

Working from Home–Unassailable Reality Elastic-Kinetic Agile (UREKA) Model Beyond COVID-Pandemic Contingency Solution

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Abstract

This is an exploratory research, more experiential insight and hindsight analysis is to provide a platform in lieu the paucity or lack of further information or/and data on post-COVID combined or hybrid of work from home and work in office (WFH and WIO respectively). Thus, the main purpose is directed at instigating readers to think about aspects of the contention-focus of this article to research on eventually. The hybrid model WFH+WIO of post-COVID era since mid-year 2022 opens a fertile area of research new-norm model that harps on the elements of “UREKA” – an acronym that asserts the unassailable reality elastic-kinetic agile model proposal to review key features of WFH values and to propagate new values of WIO a la post COVID era. The objectives of this paper are to determine the core features of WFH values that remain unassailable (i.e. unquestionable in terms of benefits to be derived therefrom), to identify-explain attributes of key characteristics in WIO values, and subsequently propose a solution-driven practical contractual agreement for better employer-employee relations, in the name of improving human resources or/and talent management.

Keywords: UREKA, Hybrid Model, Work in Office, Work from Home, Post Covid Era

Introduction

The concept and practice of Working from Home (WFH) had become a norm of gainfully employed people in businesses and industries during the duration of mandatory country-wide lockdowns with prohibitive penalties for non-compliance or mischievous digressions wittingly or unwittingly. An almost three-year long of working from home would have established a kind of habitual routine to space oneself between the call of work-related assignments and the normal duties to the family and home. The initial confinement and restricted to impulsive or one-the-spot makeshift adjustments to every aspect of life in the house/home, with the disruptive often surreptitious intrusion of family-member presence in the WFH routine, have taken its toll in more than one way. There have been reports of increasing stress-related behaviours that are even suicidal and life-threatening as one duly attempts to balance work-

life demands at home minus the familiar milieu of subordinate and peer workers, compounded by whatever were previously only family or household demands before COVID-19 lockdowns. These home-bound and announced stress-disruptive experiences raise an ominous cloud of doubts too on the efficacy of working from home, particularly in terms of organizational management assessment of performance evaluation of employee result-output submitted, in the reality of overall economic stagnancy of almost global business standstill. Few, if any, follow-up research has been conducted since the safety-caution reopening of countries and regions has been gradually lifted.

Rationale for the Study

This is an exploratory research, more experiential insight and hindsight analysis is to provide a platform in lieu the paucity or lack of further information or/and data on post-COVID combined or hybrid of work from home and work in office (WFH and WIO respectively). Thus, the main purpose is directed at instigating readers to think about aspects of the contention-focus of this article to research on eventually. The hybrid model WFH+WIO of post-COVID era since mid-year 2022 opens a fertile area of research new-norm model that harps on the elements of “UREKA” – an acronym that asserts the unassailable reality elastic-kinetic agile model proposal to review key features of WFH values and to propagate new values of WIO a la post COVID era. The objectives of this paper are to determine the core features of WFH values that remain unassailable (i.e. unquestionable in terms of benefits to be derived therefrom), to identify-explain attributes of key characteristics in WIO values, and subsequently propose a solution-driven practical contractual agreement for better employer-employee relations, in the name of improving human resources or/and talent management.

Definitions of Key Concepts

Work from Home: WFH is new normal proposition or work *operandi*, by necessity and compulsion of COVID-19 circumstances, that allows gainfully employed people or employees to conduct and fulfil their contractual obligations with their respective organizations or companies at home. The mandatory working office hours, however, remain unarticulated but assumed to be the same as working in office although the flexi-time arrangement at home is entrusted to the trust and approach of the employees themselves. Moreover, depending on the organizations or companies, the expectation is for their employees to follow its standard operating procedures (SOP) insofar as work production assignments are concerned for on-time delivery and performance evaluation at specified period.

Unassailable: The concept of unassailable refers to the letter of the law especially in terms of the employment contract, with prevailing job-specific requirements, delivery schedule as planned and appropriate compensatory rewards per contract agreement. This aspect remains unassailable (i.e. the same as pre COVID-19 pandemic era) but unfortunately, as the duration of the pandemic continues to extend itself, this contractual aspect gradually gave way to questionable practices by some employers to reduce salary and benefits which otherwise would not have happened in pre-COVID times. What was then unassailable becomes assailable so much so that it threatens employee welfare conditions with accompanying negative consequences for employee-family relations, even employer-employee morale interactions. Moreover, the issue of ‘threat-to-sue’ – an ugly reminder of tension-filled WFH scenario – is far-fetch and remote, given the restricted lockdown non-compliance penalties as overcast.

Elastic: This concept suggests an element of flexible with the WFH parameters. With self-imposed monitoring of work-requirement targets the 8-hour mandatory rule certainly gave way to self-derived flexi-hours at home. In the case of the employees on morning-evening-graveyard shifts, the grave situation requires closed factories and other industrial complexes to put their workers in cold storage literally, if they are not sacked or displaced with legal implications for employer-employee relations in arbitration bodies or/and the courts. The point here is reminiscent of the elasticity concept in economic theories of supply-demand and production-market consequences of shortfalls (imperfections) and completeness (perfections), each with negative and positive results-outcomes respectively. However, WFH does provide a flexibility that WIO does not; and in the context of the latter which promulgates the importance and adjustment of work-life balance among employees during pre-COVID times, the flexi-hours of work-life at home seems to have a better positive effect on family relations although “too much of a good thing is always too bad in the long run” when stressful relations threaten to breakup families as well.

Kinetic: This refers to an energy form that initiates, develops and sustains an active subject or an object in motion. In this instance, kinetic in WFH implies a transferable energy or a motivational force that props up and moves enthusiasm to complete committed work at home. If, WIO generates such kinetic motivation among colleagues and work-group peers during office hours (with gossips and other social exchanges in between), the WFH too is capable of tapping the kinetic support of the family members (especially in cases where the spouse or/and the child or children are pillars of family in engaging work-life balance achievements).

Agile: It is an iterative approach in self-management and confidence-building asset to express and deliver values of assigned tasks or job-specific function to the organization or employer faster than usual. In WIO, agility performance is visible and measurable almost immediately, but in WFH, agile contributions are almost virtual and cumulative performance assessment only follows lately. This by no means belittle the dedicated performance-focus employee who WFH but it laments his or her contributions are recognition-delayed or lost-in-transition as well, that is, his or her agile task-duty completion given the more-or-less full or sandwiched working hours remain unacknowledged, in contrast to supervised assessment at WIO.

Contingency Solution: This suggest that, given the premise of COVID-19 pandemic influences, WFH requires exploring and defining a set of contingency solutions to resolve issues arising therefrom, that is, transiting from a habitual routine of going to office or workplace on time (battling the woes of traffic congestion including contending with quarrelsome or pugnacious work or office colleagues (even belligerent bosses!) and reforming habits to fit into a normative work-family pattern at WFH. And, in the context of adopting a hybrid model of WFH-WIO, a set contingent solutions must be in place to abet s smooth crossover from home to office again or viva voce.

Review of Literature

In ‘Working from Home: Making the New Normal Work for You’ Mangia (2020) share a detailed strategy on how to turn working from home into a powerful career choice as follows: (a) Build the future of work in any kind of space, that is, develop ideas for home office that fit anywhere; (b) Create personalized time management routines designed specifically for

remote productivity, impact, and balance; (c) Deal with Zoom fatigue, burnout, and isolation, via untapped new strategies for connection and team-building, with remote team; and (d) Discover how to deliver powerful virtual presentations and build career impact online, with expert communication strategies designed for an online world. Summarily, WFH doesn't need a location because one can move career forward from anywhere, directed at securing one's work-life balance goal anywhere everywhere.

According to Neely (2021), in *Remote Work Revolution*, the unprecedented impact of Covid-19 had accelerated the transition to remote working, requiring the wholesale migration of nearly entire companies to virtual work in just weeks, leaving managers and employees scrambling to adjust. Companies therefore are forced to rapidly advance their digital footprint, using cloud, storage, cybersecurity, and device tools to accommodate their new remote workforce. In this regard, the benefits of remote working gained include non-existent commute times, lower operational costs, and a larger pool of global job applicants. Plans are ready for companies to incorporate permanently remote days or give employees the option to work from home full-time. However, the disadvantages include employees feeling lost, isolated, out of sync, and out of sight, leaving them wondering how to build trust, maintain connections without in-person interactions. Moreover, managers also are keen to know how to lead virtually to keep their teams motivated, including the digital tools needed to keep employees productive.

Findings and Analysis

Invariably, as the term 'UREKA' suggests, adopting a hybrid model for WFH-WIO proposition requires several adjustments particularly in the perception, attitudes, behavior and action of those involved. From the perspective of the employer, the expectations are no more or less than the contracted agreement of employment during pandemic era, with little or change made to remuneration and benefit terms and conditions of employment. In addition, compliance with SOP procedures may require some modifications but essentially they remain valid insofar as the productive capacity and productive processes are concerned to achieve target results and outcomes. From the employee perspective, the first concern is about job security and then career progression thereof, with or without additional remunerative rewards. He or she would be wise to act discretionarily within prevailing norms and without proverbially "rocking the boat". This is needed as organizations and employers are just recovering their stalemate or stalled businesses during the pandemic, with the current constricted restraints of present COVID-viruses hybrids still overcast in many countries. And from the holistic business perspective, active and promising business transactions are a pale shadow of its past glory during globalization of franchises and dynamic inflow of foreign direct investments (FDIs). In essence, the staggering recovery of international and globalized businesses is far from previous health-wealth productivity.

From the perspective of the people, the lay people of consumption of good and service, they are beginning to experience the impact of supply-demand impact that raises prices and questionable ethical practices of exploitation even though the reality shows a dire need to reinvent food and maintain food security. The latter will have a disastrous effect on consumption patterns, lifestyles, and livelihood of mainly the common populace. While the wasteful consumption of luxury goods and services may be curtailed to a certain extent, it does not mean that they are dismissed altogether. On the contrary, it has been reported in several developing countries that the rich have become richer and the poor poorer, with life-threatening consequences for the latter. Therefore, from the perspective of the producers

(and supply chain networks), imperfect and perfect competitions must be addressed at the same time to redress shortfall and completeness situations respectively of goods and services, especially with new goods and services and its derivatives along the production-distribution-retail chains of enterprises.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Regardless of the perspectives mentioned so far, the responsibility lies in the hands of the government of the day and its policy initiatives; the latter if outdated must be revised and if not relevant be abolished. Relatedly, any governance-compliance policies must be duly addressed and reviewed too. For example, in the case of Malaysia, the issue of minimum pays for labor remains a resilient contention that dominates news headlines, with application delays due to legal-need for employment Acts or regulatory rules and conditions unsettled. Moreover, in this regard, the issue of foreign labor recruitment and compensation-benefit remains a hot publicity item. Granted that governments tend to move cautiously but sometimes they need to seize the proverbial bull by the horn; otherwise pending public issues of controversies can wreck their country peace and prosperity. Therefore, all said and done, each and every one with vested interests in businesses or the common citizenry with public interest must come together as “one voice” like during the COVID-19 pandemic era to overcome the prevailing disruptive consequences, and now to resolve and support innovative creations of value-adding and value-creating enterprises to develop, grow and prosper the economic parameters of new industries and productive capacities to enhance all aspects of market performances in order to establish fresh avenues of resources and capture sources of investment-revenue incomes.

All this can be achieved, given both the hybrid model of WIO-WRH or as individual models of operation to allow a growing voice of balancing work-life commitments whose benefits can accrue to organizations, employers, employees, governments, the country and globally with a comprehensive strategic planning and implementation framework premised on “UREKA” variables that vary from context to context and from purpose to purpose as in, for example, the burning topic of food security and food security management.

In *Work from Home while You Roam: The Ultimate Work from Home Guide* (2022), Hall contends that there is an increasing number of individuals who understand the advantages of working from home, such as the adaptability of timetable, less pressure, no issue of driving this way and that to the workplace, and having the option to set aside more cash. Also, there is an increasing number of organizations that allow their representatives or workers to work from home, with positively more chances to bring in cash working from home and the chance or opportunity to become an entrepreneur working for oneself.

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