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THE IMPACT OF REMOTE WORK ON EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH: A STUDY OF SELECTED EMPLOYEES OF UNITED BANK FOR AFRICA IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of remote work on the mental health of employees at the United Bank for Africa (UBA) branch in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria. As remote work becomes an increasingly adopted practice within Nigerian banking institutions, its effects on employees' mental well-being warrant closer examination. Using a qualitative research approach and quota sampling, 10 UBA employees were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal a dual impact of remote work on mental health, with both positive and negative experiences reported. Increased flexibility and autonomy were highlighted as primary benefits, contributing positively to employee satisfaction. Conversely, challenges such as social isolation, burnout, overworking, and limited access to essential resources were significant concerns impacting mental health adversely. The study recommends a balanced approach to remote work policies, emphasizing enhanced flexibility, fostering social connections to reduce isolation, proactive measures to address burnout, and improved access to necessary resources. Tailoring support mechanisms based on employee grade levels is also advised to address varying needs and optimize remote work benefits. This study contributes to the growing discourse on remote work by providing insights into its complex implications for employee mental health in the Nigerian banking sector.

Key words: Remote Work, Employee Mental Health, Banking Sector, Flexibility, Social Isolation, Burnout, JEL Code: M54, I31, J81

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant impacts on both global economy and physical health. Beyond these effects, studies highlight the pandemic's psychological toll (Stasiuk-Piekarska, 2021). Government measures such as lockdowns, social distancing, remote work transitions, and irregular schedules disrupted work-life balance, leading to heightened anxiety and other negative psychological outcomes. A survey across 46 countries found that half of those experiencing decreased well-being attributed it primarily to declining mental health (Campbell & Gavett, 2021). However, effective human resource strategies implemented by certain companies during the pandemic helped enhance employees' mental well-being (İlhan, 2021).

In Nigeria, the adoption of remote work practices has been influenced by both global trends and local economic realities. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many Nigerian businesses to quickly adopt remote work strategies, revealing both challenges and opportunities unique to the Nigerian context. Factors such as infrastructure limitations, socio-economic disparities, and cultural norms play crucial roles in shaping how remote work is perceived and experienced by Nigerian employees.

The transition to remote work in Nigeria presents a compelling case for studying its impact on employee mental health. While remote work offers advantages such as increased autonomy and flexibility, it also introduces new stressors such as blurred work-life boundaries, feelings of isolation, and difficulties in maintaining productivity amidst domestic responsibilities. These stressors can significantly affect psychological well-being, potentially leading to burnout, anxiety, and reduced job satisfaction among Nigerian employees.

The rapid evolution of work dynamics in the 21st century has been marked by a transformative shift towards remote work, a trend that has been amplified by technological advancements and the exigencies of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Once considered a privilege or an arrangement for specific roles, remote work has now become a standard practice across various sectors, including the banking industry, which has historically been characterized by a rigid, in-office work structure. The implications of this transition extend beyond operational efficiencies and cost savings; they permeate the very fabric of employee well-being, particularly mental health. As the banking sector adapts to this new normal, it is essential to investigate the nuanced relationship between remote work and mental health outcomes for employees within this high-pressure environment.

The banking industry, with its inherent demands for precision, accountability, and customer service, presents a unique context for examining the mental health implications of remote work. Traditionally, banking professionals have operated in structured environments that emphasize face-to-face interactions, teamwork, and a clear separation between work and personal life. However, the shift to remote work has blurred these boundaries, leading to a complex interplay of benefits and challenges that can significantly affect mental health. While remote work offers

flexibility, reduced commuting stress, and the potential for a better work-life balance, it also raises concerns about isolation, burnout, and the erosion of workplace culture, all of which can adversely impact mental well-being.

Research indicates that mental health issues are prevalent in high-stress professions, including banking. According to a study by the American Psychological Association (2021), employees in the financial sector report higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to other industries, largely due to the pressures of performance metrics, client expectations, and economic fluctuations. As remote work becomes more entrenched, it is crucial to understand how these existing stressors are compounded or alleviated in a virtual environment. For instance, while remote work can provide a reprieve from the daily grind of commuting and office politics, it may also lead to feelings of disconnection and loneliness, particularly for those who thrive on social interactions and collaborative efforts.

The mental health implications of remote work in the banking sector are further complicated by the industry's cultural norms, which often prioritize productivity and results over employee well-being. The stigma surrounding mental health issues can deter employees from seeking help or disclosing their struggles, exacerbating feelings of isolation and stress. Additionally, the transition to remote work has necessitated the rapid adoption of digital tools and technologies, which, while enhancing efficiency, can also contribute to feelings of overwhelm and anxiety as employees navigate new systems and workflows without the immediate support of colleagues. The United Bank for Africa, a banking brand offers an ideal experimental scenario owing to the vast investment of the brand in promoting remote work technology.

Given these complexities, this thesis aims to explore the multifaceted relationship between remote work and mental health within the banking industry. By synthesizing existing literature, conducting empirical research, and analyzing case studies, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how remote work influences mental health outcomes for banking professionals. It will investigate both the positive aspects, such as increased flexibility and autonomy, and the negative consequences, including social isolation and burnout. Furthermore, the research will explore the specific challenges faced by different segments of the banking workforce, including front-line employees, middle management, and senior executives, each of whom may experience the impacts of remote work differently.

The findings of this research will not only contribute to the growing body of knowledge on remote work and mental health but will also have practical implications for banking institutions seeking to support their employees in this new landscape. As organizations within the banking sector navigate the transition to hybrid work models, it is imperative to prioritize mental health initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by remote workers. This includes developing policies that foster connection and collaboration, implementing mental health resources and support systems, and cultivating a workplace culture that values well-being alongside productivity.

Conclusively, as the banking industry continues to adapt to the realities of remote work, understanding the interplay between this work model and mental health is more critical than ever. This paper endeavors to illuminate the complexities of this relationship, providing a foundation for future research and practical applications that can enhance the mental health and overall well-being of banking professionals. Through a thorough exploration of existing literature, empirical analysis, and actionable recommendations, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how banking institutions can effectively support their employees in navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by remote work, ultimately encouraging a healthier, more resilient workforce in an ever-evolving industry.

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications

2.0.1   Remote Work

According to Patil, Janani, Kumar, Shobitha, and Nagaprakash (2024), remote work, a concept that has significantly evolved due to technological advancements, refers to the practice of employees performing their tasks outside of the conventional office setting. This shift is facilitated by various digital tools and platforms that enable seamless communication, collaboration, and access to work resources from virtually any location. The ability to work remotely offers employees the flexibility to manage their professional responsibilities without the constraints of a fixed office space, leading to increased job satisfaction and work-life balance. Moreover, it allows organizations to tap into a global talent pool, reduce overhead costs, and enhance productivity. As a result, remote work has become a viable and often preferred option for both employers and employees, transforming the traditional notions of where and how work can be accomplished (Patil, Janani, Kumar, Shobitha, & Nagaprakash, 2024).

2.0.2 Mental Health

Mental health is regarded as the ability to function effectively and adapt to one's environment, which significantly contributes to a higher quality of life (Sadry et al., 2022). This perspective highlights the importance of mental health in everyday functioning and overall well-being. Farahbakhsh et al. (2007) further elaborate on this by stating that mental health involves the capacity to cope with life's pressures, thereby reducing anxiety and avoiding symptoms of disability. This suggests that the ability to manage stress and life's challenges is a crucial component of mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) offers a comprehensive definition, describing mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals can effectively handle life's stresses, recognize and realize their abilities, engage in productive learning and work, and make meaningful contributions to their community. This definition underscores the multifaceted nature of mental health, emphasizing not only the absence of mental illness but also the presence of positive attributes such as resilience, personal growth, and social contribution. Together, these perspectives provide a holistic understanding of mental

health, highlighting its essential role in enhancing individuals' lives and their ability to function within society.

2.1 Literature Review

Research has consistently shown that remote work offers several benefits that can positively impact employee well-being. One of the most notable advantages is the increase in job satisfaction. Employees who work remotely often report higher levels of satisfaction due to the flexibility and autonomy that remote work provides (Pooja & Madhukar, 2024). This flexibility allows employees to better manage their personal and professional lives, leading to improved work-life balance. The ability to avoid long commutes also contributes to higher job satisfaction, as employees can save time and reduce the stress associated with daily travel.

Additionally, remote work has been linked to improvements in job performance. The autonomy that comes with remote work allows employees to work at their own pace and in environments that they find most conducive to productivity. This can lead to increased efficiency and better performance outcomes (Pooja & Madhukar, 2024). Furthermore, remote work can reduce absenteeism, as employees who are unwell but still capable of working can do so from home, thus maintaining productivity while managing their health.

Remote work has emerged as a pivotal area of study, particularly in understanding its profound implications for employee mental health. Several scholarly articles provide foundational insights into this evolving field, underscoring the novelty of approaches that focus on remote work's impact. For instance, Knolle et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive survey across the UK and Germany, examining the mental health effects during two waves of data collection. Their findings highlighted significant differences attributed to the country-specific responses to remote work, particularly noting higher levels of psychological distress among UK respondents compared to their German counterparts. Similarly, Daimer et al. (2021), utilizing the same dataset but in a subsequent wave, contrasted the immediate and cumulative effects of remote work. They discovered that while initial adaptation to remote work conditions showed improved mental health indicators in the second wave, there was also an increase in schizotypal traits over time, suggesting a cumulative psychological toll from prolonged remote work scenarios. These studies emphasize the dynamic nature of remote work's impact on mental well-being, pointing to both short-term adjustments and long-term challenges.

Further exploring the ramifications of remote work, Oksanen et al. (2021) researched into the role of social media communication during remote work settings. They found that increased reliance on social media for work-related interactions during remote work phases correlated with heightened stress levels among employees. Interestingly, employees accustomed to using social media before the remote work era showed better resilience to these stressors, indicating varying coping mechanisms among different employee groups. Yüceol et al. (2021) contributed to this discourse by examining the effects of remote work on work-life balance and mental well-being among Generation Y academicians. Their study highlighted a generally positive impact on mental

well-being, suggesting that remote work, when effectively managed, could enhance work-life harmony. Conversely, Pieh et al. (2020) focused on broader impacts of isolation and remote work during the pandemic, revealing increased depression levels and decreased quality of life, particularly affecting young people, women, and those with lower incomes.

Phadnis et al. (2021) addressed specific challenges faced by employees in Indian organizations during remote work transitions, such as increased workload, feelings of loneliness, and disconnection from the real world. Their findings underscored the multifaceted nature of remote work's impact on mental health, highlighting concerns that resonate globally. Despite these insights, the literature gap persists in fully comprehending the intricate relationship between remote work formats and employee mental well-being. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by exploring how the transition to remote work has affected employees' mental health and well-being, examining nuances in adaptation, coping strategies, and organizational responses. By synthesizing these diverse perspectives, this review seeks to contribute valuable insights into optimizing remote work environments to foster healthier work conditions and support employee mental well-being effectively.

2.1.0 Conceptual Framework
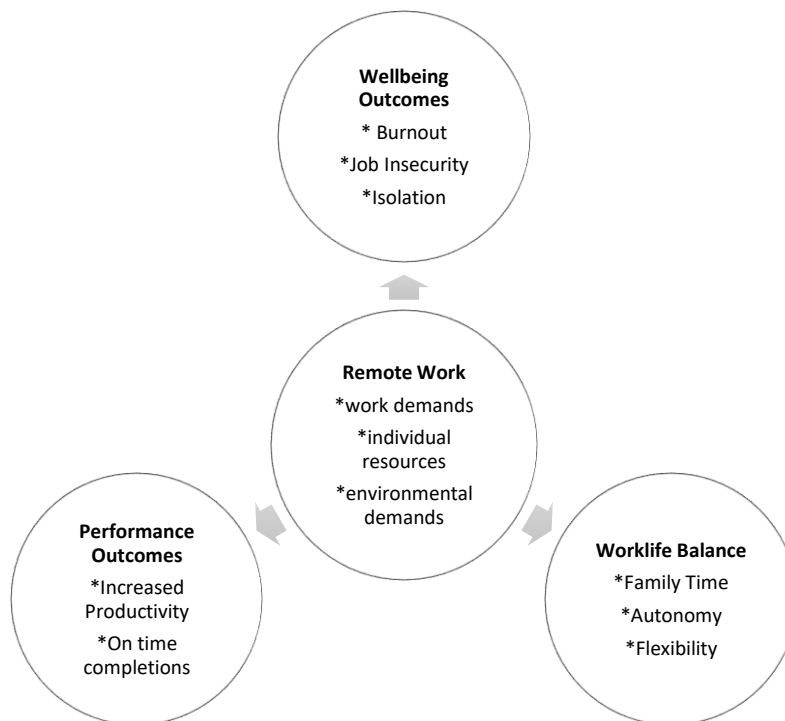
Source: Researcher's Conceptualization (2024)

Below is a textual description of the conceptual framework:

Conceptual Framework:

1. **Remote Work Measures:**
   - **Work Demands:** Tasks, responsibilities, and pressures associated with remote work.
   - **Individual Resources:** Personal skills, coping mechanisms, and support systems.
   - **Environmental Demands:** Home office setup, technological resources, and family responsibilities.
2. **Employee Mental Health Measures:**
   - **Well-being Outcomes:** Emotional and psychological state, stress levels, and overall mental health.
   - **Work-life Balance:** The equilibrium between professional and personal life.
   - **Performance Outcomes:** Productivity, job satisfaction, and career progression.

Connections:

1) **Work Demands → Well-being Outcomes:** High work demands can lead to increased stress and decreased mental health.
2) **Individual Resources → Well-being Outcomes:** Strong individual resources can mitigate the negative impact of work demands on mental health.
3) **Environmental Demands → Well-being Outcomes:** Challenging environmental demands can contribute to stress and affect well-being.
4) **Work Demands → Work-life Balance:** High work demands can disrupt work-life balance.
5) **Individual Resources → Work-life Balance:** Effective coping mechanisms and support can help maintain a healthy work-life balance.
6) **Environmental Demands → Work-life Balance:** Supportive environmental conditions can facilitate a better work-life balance.
7) **Work Demands → Performance Outcomes:** High work demands can either enhance performance (through challenge) or hinder it (through overload).
8) **Individual Resources → Performance Outcomes:** Adequate resources can improve job performance and satisfaction.
9) **Environmental Demands → Performance Outcomes:** A conducive remote work environment can enhance productivity and performance.

This framework helps to visualize how different aspects of remote work influence various dimensions of employee mental health, highlighting the complex interplay between work demands, individual resources, environmental demands, and the resulting well-being, work-life balance, and performance outcomes.

2.1.1 Theoretical Framework for Studying Remote Work and Employee Mental Health

The shift towards remote work, accelerated by technological advancements and the global COVID-19 pandemic, has significant implications for employee mental health. This is particularly relevant in academic institutions such as Kogi State University. To understand how remote work influences employee mental health, this theoretical framework integrates various established theories, examining their assumptions, criticisms, and applications in the context of this study.

Theories Supporting the Framework

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) posits that job demands, which include physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects requiring sustained effort, can lead to stress and burnout. Conversely, job resources, which help achieve work goals, reduce job demands, or stimulate personal growth, can enhance well-being and performance. The model assumes that an imbalance between demands and resources negatively impacts mental health. In remote work, demands might include increased workload and blurred work-life boundaries, while resources might include autonomy and flexibility. Criticisms of the JD-R model point to its broad categorization of demands and resources, which may not capture the nuanced experiences of remote workers. In the context of Kogi State University, the JD-R model can identify specific job demands and resources associated with remote work and their effects on academic staff's mental health.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) suggests that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect their resources, such as time, energy, and social support. Stress occurs when these resources are threatened or lost. The theory assumes that remote work can either deplete resources, through increased isolation, or conserve them, through reduced commuting time. Criticisms of the COR theory highlights its focus on resource loss rather than gain processes, which can be equally important. This theory can be applied to assess how remote work affects resource dynamics among Kogi State University staff, such as the impact of social isolation on mental health.

Person-Environment Fit Theory (Edwards, 1996) posits that stress and well-being are influenced by the degree of fit between an individual and their environment. A good fit leads to positive outcomes, while a poor fit leads to stress and negative outcomes. The theory assumes that individual needs and environmental supplies must align for optimal well-being. In remote work, this could relate to the alignment between an employee's home environment and their work requirements. However, the theory can be seen as overly simplistic, as it may not account for the

complexity of individual differences and changing environments. At Kogi State University, this theory can evaluate how well remote work environments match the needs of academic staff and how this fit affects their mental health.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that relationships are formed based on the reciprocal exchange of resources, where positive exchanges lead to increased trust and commitment. The theory assumes that social interactions and support networks are crucial for well-being. In remote work, the lack of face-to-face interactions can affect these exchanges. Criticisms of the theory point out that it does not account for non-reciprocal relationships and is too focused on rational, economic exchanges. This theory can study the impact of reduced social interactions in remote work on the mental health of Kogi State University staff.

Assumptions of the Framework

The framework assumes that remote work is a double-edged sword, providing flexibility and autonomy but potentially leading to increased isolation and work-life boundary issues. It emphasizes the importance of job resources, both personal and organizational, in mitigating the negative effects of job demands in remote work settings. The degree of alignment between employees' needs and their remote work environment significantly impacts their mental health, and social interactions and support networks play a vital role in maintaining mental health in remote work contexts.

Criticisms of the Framework

The theories may not capture the diverse experiences of remote workers across different industries and job roles, potentially leading to overgeneralization. Their static nature may not fully account for the dynamic and evolving nature of remote work environments. Additionally, the framework may not adequately address individual differences in coping mechanisms and personal resilience.

Application to the Current Study

In the context of the United Bank for Africa, this theoretical framework provides a basis for examining how remote work affects the mental health of banking Staffs. By applying the JD-R model, the study can identify specific job demands, such as increased workload, and resources, such as autonomy, associated with remote work. The COR theory can help explore how remote work influences resource dynamics, such as the impact of social isolation on staff well-being. Person-Environment Fit Theory can assess the alignment between home work environments and

job requirements, while Social Exchange Theory can investigate the effects of reduced social interactions on mental health.

3.0 Methodology

The research design utilized a qualitative approach to gather in-depth insights into remote work and its impact on employee mental health. By adopting a phenomenological perspective, the study explored the lived experiences of employees and their thoughts on how remote work affects their mental health. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to express their views freely and provided rich data.

Quota sampling was employed to select participants, focusing mainly on all Staffs to ensure objective perspectives. A sample size aiming for saturation was achieved by randomly selecting 10 employees, all of whom provided informed consent. The data gathered was analyzed using thematic analysis, which identified recurring themes and patterns within the interview data. Transcripts were systematically coded to extract key themes related to remote work, employee motivation, and mental health.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the ethical integrity of the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants after providing clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and their rights to voluntary participation. Confidentiality was maintained by keeping all collected data anonymous and safeguarding personal information. The dignity, privacy, and autonomy of employees were respected throughout the research process, with any concerns or complaints promptly addressed. Measures were taken to minimize potential harm or discomfort, with participation being entirely voluntary and allowing participants to withdraw at any time without penalty. The research was conducted with transparency, honesty, and integrity, with all conflicts of interest disclosed and results reported accurately and objectively. The research proposal was reviewed and approved by the relevant ethics committee to ensure compliance with ethical standards and guidelines. By adhering to these ethical considerations, the study upheld the highest ethical standards and promoted the well-being and rights of the employees involved.

4.0 Data Analysis

Table 4.0: Demographic Table of Respondents

Respmdents ID	Gender	Age	Job Level
1	Male	25-34	Entry Level
2	Female	25-34	Mid Level
3	Male	35-40	Mid Level
4	Female	25-34	Entry Level
5	Male	41-45	Senior Level

6	Female	41-45	Senior Level
7	Male	25-34	Mid Level
8	Female	35-40	Mid Level
9	Male	41-45	Senior Level
10	Female	25-34	Entry Level

Source: Field Report (2024)

4.1 Thermatic Analysis

This thematic analysis explores the effects of remote work on the mental health of 10 selected UBA staff members, focusing on themes related to increased flexibility and autonomy, as well as challenges such as social isolation and burnout. The study includes responses from 3 entry-level employees, 4 mid-level employees, and 3 senior-level employees, with an equal gender distribution of 5 males and 5 females.

Themes Identified

1. Increased Flexibility and Autonomy

Description: Many employees reported that remote work allowed them to manage their schedules more effectively, leading to a better work-life balance.

Responses:

Entry-Level Employees: 2 males, 1 female

"I can start my day earlier and finish on time, which helps me spend more time with my family."

Mid-Level Employees: 3 females, 1 male

"The flexibility to work from home has allowed me to attend to personal matters without compromising my work."

Senior-Level Employees: 1 male, 2 females

"I appreciate the autonomy to make decisions about my work environment, which has increased my productivity."

Total Respondents: 10 (5 males, 5 females)

2. Social Isolation

Description: A significant number of employees expressed feelings of loneliness and disconnection from their colleagues due to the lack of face-to-face interaction.

Responses:

Entry-Level Employees: 1 male, 2 females

"I miss the casual conversations we used to have in the office."

Mid-Level Employees: 2 males, 2 females

"Working remotely can feel isolating; I often feel like I'm missing out on team dynamics."

Senior-Level Employees: 1 male, 2 females

"While I enjoy working from home, I do feel a lack of camaraderie with my team."

Total Respondents: 9 (4 males, 5 females)

3. Burnout and Overworking

Description: Several employees reported experiencing burnout due to the blurred lines between work and personal life, leading to longer working hours.

Responses:

Entry-Level Employees: 1 male, 2 females

"I find it hard to switch off after work hours; I often end up working late."

Mid-Level Employees: 3 males, 1 female

"The pressure to be constantly available has led to increased stress and fatigue."

Senior-Level Employees: 2 males, 1 female

"I have noticed that I am working more hours than I did in the office, which is concerning."

Total Respondents: 10 (6 males, 4 females)

4. Access to Resources and Support

Description: Employees highlighted the importance of having access to necessary tools and support while working remotely.

Responses:

Entry-Level Employees: 2 males, 1 female

"Sometimes I struggle with technical issues, and I miss having IT support nearby."

Mid-Level Employees: 2 females, 2 males

"Having the right tools at home is crucial; I wish the company provided more resources."

Senior-Level Employees: 1 male, 2 females

"I believe that better support systems could alleviate some of the stress associated with remote work."

Total Respondents: 9 (5 males, 4 females)

The thematic analysis reveals the relationship between remote work and employee mental health among UBA staff. While increased flexibility and autonomy are significant benefits, challenges such as social isolation, burnout, and limited access to resources also emerge as critical issues.

Summary of Respondents by Theme

Increased Flexibility and Autonomy: 10 respondents (5 males, 5 females)

Social Isolation: 9 respondents (4 males, 5 females)

Burnout and Overworking: 10 respondents (6 males, 4 females)

Access to Resources and Support: 9 respondents (5 males, 4 females)

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The thematic analysis of the effects of remote work on employee mental health among UBA staff members reveals a nuanced understanding of how remote work arrangements impact employees differently based on their roles and gender. The findings climax both the benefits of increased flexibility and autonomy, as well as the challenges of social isolation, burnout, and access to resources. This discussion will lay emphasis into the implications of these findings, focusing on gender interpretations and grade-level differences.

The theme of increased flexibility and autonomy emerged strongly across all employee levels and genders. Employees appreciated the ability to manage their schedules, which allowed for a better work-life balance. This finding aligns with existing literature that suggests flexible work arrangements can enhance job satisfaction and overall well-being.

Interestingly, female employees, particularly in mid-level positions, emphasized the importance of flexibility to attend to personal matters, which may reflect traditional gender roles in caregiving and household responsibilities. This suggests that while remote work provides autonomy, it may also reinforce existing societal expectations regarding gender roles. Male employees, on the other hand, focused more on productivity gains, indicating a potential difference in how flexibility is perceived and utilized based on gender.

Accordingly, Senior-level employees expressed a greater appreciation for autonomy in decision-making regarding their work environment, suggesting that as employees advance in their careers, they may feel more empowered to shape their work conditions. This could indicate that organizations might consider providing more autonomy and flexibility to mid-level and entry-level employees to enhance job satisfaction and productivity.

The theme of social isolation was prevalent, particularly among mid-level and senior-level employees. Many expressed feelings of loneliness and a lack of camaraderie, which can adversely affect mental health. This finding is consistent with research indicating that remote work can lead to feelings of disconnection, especially in environments where teamwork and collaboration are essential.

Furthermore, Female employees reported feelings of isolation more frequently than their male counterparts. This could be due to the generally more collaborative nature of female employees, who may value social interactions more highly. The absence of informal office interactions may disproportionately affect women, who often engage in relationship-building as a critical aspect of their work. Male employees, while also acknowledging feelings of isolation, seemed to focus more on the impact on team dynamics rather than personal feelings of loneliness.

Also, Entry-level employees reported missing casual conversations, which are crucial for building workplace relationships. As they are often new to the organization, the lack of social interaction could hinder their integration into the workplace culture. Mid-level employees, who may have more established relationships, expressed concerns about missing out on team dynamics, while

senior-level employees noted a lack of camaraderie. This suggests that social isolation may affect employees differently based on their career stage, highlighting the need for organizations to implement strategies to foster connection among all levels.

Note also that Burnout and overworking emerged as significant concerns, with employees noting the challenges of maintaining boundaries between work and personal life. The analysis revealed that both males and females reported similar experiences of burnout; however, the reasons for this burnout varied.

It is worthy of note to show that Male employees, particularly at the mid-level, expressed feeling pressured to be constantly available, which may reflect societal expectations of men as primary breadwinners. This pressure could lead to overworking, as they strive to meet these expectations. Female employees, while also experiencing burnout, highlighted the struggle to switch off from work, suggesting that their burnout may be exacerbated by balancing both professional and personal responsibilities.

Entry-level employees reported difficulties in switching off after work hours, which could hinder their ability to recharge and ultimately affect their performance. Mid-level employees, facing increased responsibilities, felt the pressure to be constantly available, leading to higher stress levels. Senior-level employees noted a concerning increase in working hours, indicating that as employees move up the career ladder, the risk of burnout may intensify. This highlights the need for organizations to establish clear boundaries and encourage employees to prioritize their mental health, regardless of their grade level.

The theme of access to resources and support was particularly salient among employees, with many expressing a need for better tools and support systems while working remotely. This finding points to the importance of organizational support in mitigating the challenges of remote work.

Both male and female employees expressed similar concerns regarding the lack of technical support, indicating that this issue transcends gender. However, female employees in mid-level positions expressed a desire for more resources, perhaps reflecting their need for additional support in navigating their roles effectively.

Entry-level employees reported struggling with technical issues due to a lack of immediate support, which could hinder their performance and confidence. Mid-level employees expressed a need for better tools to enhance productivity, while senior-level employees recognized that improved support systems could alleviate stress. This suggests that organizations should consider providing comprehensive resources and support tailored to employees' needs at different career stages.

4.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the thematic analysis regarding the effects of remote work on employee mental health among UBA staff members, several recommendations are made to enhance

employee well-being, foster connection, and improve productivity. These recommendations are tailored to address the identified themes of flexibility and autonomy, social isolation, burnout, and access to resources and support.

1. Enhance Flexibility and Autonomy

Organizations should formalize flexible work arrangements that allow employees to tailor their schedules according to personal and professional needs. This could include options for staggered work hours, compressed work weeks, or hybrid work models that combine remote and in-office work. Organizations are also advised to conduct regular surveys to gather employee feedback on their preferences regarding work arrangements. Develop a framework that allows managers to grant autonomy in how employees structure their workdays, ensuring that all employees, regardless of their grade level, have the opportunity to benefit from increased flexibility.

2. Foster Social Connection

The Organization should implement initiatives aimed at enhancing social interaction and team cohesion among remote workers. This can include virtual team-building activities, regular check-ins, and informal social gatherings via video conferencing.

They should also schedule bi-weekly or monthly virtual coffee breaks or team lunches where employees can engage in casual conversations. The organization should encourage the use of collaboration tools that facilitate informal interactions, such as chat platforms or social channels dedicated to non-work-related discussions.

3. Address Burnout and Overworking

The Organization should develop and promote policies that encourage work-life balance and discourage overworking. This could involve setting clear expectations around availability and communication after work hours, as well as promoting mental health days.

They should also establish guidelines that outline appropriate working hours and encourage employees to take regular breaks while also provide training for managers to recognize signs of burnout and equip them with strategies to support their teams in maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

4. Improve Access to Resources and Support

Organization should assess and enhance the resources available to employees working remotely. This includes providing access to necessary technology, tools, and IT support to ensure employees can perform their tasks effectively. Organizations should also conduct a needs assessment to identify gaps in resources and support for remote employees while also investing in technology that facilitates remote work, such as collaboration software, cloud storage solutions, and cybersecurity measures. Additionally, they should also establish a dedicated IT support line to assist employees with technical issues promptly.

5. Tailor Support Based on Employee Grade Levels

Organizations should recognize that different employee levels may require distinct types of support and resources. They should thereforeTailor initiatives to address the specific needs of entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level employees.

In addition, they should create mentorship programs that pair entry-level employees with more experienced colleagues to foster professional development and integration into the workplace culture. For mid-level employees, they should provide leadership training focused on managing remote teams effectively. For senior-level employees, offer strategic resources to help them navigate the complexities of remote leadership.

Conclusion

The recommendations provided aim to create a supportive and productive remote work environment that enhances employee mental health and well-being. By addressing the key themes identified in the analysis, UBA can foster a culture that values flexibility, social connection, work-life balance, and adequate support for all employees. Implementing these strategies will not only improve employee satisfaction and productivity but also contribute to a more resilient and engaged workforce in the long term.

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