How has COVID-19 Impacted Work Environments, and How has it left it after it was gone: Focusing on Remote Work'

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The New York Times has recently reported new evidence on the impact of COVID-19; that ability in math and reading has been drawn back by two decades, and that the achievement gap has even widened ("The Startling Evidence...", 2023). In likeliness to schools, corporations were forced to fit in, and remote work at home had increased more than ever (Phillips, 2020). As we are getting closer than ever to making a full recovery from this virus, scholars have recently started to analyze what had happened and how this sudden pandemic impacted workplaces in terms of worker well-being, diversity, connectivity, and efficiency through spreading remote work. This essay aims to critically analyze the impact of the sudden introduction of remote work that has impacted our societies, and what situation we were left with after the situation had ended. Facilitating recent work on this new subject, this essay will address the following research question: How does: How has COVID-19 impacted work environments, and how has it impacted them after it was gone.

The sudden and global spread of the virus has made remote work crucial, greatly impacting the way organizations are connected and how workers work with each other. The sudden change has also deeply impacted workers as they had to try to get used to this new, creaky way of interaction (Aleem & Sufyan & Ameer & Mustak, 2023). Multiple studies suggest that this will be a permanent trend, given its various advantages (Phillips, 2020; Saad & Wigert, 2021). Moreover, it has been reported that organizations with geographical

limitations to diversity and organizations in general can even expect more diversity in applicants (David & Prasanna, 2022).

What happened when this style of work was first introduced? The intuitive guess is that it would allow less connectivity, together with physical isolation of each worker. Indeed, connectivity had decreased in environments where that is crucial such as groups of information workers after the introduction of remote work (Yang et al, 2021). Moreover, some research even suggests that the blurring of work and life by remote work could've increased procrastination (Yao et al., 2023). Alee, Sufyan and Ameer (2023) analyzed earlier research on this topic from 2021 to 2022 and reported that the transition to remote work has mostly resulted in devastation of workers at work and in their personal lives. Indeed, in both mental well-being aspects of employees and productivity aspects of organizations, research working with data from the early COVID era frequently suggests the disadvantages of remote work.

While this trend persists in recent studies, there is also evidence that workers who were more used to this style of work had a better experience (Donati et al., 2021). That is to say that the suggested negative effects might be the natural response to a new environment instead of the inferiority of the method. Other research also suggests that skillfulness is required in controlling organizations when the constituents are working remotely (Hafermalz et al.,

2020). Moreover, some suggest that less physical connectivity actually leads to efficiency since it decreases unnecessary connections (Saad & Wigert, 2021). This implies that despite the prevalence of negative evidence suggesting the disadvantages of remote work, this new form of work can still be a great solution to some of the problems in workplaces.

Moreover, multiple examples from the past suggest that the negative reception of remote work is merely the product of resistance to change itself. There are many examples for this, such as the advent of books, digital notetaking, or email. When email first emerged, it was faced with skepticism, such as it was unreliable, would cause an overload of mail(spamming), and would cause start diminishing of formal writing culture. However, as time passed, the skepticism had disappeared as everyone else was using it, becoming an integral part of many parts of our society. Especially, the possibility email opens for spamming was solved by various software. Similarly, the initial complaints against remote work taking diminished collaboration, weakened company culture, potential productivity losses as their primary reasons, could be interpreted as the reaction to the stress from having to adapt to a new environment. It could be also expected that advancement in software design for remote work will also solve problems that seemed to be the property of remote work itself. In likeliness to how email revolutionized communication, remote work could enable much more than it costs, and further research is needed on this subject.

In conclusion, the impact of COVID-19 on the workplace environment was tremendous and has left a big scratch on the mental health of many workers. However, not only does the research on structural analysis of communication styles before/after remote work only exist on a elementary analysis of text communication focused on diminished communication, but it was also not possible to find research on the impact of COVID-19 and remote work on equity & diversity except for a house chore distribution survey conducted to a small group of people. Existing research was mainly focused on relatively non-costly subjects like surveys based on pre-determined factors and mental health impact of remote work. Further research is needed on this especially important trend that is expected to become a new norm for working. Moreover, researchers working in equity & diversity should be encouraged to work in this subject as this is the most equal interaction style possible with no physical being at all. As earlier research has suggested (Ozimek, 2020), further research on this topic should focus on more structural analysis of interactions and ideal systems that should be developed to ensure maximum efficacy.

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