Nepali IT Employees' Perception towards Telecommuting: A Qualitative Study

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*Abstract***:** *This research tries to explore the perception of Nepali IT employees towards telecommuting in a qualitative method. It tries to dig into the opportunities that the Nepali context offers for the adoption of telecommuting concept and identify the potential pitfalls. The individual interview method was chosen for the data collection. The semi-structured guideline was followed. Convenience sampling was used. Four employees working in IT companies inside the Kathmandu Valley were interviewed. 100 % of the participants reported that this concept is advantageous in the case of Nepal. Flexibility, freedom in doing work, increases in productivity, work-life balance, and cost-effectiveness were found to be perceived advantages of telecommuting in the context of Nepal. Worsening of communication and lack of infrastructure, disturbances in the house are perceived disadvantages. Furthermore, the inclusion of wide diversity of workforce is the prominent opportunity of telecommuting while the implementation part is the main hurdle as it is a new concept in the case of Nepal.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Some jobs require constant human interaction, others can be performed with minimal face-to-face human interaction and physical presence. Government jobs for example need constant human interaction. Whereas, core jobs in the IT sector do not require employees to be present all the time in the company. Part or whole of their work can be performed from the home itself. This way of performing the job in other places than in regular institutions is known as telecommuting. This concept is not only popular in developed nations, it has been practiced widely in developing nations like Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand too [1]. This concept has been wide-spreading as work nature has been shifting from a traditional centralized location to a much more flexible arrangement [2].

Telecommuting has been a normal procedure in IT companies in developed countries [3]. Much of the studies in this sector are focused on developed countries. The concept of working

anytime from anywhere has not been explored to that extent in the context of developing nations [4]. Nothing much can be found about the study in this sector in underdeveloped countries like Nepal. In Nepal, this concept is still new. Right now, In Nepal, employees' perception of telecommuting is anecdotal and it lacks scholarly research. There is no research in the case of Nepal that studies the potential opportunities and challenges of this concept in the Nepali context. To fulfill this research gap in the existing literature, this research tries to extract the perception of Nepali employees towards telecommuting. To lay the groundwork for the upcoming research, this research tries to understand and explore employee perception towards telecommuting and associated opportunities and challenges from a qualitative perspective because when research is in the early stage, taking the qualitative route seems more appropriate as it provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher believes that this research will help academicians and practitioners to better understand the telecommuting phenomenon in depth. Moreover, it will provide the prospect to corporate managers about the perception of Nepali employees towards telecommuting which in due course of time will help them to formulate better work strategies to enhance their employees' productivity.

This study is strictly focused on the IT employees in Nepal. In the case of Nepal, it is still insignificant to do research in this area, except in the IT sector because it is difficult to imagine telecommuting in other sectors in Nepal due to job characteristics and available infrastructure. This research tries to explore the perception of Nepali IT employees towards telecommuting. It tries to dig into the opportunities that the Nepali context offers for the adoption of telecommuting and identify the potential pitfalls. In doing so it tries to answer the following research questions:
1. How do Nepali employees in the IT sector perceive telecommuting?
2. What are the potential advantages and disadvantages related to telecommuting in the Nepali context?

2. METHODOLOGY

The individual interview method was chosen for the data collection. By individual interview method, the concept of telecommuting could be understood from participants' perspectives. In a focus group, participants might be influenced by others' ideas and may not open up as in one to one interview.

The semi-structured guideline was followed while conducting the interview, as the researcher needed to study the perception of respondents so applying a totally unstructured or structured way was not feasible. Using a structured way, a researcher might not dig out the perception from the respondents' mind and in an unstructured way, the respondent might deviate from the topic of interest so a semi-structured way was used so that the interview remains within the boundary of research and also open their mind.

Written consent was taken from the participants. The entire interview was recorded with their permission. They were assured that their responses will be kept confidential and deleted and not be used in this research and anywhere else if they do not want it to be used during the interview or even after the interview was over. They were informed where and who to contact if they have some issue regarding the interview after the interview was over. During the

interview, the researcher tried to follow up immediately insisting to talk more about it when the interviewee was disclosing the area of great interest. The researcher tried to remain open to the new and unforeseen phenomenon and refrained from imposing ready-made frameworks. The interview setting was chosen considering the potential interruptions. The purpose of the interview was explained to the participants beforehand. Terms of confidentiality were addressed and interviewees were informed about the length of the interview. They were informed how to contact after the interview. Open-ended and neutral questions were asked.

Due to the limitation of time, convenience sampling was used. Four employees working in IT companies inside the Kathmandu Valley were chosen. They were chosen based on the researcher's knowledge that they have acquaintance with the telecommuting concept and they are in the potential position in their organization to implement this concept.

The interview was conducted in the nearby coffee shop of the workplace of respondents. While interviewing in their workplace, there might be various interruptions and respondents might lose their focus and flow of the interview. The whole of the interview was transcribed and coded. The top-down approach of data analysis was used, as this research is more of theory testing rather than theory building.

3. RESULTS

100 % of the participants stated that the concept of telecommuting is advantageous in the case of Nepal. After coding and analyzing, the researcher could find out that participants believe that telecommuting will provide them with the flexibility they need so that they will be able to perform their work efficiently which in turn will increase their productivity. This finding is in alignment with the study made by various researchers. If practiced well, telecommuting will increase the efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction of employees [5]. Due to fewer interruptions, the employee can attain a higher level of work concentration, which will increase their performance [6]. Employees who practice telecommuting are much more productive, satisfied with their jobs, and can manage their schedules efficiently [7]. Furthermore, they pointed out that telecommuting would be beneficial as it will save their time and money and protect them from the stress of traveling to their workplace arising through various geographical, political, social, and economic factors. This is very much relevant to the current situation in Nepal. This finding is also in alignment with the finding of [8], an employee who practices telecommuting will reduce transportation costs and saves time and energy incur in commuting to the workstation. Participants also pointed out that due to the advancement in technology, telecommuting is the need of the hour.

However, in the context of Nepal, participants also pointed out that telecommuting will worsen the communication with their team members which is in alignment with the argument of [9], due to the lack of face-to-face communication, regular supervision, and constant interaction, those who are practicing telecommuting might feel isolated and maybe frustrated which might result in job dissatisfaction rather than job satisfaction. This is further supported by [10] arguing that due to telecommuting, there will be lesser communication and interaction among the team members, which may result in lesser teamwork in an organization, which in turn may affect the overall productivity of the organization. Furthermore, respondents point out that it is too technology-dependent and not suitable for Nepali working culture and Nepali

society as there might be much more disturbance by family members and relatives at home. Future research can be done on telecommuting regarding the Nepali working culture.

Regarding the opportunity of telecommuting in Nepal, one interesting thing that came out during the interview is, telecommuting might be one of the ways of utilizing a potential workforce that left Nepal due to opportunities in a foreign land. Through telecommuting, Nepal can still utilize their talent, although they are in foreign countries. This also might be the potential research in the future. And regarding the challenge, telecommuting is a completely new paradigm in Nepal, organization should train their employees to feel comfortable with this practice. They should devise a way to monitor and track the process and guide accordingly. Before implementation, a pilot test should be carried out to see the effect. Before putting it into practice, its effectiveness should be examined, as it has never been implemented in the case of Nepal.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Every work cannot be performed from home. It depends upon the nature of work. The concept of telecommuting is spread throughout the world; however, no practice is seen in Nepal. There is a lack of scholarly backup about telecommuting in the case of Nepal. There is no research showing the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and challenges of telecommuting in the context of Nepal. This study shows that employees in the IT sector of Nepal perceive telecommuting as a potential alternative to the traditional working culture. It can inculcate various workforces of Nepal inside and outside the country. They see this as the potential working culture due to technological advancement but are also skeptical about its applicability in the context of the Nepali working environment. Since this very new concept in the case of Nepal, its implementation is a big challenge, and organizations will have to devise new and innovative mechanisms to implement it successfully. Future studies regarding the relationship between telecommuting and the working culture of Nepal can be carried out if the future.

Limitation

Due to the limitation of time, a small sample convenient sampling was used and this research is focused on the IT employees only so the result may not be generalizable to whole firms in Nepal. The result may be different if data was taken from a large population with a different sampling method. This research was carried out in a section of Nepal i.e. in Kathmandu. Therefore, the result cannot be generalized to the whole of Nepal, as only a limited percentage of the country has been blessed with the development of ICT.

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6. ANNEX

Response from participants

Key Informant (KI)	What do you know about workplace flexibility?	When (time) and where (place) can you best perform your work?	Can your work be performed outside your organization?
KI 1	Flexible working time. Very important in the current scenario.	It depends upon the nature of work. We need to use licensed software. These works cannot be performed from home. Works done in freeware can be performed from anywhere.	Yes. Partially.

KI 2	The flexibility of working from any location is called workplace flexibility. It revolves around the principle of delivering work wherever you are.	It is subjective. It depends on what type of work is being performed.	Some work can be done outside of the organization but some can't.
KI 3	-Abandoning the notion of 9-5 workday -Allowing employees to work anytime from the location of their choice (coming to office, working from home or coffee shop or co-working space, etc.)	-Nighttime where there is very less distraction from the surrounding -From my room at home	Yes. 100%. I just need to have a laptop and internet.
KI 4	It is the concept of working from anywhere without restriction in the particular time frame	There is no exact time and place for me. It depends on different factors.	Yes, but not all the work I do. Around half.

Key Informant (KI)	How do you perceive the concept of telecommuting?	What do you think are the potential advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting in your context?
KI 1	Good. This is required in the present condition of technological advancement. Employees can work efficiently if they are given flexibility in working time and place.	Advantages: -Freedom and flexibility to employees -Work-life balance -In the current scenario employees need to take leave for petty things too, if this concept is implemented, it will be helpful in such cases -Some employees may not like the environment of the company and may perform better if let perform alone. Disadvantages: -It will create problems in team communication. -It might not fit well in Nepali working culture.

		-In the case of companies where they have to use licensed products, this might not work.
KI 2	It is a great idea but there should be a proper checking and balancing mechanism.	Motivation, flexibility can be advantages of this whereas misuse of flexibility in the workplace can happen.
KI 3	-Availability of high-speed Internet, wireless devices, good web applications, and online collaborative tools have made easier for the interaction between employees and supervisors/managers. I think more and more companies will be moving towards telecommuting in the future. -Telecommunicating can be an ideal style of working for jobs related to Information Technology. For example, a software developer is a good candidate for teleworking.	Advantages: - Beneficial to both employees and organizations. - The wider pool of talent - Time & cost saving for employees and organization - Diversity in employees - Work-life balance. - Increases productivity Disadvantages: - Lack of face-to-face interaction - Lack of control on tracking - There can be distractions at home - Security issue

KI 4	In a good way. Working from home is fun I suppose.	Advantages: -It saves commuting time. -It might bring positive thoughts about the work in the mind of employees, which might increase productivity. Disadvantages: -Employees might be busy with personal stuff rather than official work.

Key Informant (KI)	What do you think are the opportunities and challenges of implementing telecommuting in Nepal?
KI 1	Opportunities: -Inclusion of various workforces from different parts of the country and outside the country as well. Challenges: -No work seriousness, no dedication
KI 2	Opportunities: - Can get employees from different locations who can't relocate - Motivation for work Challenges - Check and balance mechanism
KI 3	Opportunities: - Nepal has a huge problem of brain drain. Telecommuting can reduce this issue. - Even if we focus on local level migration, most of the people in Nepal desire to move to the capital (Kathmandu valley) for work opportunities. If companies allow telecommuting then people can stay in their hometown and work from there. Challenges: - The Internet, which is the main factor to facilitate telecommuting, is not so stable in Nepal. It is getting better within Kathmandu valley (Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur districts) and also in some other metropolitan cities like Biratnagar and Pokhara, but besides them, the reachability and stability of the internet is not so good. - Many people live in a joint family in Nepal. People live a more social life in Nepal as compared to western countries. This scenario is also a telecommuting challenge in the context of Nepal. People come often to

	visit your place. This might have come to visit other people in the house. But this can cause distractions while working at home.
KI 4	Opportunities: -Time constraints might help to reduce the stress in employees resulting in high productivity. -Extra free time for employees. Challenges: -Technical resources like low internet speed in home, work setup at home -No proper supervision, family interruption, distraction