

Institutional Responses To Covid-19 Restrictions And Post-Covid-19 Strategies For Promoting Job Satisfaction And Work-Life Balance

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I. Introduction:

Work-life balance (WLB) has emerged as a critical concern in modern organizations, aiming to balance work demands and personal life to enhance job satisfaction, employee retention and productivity. Singh and Khanna (2018) define WLB as a comprehensive concept that entails setting appropriate priorities between “work” (career and ambition) and “life” (happiness, leisure, family and personal development). This balancing act ensures that neither aspect dominates the other, allowing individuals to pursue professional goals while maintaining personal well-being. Margaretha (2021) expands on this by describing WLB as a scenario that enables employees to manage their career responsibilities and personal life without succumbing to job stress and fatigue. Organizations help employees avoid burnout, leading to greater job satisfaction and enhanced performance by fostering such an environment.

A well-maintained work-life balance significantly impacts employee commitment, job satisfaction and organizational productivity. Employees who experience a healthy WLB are more likely to remain committed to their organization, perform better and exhibit higher levels of satisfaction. This, in turn, results in higher employee retention rates and improved overall productivity. Johansson (2020) asserts that stressed workers who are dissatisfied with their work and the amount of time they have for their personal lives are the result of the expectations of job performance and demanding schedules, which have blurred the lines between work and personal time. According to Ganapathi (2016), millennial workers are especially affected by this problem since they place a great importance on keeping their personal lives and work lives apart.

The COVID-19 epidemic made these problems worse. Many workers around the world were compelled by the stay-at-home directives to make the abrupt and ill-prepared shift to working from home (McKinsey Global Institute, 2021). The lines separating one’s personal and professional lives got even more blurred as a result of this abrupt change. Stress was experienced by most of the workers and a fall in overall job satisfaction due to their inability to balance their professional and personal commitments. The work-from-home paradigm brought on by the pandemic highlighted the effect of boundaries and the requirement that firms aid staff in coming up with a healthy WLB. These changes have significantly impacted employees’ WLB experiences in the workplace, which needs the necessity for techniques to deal with these issues.

COVID-19 introduced a crucial shift in remote work, moving from flexible working strategies to crucial requirements for many workplaces (Franken et al. 2021). This “forced flexibility” compelled firms and employees to rapidly adapt to new job arrangements. The pandemic accelerated the use of work-from-home techniques, making them obligatory from optional. This shift is relevant and timely, as it has necessarily changed how work is done. It is crucial to understand the work-life balance (WLB) experiences of employees amid the epidemic as organizations attempt to establish the “next normal.” The forced shift to remote work has provided crucial latest understandings into how workers stabilize their professional and personal lives. These results must be accounted by firms when deciding on future work-from-home and hybrid work arrangements. It is crucial to effectively respond to these new standards so as to support the coming group of employees’ well-being and job happiness. This incorporate resolving the problems bumped into in the process of the epidemic, developing regulations that foster a healthy work-life balance and coming up with an environment that puts into consideration both professional and individual well-being. In the atmosphere of changing employment, firms can advance retention, productivity and employee satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study:

This study aimed to analyze the institutional responses to Covid-19 restrictions and post-Covid-19 strategies for promoting job satisfaction and work-life balance.

II. Theoretical Review:

This research uses two theories namely; Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model and boundary theory. Boundary Theory, introduced by Nippert-Eng in 1996, illustrates how people negotiate, create and maintain boundaries amongst various domains of their lives, such as work personal life. According to this theory, these boundaries are managed by people to accomplish a desired level of integration or segmentation (Park et al., 2020). Segmentation incorporates clearly separating personal life and work, ensuring slight overlap between the two. This approach helps people focus on one domain at a time, potentially improving performance and minimizing stress in both areas. However, integration involves merging professional and personal spheres to promote more fluidity and flexibility between both. Individuals who are more integrated may focus on individual projects while they are at work or check work emails in their spare time. This policy can offer more flexibility and a sense of balance between home life and work, but it correspondingly runs the risk of overly obfuscating boundaries, which, if not held correctly, can result in burnout and stress.

The lines between business and personal life were increasingly hazy during the COVID-19 pandemic as many workers switched to working remotely. It became extremely difficult to keep a clear separation between work and personal obligations as a result of this overlap. The absence of a physical barrier between work and home probably increased stress and job unhappiness for workers who prefer segmented boundaries. These people need distinct boundaries between their personal and professional life and the pandemic's disruption made it challenging to uphold these boundaries. On the other hand, workers who value integrated boundaries which combine work and personal life might have found it easier to adjust to working remotely. They still had trouble juggling their personal lives with the heightened demands of their jobs, though.

Constant work at home can result in longer workdays and make it harder to step away from work-related responsibilities, both of which increase the risk of stress and burnout. The epidemic brought to light the need of comprehending personal boundary preferences and the necessity for enterprises to accommodate a range of work-life balance strategies. Regardless of the method that an employee prefers for managing their boundaries, offering them the tools and flexibility they need to do so can improve their general well-being and job happiness. This knowledge is essential as firms manage the changing workplace following the pandemic.

According to Demerouti et al. (2023), the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model divides job characteristics into two categories: job demands and job resources. Job resources are elements of a job that support achieving work goals, lessen job demands and foster personal development. Job demands, on the other hand, are features of a job that call for consistent effort and can cause stress. Job expectations rose during the COVID-19 epidemic, necessitating workers to adjust to new technologies and manage hazy work-life boundaries. At the same time, workplace amenities such as coworker social support networks and ergonomic workstations were reduced.

The ability of employees to manage their personal and professional lives was greatly impacted by these developments, which in turn affected their level of job satisfaction. The JD-R Model states that inadequate job resources combined with high job demands might result in burnout. Nonetheless, the impact of these strong demands can be mitigated by having enough resources. Employees who had access to resources including flexible work schedules, encouraging management and useful technology tools during the pandemic probably had better work-life balance (WLB) and increased job satisfaction (Ninaus et al., 2021).

The employment Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model was used in this study to find and propose employment resources that promote work-life balance (WLB). Important resources include supplying home office equipment that is ergonomic, giving mental health support and cultivating a positive work environment. By striking a balance between job demands and sufficient resources, organizations can greatly increase employee happiness and well-being. The purpose of the study was to investigate how workers' work-life balance and job satisfaction were impacted by changes in employment expectations and resources during the COVID-19 epidemic. It specifically looked at the new demands on the workplace, such managing work-life balance and adjusting to remote work technologies, as well as the changed resources, like inadequate home office settings and less social support. The goal of the study is to comprehend how businesses might use these insights to create post-pandemic plans that work. Improving workplace resources, such as offering flexible work schedules, strong managerial assistance and essential technology tools, might lessen the negative consequences of rising job expectations.

III. Methodology:

As recommended by Hossain et al. (2021), a cross-sectional research design was used for this investigation. In a cross-sectional study, the prevalence of an outcome of interest is ascertained by looking at data from a population at a particular point in time. With this method, researchers can examine multiple aspects of a

population at once, including age, income, gender, occupation and more, all without changing any parameters. The purpose of the study was to look at how work-related pressures and resources affected workers' job satisfaction and work-life balance (WLB) during the COVID-19 epidemic. This research was especially well-suited to the cross-sectional technique, which allows for the evaluation of the pandemic's direct consequences on various demographic and occupational categories. This strategy entails gathering information from a broad sample of employees via questionnaires and surveys. Finding trends and connections between job demands, job resources and their effects on work-life balance and job satisfaction was the goal of the investigation. This study also analyzed the traits that are most prevalent in the sampled population after gathering various characteristics. Finding patterns and correlations in the data is made easier with the use of this analysis. The study focused on institutions that had WLB policies in order to evaluate their efficacy and pinpoint areas that could use improvement, using secondary data. Data was presented thematically by grouping similar themes together.

IV. Discussion:

The impact of institutional responses to Covid-19 on job satisfaction levels:

Institutions responded to the COVID-19 epidemic in a variety of ways, with some taking steps to support staff, sustain operations and ensure health and safety. Employee job satisfaction was significantly impacted by these responses, with different results depending on the type and efficacy of the interventions put in place. The broad adoption of remote work policies was one significant institutional response. More flexibility and a better work-life balance were made available to many employees by this change, which raised job satisfaction (Kasbuntoro et al., 2020). The freedom to better balance work and personal obligations was much appreciated, which resulted in a feeling of empowerment and fulfilment. However, several workers had difficulties with working remotely. Their job satisfaction was significantly influenced by things like poor home office arrangements, restricted access to resources and heightened feelings of isolation as a result of less social interaction. These difficulties highlighted how crucial it is to have extensive support networks and resources in order to enable productive remote work arrangements.

An additional crucial component of institutional responses to the COVID-19 epidemic was health and safety protocols. Employees usually accepted enhanced measures well, including frequent sanitization, the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and health monitoring. These actions improved workers' sense of worth and safety, which raised their level of job satisfaction (Dziuba et al., 2020). Employee trust and morale increased when employers showed a commitment to protecting their personnel, which raised overall job satisfaction. However, some employees were not happy with how these health and safety procedures were being implemented consistently, or they felt that they were not being carried out adequately. Concerns regarding personal safety and well-being emerged in situations when protocols were handled inconsistently or where staff members thought the precautions were insufficient. This emphasized how important it is to have all-encompassing, transparent and consistent health plans.

During the pandemic, employee evaluations of their companies were significantly influenced by the efficacy of health and safety interventions. Employee morale and job satisfaction increased in companies that were able to put strong safety measures in place and maintained them. On the other hand, companies that had trouble implementing their plans saw a rise in employee discontent as well as possible drops in engagement and trust. Thus, it became clear how crucial comprehensive and successful health policies were to preserving worker happiness and wellbeing throughout such emergencies. Employment security and financial assistance were major determinants of employment happiness (Pang, 2018). Job satisfaction was better in organizations that offered financial support, such as incentives, hazard pay, or guarantees of job stability. These actions reduced financial strain and strengthened workers' sense of security and devotion to their companies. On the other hand, organizations that did not provide more funding or informed staff members about impending layoffs and budget cuts increased employee worry and lowered job satisfaction.

Transparency and communication were essential during the pandemic. Job satisfaction was positively impacted by leadership's regular and transparent communication regarding institutional responses, future plans and health updates. Having access to information made them feel more involved with the company and appreciated. On the other hand, unclear communication or misinformation that was believed to exist caused mistrust and confusion, which had a detrimental effect on job satisfaction levels. Initiatives promoting mental health and wellbeing played a critical role in preserving job satisfaction throughout the pandemic. Work satisfaction significantly improved in institutions that provided complete mental health assistance, including wellness initiatives, mental health days and counselling services (Barcons et al., 2019). These programs showed a dedication to workers' well-being that went beyond their physical health and took into account the psychological and emotional difficulties brought on by the pandemic.

Access to counselling services assisted staff members in reducing stress and anxiety, while wellness initiatives, which included exercise classes and mindfulness exercises, enhanced general wellbeing. Mental health days provided workers with the essential time off to recuperate, averting burnout and maintaining output. These

kinds of support networks increased workers' job happiness by reaffirming that their bosses respected and cared for them. On the other hand, during the epidemic, institutions that disregarded mental health issues experienced negative consequences. Employee stress and burnout escalated due to a lack of mental health care, which dramatically decreased job satisfaction. Workers who felt unsupported in taking care of their mental health were more likely to be worn out and disengaged, which had an impact on their dedication to the company and general performance. Thus, throughout the pandemic, retaining a motivated and healthy workforce and preserving job satisfaction required including mental health and well-being programs (López-Cabarcos et al., 2020). Businesses who gave priority to these elements were better able to assist their staff members during the crisis, resulting in a more resilient and contented labour force.

The impact of institutional responses to Covid-19 on work-life balance:

Institutions have implemented a range of remedies in response to the Covid-19 epidemic with the goal of helping staff members and maintaining continuity and safety. The impact of these measurements on employees' work-life balance was substantial and the results varied based on the type and efficacy of the replies. According to Schuster et al., (2020), the implementation of remote work practices was one of the most noteworthy institutional reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote employment greatly improved work-life balance for many individuals by removing commuting hours and offering more flexibility in juggling personal and professional obligations. Many employees saw an improved work-life balance as a result of their increased ability to connect work and home life. Having the flexibility to arrange their workday around personal obligations enhanced their sense of autonomy and job satisfaction.

But the move to remote employment also brought with it a number of difficulties. Some workers found it challenging to draw boundaries between their personal and professional lives, which resulted in longer workdays and higher stress levels. When personal and professional spaces were not clearly demarcated, it was frequently difficult for workers to detach from their work and find time to unwind and rejuvenate. Constantly juggling work and personal obligations can cause burnout and have a detrimental effect on general wellbeing (Suldo et al., 2020). As a result, even if remote work rules provided significant advantages in terms of flexibility and blending work and personal life, they also made evident the necessity of developing methods for upholding boundaries. In order to guarantee that remote work maintains its beneficial effects on employees' work-life balance and job happiness, it is imperative to tackle these obstacles.

Institutions also put in place a number of health and safety protocols to safeguard workers who persisted in doing their jobs on-site. These steps which included increased sanitization, social distancing procedures and the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) were essential in establishing a secure workplace (Cirrincione et al., 2020). Knowing that their health was a top priority helped employees feel less stressed and anxious, which improved their work-life balance. But inconsistent application of these policies or a sense of inadequacy may exacerbate stress and raise safety issues, which would take away from a positive work-life balance.

The provision of financial support in the form of bonuses, hazard pay and job security promises was crucial in affecting work-life balance. Organizations that offered these services assisted in easing employees' financial strains and uncertainties so they could concentrate more successfully on their personal lives and obligations. However, a lack of funding or information about impending layoffs and budget cuts caused employees' worry and stress levels to rise, which negatively impacted their capacity to maintain a healthy work-life balance. But inconsistent application of these policies or a sense of inadequacy may exacerbate stress and raise safety issues, which would take away from a positive work-life balance.

The provision of financial support in the form of bonuses, hazard pay and job security promises was crucial in affecting work-life balance (Yadav et al., 2019). Organizations that offered these services assisted in easing employees' financial strains and uncertainties so they could concentrate more successfully on their personal lives and obligations. However, a lack of funding or information about impending layoffs and budget cuts caused employees' worry and stress levels to rise, which negatively impacted their capacity to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Initiatives promoting mental health and wellbeing were also crucial in promoting work-life balance. Employers that provided mental health services, such as wellness initiatives, mental health days and counselling, enabled staff members to better manage stress and maintain a work-life balance. These programs showed a dedication to the welfare of the workforce and promoted a more all-encompassing method of striking a balance between work and personal life. However, disregarding mental health issues resulted in a rise in stress and burnout, severely upsetting work-life balance.

Work-life balance was also impacted by training and development opportunities since they kept workers engaged and helped them grow. Employers who provided online professional development opportunities and modified training curricula to accommodate the new work environment were able to retain their workforce's loyalty and motivation. This assistance played a pivotal role in cultivating a sense of purpose and advancement, hence positively impacting work-life balance.

The influence of Covid 19 restrictions on job satisfaction levels:

A number of regulations were put in place in response to the Covid-19 epidemic in an effort to stop the virus's spread. Employees' job satisfaction levels were significantly impacted by these restrictions, which included travel bans, lockdowns, social distancing tactics and limits on in-person encounters. There were both beneficial and negative effects of these limitations on job satisfaction. A significant feature of COVID-19 limitations was the extensive use of lockdowns and stay-at-home directives, which forced many workers to abruptly transition to remote work (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Job satisfaction was impacted by this adjustment in two ways. Positive aspects of remote work included increased flexibility, shorter commutes and cosier workspaces for staff members. Due to their enhanced autonomy and improved capacity to manage work and personal obligations, several employees expressed greater job satisfaction. One notable benefit that improved productivity and general well-being was the ability to modify work schedules to accommodate personal obligations.

But this change also brought with it a number of difficulties. Workers who had subpar home office arrangements experienced decreased productivity and physical discomfort. As the absence of social interaction with co-workers had a negative impact on mental health, feelings of isolation grew common. Furthermore, it became harder to draw boundaries between work and personal life, which made some people work longer hours and feel more stressed. It was difficult to detach from work due to the continual overlap of work and personal areas, which led to burnout. Therefore, even while working remotely had many advantages in terms of freedom and flexibility, it also made clear how crucial it was to deal with issues like isolation and boundary management in order to maintain job satisfaction. To lessen these negative effects, organizations must assist staff in setting up productive home workplaces and encouraging online social contacts.

According to Courtemanche et al., (2020), restrictions on in-person interactions and social distancing tactics also made a significant difference. The dynamics of the workplace were changed by the decrease in in-person meetings and exchanges. Lack of in-person contact caused feelings of alienation and loneliness for certain workers, particularly for those who thrive on social contacts and teamwork, which had a detrimental impact on job satisfaction. On the other hand, employees who felt that in-person meetings disrupted them or wanted less social engagement saw the switch to virtual communication as a good development that improved their level of job satisfaction. Employees in a variety of industries were impacted by travel bans and movement limitations, especially those whose professions required them to remain on-site or involve travel. When these limitations made it impossible for employees to travel for work, they became frustrated and dissatisfied because their jobs were greatly disrupted. However, several staff members valued the lessened demands on their time for travel, which enhanced work-life balance and, as a result, increased job satisfaction.

The restrictions also led to changes in workload and job roles. In some cases, employees experienced increased workloads due to the need to adapt to new ways of working, such as mastering new technologies for remote work or taking on additional responsibilities due to staffing shortages. This increase in workload and the pressure to adapt quickly often resulted in stress and burnout, leading to decreased job satisfaction (Dewi & Riana, 2019). However, in other cases, employees whose workloads were reduced or who were able to work more efficiently from home reported higher job satisfaction. Employees' psychological well-being was also greatly impacted by the general anxiety and worry brought on by the pandemic and the related limitations. A sense of instability and worry was brought on by the frequent changes and the have to adjust to new limitations, which had a detrimental effect on job satisfaction.

The influence of Covid 19 restrictions on work-life balance:

Widespread steps to stop the virus's spread were implemented in response to the Covid-19 epidemic. These included travel bans, lockdowns, social distancing measures and restrictions on face-to-face interactions. These limitations had a substantial impact on how well individuals balanced their personal and professional lives, with varying results based on the limits and the circumstances of each employee. The imposition of lockdowns and stay-at-home directives, which caused an abrupt and widespread transition to remote work, was one of the most significant limitations. According to Oludayo et al., (2018). the work-life balance of numerous employees was positively impacted by this change. The ability to work from home and the reduction of commute time helped employees to better balance work and personal obligations. Many were able to attain a more harmonious and balanced daily routine because to this flexibility, which enhanced work-life balance. However, some workers also faced difficulties as a result of this change. The lines between work and personal life became hazier for individuals with subpar home offices or those who struggled to keep work and personal life separate, which resulted in longer workdays and higher levels of stress. Their work-life balance was badly harmed by this erasing of boundaries between work and home life.

Limitations on face-to-face interactions and social distance policies also significantly affected work-life balance. Some employees were able to better manage their time and reduce the stress that comes with having many in-person encounters by decreasing the number of in-person meetings and increasing virtual communication

(Graves & Karabayeva, 2020). Workers who were introverted or felt that attending in-person meetings required a significant amount of time found it simpler to balance their personal and professional life as a result of this adjustment. Nonetheless, the absence of face-to-face engagement caused individuals who valued collaboration and social contacts to feel alone and disconnected, which negatively impacted their general sense of equilibrium and wellbeing.

Restrictions on movement and travel showed conflicting effects on work-life balance. The inability to travel relieved work-related stress and allowed individuals whose employment required frequent travel to spend more time at home, which improved work-life balance. These workers frequently expressed gratitude for the lessened travel requirements, which allowed them to spend more time with their families and partake in leisure activities. On the other hand, for those whose jobs required a lot of travel or on-site presence, these limitations upset their regular work schedules and created annoyance, which resulted in an unbalanced feeling between their personal and professional lives.

The limitations also caused adjustments to employment positions and workload (Tentama et al., 2019). The need to adjust to new working conditions such as learning new technology for remote work or taking on more duties owing to personnel shortages often resulted in increasing workloads for employees. Work-life balance was badly impacted by the increasing effort and the need to quickly adjust, which raised stress and burnout levels. The remote work environment did, however, result in lower workloads or more efficient workflows for certain individuals, which improved their work-life balance by freeing up more time for family and personal pursuits.

Furthermore, the general stress and uncertainty brought on by the pandemic and the ensuing limitations significantly impacted the psychological health of the workforce. An atmosphere of instability and anxiety was brought about by the need to continually adjust to new limitations as well as the virus's inherent fear. It was difficult for workers to maintain a healthy work-life balance because of the widespread stress. Organizations with robust support networks, transparent communication protocols and mental health resources were better equipped to assist their staff members in overcoming these obstacles, which in turn improved their work-life equilibrium.

V. Conclusion:

The consequences of the various policies and procedures implemented by organizations for business continuity on the workers have not been properly examined or understood, despite the fact that the repercussions of the Covid 19 pandemic on the economy have been well-documented and underlined. Organizational reactions to COVID-19 may have resulted in the introduction of stressors such greater workloads, workplace limitations, technological stress, professional isolation, intense housework and emotional expectations, among other things. The purpose of this research project is to examine the effects of these new stressors on work-life balance and job satisfaction. These stresses have affected work-life balance and job satisfaction in diverse ways. The findings of this study will be crucial in helping human resource professionals handle remote work following the epidemic and advising firms as a whole about work-life balance-promoting policies. Additionally, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding employee psychological health and employer and employee boundary management procedures and practices in the future.

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