of Remote Working on Employees Performance amidst Corona Virus Pandemic: A Case of Selected Organizations in Chipata District, Zambia

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Abstract:- The main objective of the study was to establish the effect of remote working on employees' performance amidst corona virus pandemic in Chipata district and to answer the main research question on: How effective was remote working on employees' performance amidst corona virus in Chipata District? The COVID-19 pandemic has abruptly and radically turned over the working world, making unforeseen business and leadership challenges. The speedy move to remote work has resulted on other challenges for organizations. Effectual accomplishment measurement, administration, and accountability are always a challenge. In this abruptly, almost, completely virtual world, where it is much easier for employees to become almost imperceptible, it turns out to be a stumbling block to be familiar with and compensate immense accomplishment and also transact with accomplishment challenges. The mixed method approach of the study was informed by the philosophical assumption of pragmatism. Convergence parallel was the strategy of the mixed method approach. The target population was active organizations and the sample size was 38 employees, selected by purposive sampling method. The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were analyzed through required statistical parameters and qualitative data were analyzed through analogous of themes and patterns. The findings were that majority of the employees understood the concept of remote working. Further, remote working improved employees' performance. Subsequently, remote working proved to be challenging in terms of technology dependence, internet connection and machine malfunction, not effective in all cases, distractions, commitment, screen fatigue, and work-life balance.

Keywords:- Corona Virus Pandemic, Effect, Employee Performance, Remote Working.

I. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of the study was to establish the effect of remote working on employees' performance amidst corona virus pandemic in Chipata district and to answer the main research question on: How effective was remote working on employees' performance amidst corona virus in Chipata District? The COVID-19 pandemic has abruptly and radically turned over the working world, making unforeseen business and leadership challenges. Some organizations are turning hard to new conveyance channels, new products, and new working styles without having much time to administer the effect of these changes considerately (ACAS - Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, n.d; Denton, 2020; IBEC - Irish Business and Employers Confederation, 2020). Consequently, many senior managers, presently, find themselves shooting from the hip, deprived of their usual means to connect deeply with stakeholders and achieve agreement on proceeding (ILO - International Labor Organization, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e; Eurofound - European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions & ILO, 2017)

The speedy move to remote work has resulted on other challenges for organizations. Effectual accomplishment measurement, administration, and accountability are always a challenge. In this abruptly, almost, completely virtual world, where it is much easier for employees to become almost imperceptible, it turns out to be a stumbling block to be familiar with and compensate immense accomplishment and also transact with accomplishment challenges (Fulbright. 2020; Eurostat. 2018; ILO, 2020f; ILO, 2018; ILO, 2016). Particularly, leaders must be accustomed to the requirements of their businesses and their people, although the anxiety in their own lives may have amplified for the duration of the pandemic.

While videoconferencing and remote work actions have been attaining stable advancement in current years, many responsive discussions or interaction in businesses are, hitherto, characteristically dealt with in person (IOE - International Organization of Employers, 2020; Lexology, 2020). Faith and clearness — necessary for taking sides in effectual exchange of ideas, information sharing, and monitoring through on obligations — are superlative instituted and sustained face to face. The incapability to bring in the external and internal stakeholders together in person for the predictable future, appends more complexity to decision-making and amplifies the possibility for conflict (World Health Organization, 2020c; Messenger, 2019). For organizations, the significant challenge in the present atmosphere hinges on how executives can connect practically in important decision-making procedures with

stakeholders and internal team members, in methods that improve faith, clearness, and cooperation. The predicament, also, presents a significant opportunity to a second thought on how decision-making is spread and dealt with locally and globally (IBEC - Irish Business and Employers Confederation, 2020; Eurofound (2020a, 2020b).

II. METHODOLOGY

The mixed method approach of the study was informed by the philosophical assumption of pragmatism. Convergence parallel was the strategy of the mixed method approach. The target population was active organizations and the sample size was 38 employees, selected by purposive sampling method. The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were analyzed through required statistical parameters and qualitative data were analyzed through analogous of themes and patterns.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Findings and discussion were informed by research questions that are discussed in sections A, B, and C respectively.

3.1 Section A
The first research question is: **How was employees' understanding of remote working?**
The following variables of interest were selected to provide answers that were informed by the findings and discussion.

3.1.1 Awareness of electronic Working
Table 1 presents respondents awareness of remote working. Remote work is a working model that permits stakeholders to work outside of convention office surroundings. As an alternative of traveling to an office every day to work from an assigned table, remote employees can carry out their work and exceed their goals wherever they want. Results show that the majority of the respondents, 47.4 percent, indicated awareness to remote working while 42.1 percent did not. Further, 10.5 percent of the respondents were undecided.

Table 1: Awareness of Electronic Working					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	5.3	5.3	5.3
	Disagree	14	36.8	36.8	42.1
	Neutral	4	10.5	10.5	52.6
	Agree	15	39.5	39.5	92.1
	Strongly Agree	3	7.9	7.9	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data

3.1.2 Comprehension of work progress by remote working
Table 2 shows respondents opinion regarding comprehension of work progress by remote working. Remote working has turned out to be an ever more prevalent work style that has created important awareness from stakeholders. With current progress in technology that allow mobile connections, working away from the office as a remote worker has turned out to be ever more accessible to many organizations, globally. The study revealed that 39.5 percent of the respondents indicated agreement to comprehension of work progress by remote working while the majority, 42.1 percent disagreed and 18.4 percent were undecided.

Table 2: Comprehension of Work Progress by Remote Working					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Disagree	15	39.5	39.5	42.1
	Neutral	7	18.4	18.4	60.5
	Agree	2	5.3	5.3	65.8
	Strongly Agree	13	34.2	34.2	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data

3.1.3 Remote Working and Work-Life Balance
Table 3 indicates the opinion of respondents remote working and balancing other life commitments. There has been escalating debate about whether working from home enhances the ability of the worker to balance work requirements and other life commitments. Results of the survey showed that the majority of the respondents, 52.7 percent, indicated disagreement that remote work did not affect workers' other life commitments while 10.5 percent indicated agreement. Subsequently, 36.8 percent were undecided.

Table 3: Remote Working and Work-Life Balance					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	5.3	5.3	5.3
	Disagree	18	47.4	47.4	52.6
	Neutral	14	36.8	36.8	89.5
	Agree	4	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data

3.2 Section B

The second question was: **What was employees' performance benefit by remote working?**

The following variables of interest were chosen to provide answers that were informed by the findings and discussion

3.2.1 Remote working reduces on cost

Table 4 presents opinion of respondents that remote working reduced costs. It was believed that remote working would put aside money on office space and reduce the cost and time employees spend traveling. Results showed that majority of the respondents, 97.4 percent indicated agreement that remote working reduced various costs while 2.6 percent were undecided.

Table 4: Remote Working Reduces on Cost					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Agree	17	44.7	44.7	47.4
	Strongly Agree	20	52.6	52.6	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data

3.2.2 Improves retention and job satisfaction

Table 5 indicates respondents' opinion that remote working improved job retention and satisfaction. It was argued that remote work enhances job retention as a worker might be satisfied with his/her job and ultimately saving some costs related to hiring and training. However, the study revealed that majority of the respondents, 50 percent indicated disagreement to while 28.9 percent indicated agreement and 21.1 percent were undecided.

Table 5: Remote Working Improves Retention and Job Satisfaction					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	19	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Neutral	8	21.1	21.1	71.1
	Agree	7	18.4	18.4	89.5
	Strongly Agree	4	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data

3.2.3 Remote workers are less stressed

Table 6 shows the views of respondents that remote work reduced stress. It was believed that remote working provided staff with the option to relocate thereby assisting them get an improved hold on their work-life equilibrium, thereby creating an overall joyful workforce. Results showed that majority of the respondents, 55.2 percent, indicated agreement to the view that remote work reduced stress while 7.9 percent were in disagreement while 36.8 percent were undecided.

Table 6: Remote workers were Less Stressed				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	Disagree	2	5.3	5.3	7.9
	Neutral	14	36.8	36.8	44.7
	Agree	10	26.3	26.3	71.1
	Strongly Agree	11	28.9	28.9	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Source: Filed Data

3.2.4 Increased Productivity and Performance

Table 7 indicates respondents' opinion that remote working increased productivity and performance of an organization. There was an argument that working from home regularly directs to a small number of interruptions, few office politics, a quieter noise level, and less or more efficient meetings. In addition to not traveling to work places, remote workers naturally have more time and fewer distractions, which directs to amplified productivity, an enormous advantage of working from home for both employees and employers alike. However, the study revealed that majority of the respondents, 50 percent, indicated disagreement to this view while 26.4 percent indicated agreement and 23.7 percent were undecided.

Table 7: Increased Productivity and Performance				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	19	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Neutral	9	23.7	23.7	73.7
	Agree	2	5.3	5.3	78.9
	Strongly Agree	8	21.1	21.1	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data

3.3 Section C

The third question was: **What challenges were affecting employees' performance by remote working?**

The following variables of interest were opted for to provide answers that were informed by the findings and discussion. Figure 1 presents respondents' opinion on challenges associated with remote working as follows:

i.   **Technology-dependency** - Remote working is carried out by employing computer products. There were arguments that gaining knowledge of making use of the products might take a long time. Results showed that majority of the respondents, 79.9 percent indicated agreement that technological dependence was a challenge to remote working.

ii. **Internet connection and machine malfunction**: The study revealed that majority of the respondents, 79.9 percent were in agreement that there was a challenge of internet connection and machine malfunctioning affected remote working. Poor internet made work progress boring and wasting of time.

iii. **Not effective in all cases:** It was believed that users cannot connect uninterrupted with their contemporaries and leaders and may feel cut off, less productive or less creative. The results showed that majority of the

respondents, 81.6 percent, indicated that remote working was not effective.

iv. **Distractions:** It was argued that working remotely or from home, entails fighting a latest group. It was explained that there were always some sorts of distractions arising from household members. The study revealed that majority of the respondents, 78.9 percent, agreed to this fact.

v.   **Commitment:** Lack of commitment as meetings, workshops or labs are "only" remote. Results showed that majority of the respondents, 76.3 percent indicated agreement that workers did not commit themselves in such a situation.

vi. **Screen Fatigue:** Screen fatigue triggers the concentration duration to cut down, as gazing at a computer screen is more fatiguing than face-to-face dealings. The study revealed that majority of the respondents, 71.1 percent, indicated agreement that remote working was affected by screen fatigue.

vii. **Work-life Balance:** Working remotely or from home frequently manifests in a synthesis of work and private life and some employees may have challenges to uncouple at the close of the work day. Results showed that majority of the respondents, 56.3 percent, indicated agreement that they could not balance work and private life as interests clashed.
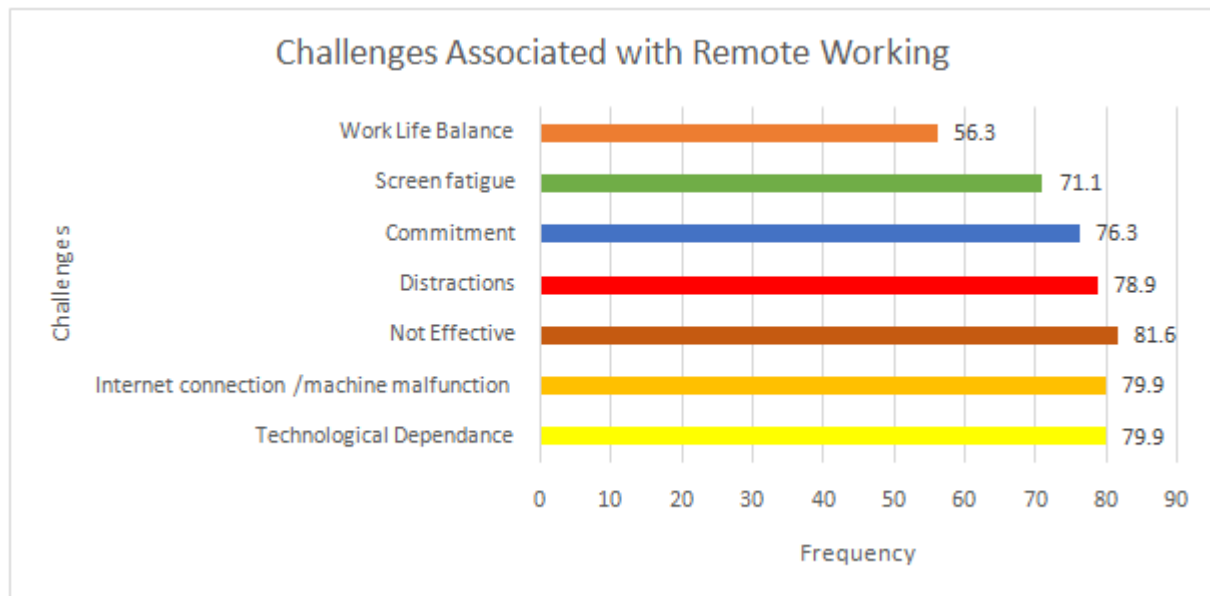
Figure1 Challenges Associated with Remote Working
Source: Filed Data

IV. CONCLUSION

Majority of the respondents indicated awareness to remote working; disagreed to comprehension of work progress by remote working; and disagreed that remote work did not balance work-life.

Further, remote working provided benefits such as reduction in traveling costs; improvement in retention and job satisfaction; reduced stress; and increased productivity and performance. Subsequently, remote working presented challenges, for instance, technology-dependency; internet connection and machine malfunction; not effective in all cases; distractions; lack of commitment to remote meetings; screen fatigue; and work-life balance.

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