

*The Changing Nature of Work and the Workplace in the Post-Pandemic Era and its Impact  
on Business Sustainability: An Analytical Review*

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**Abstract**

The world has witnessed and experienced COVID-19 as one of the biggest traumas and nightmares at the end of the last decade of the twenty-first century. While human beings are accustomed to the 'new normal' way of living in the post-COVID era, business enterprises are in the transition phase and may need a long time to reach normalcy and attain their full potential. This research has made an attempt to get an insight into the changing nature of work, workplace strategies, and the impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability of business in the post-pandemic era. The study emphasises the changing nature of work in the post-COVID era by elucidating factors such as flexibility, remote working, hybrid models of working, virtual platforms, digital transformation, and cyber security. Similarly, workplace strategies are expounded through changing workplace practises in the post-pandemic era, the connectivity of people through digitization of communication, growing concern for the well-being of employees, and a paradigm shift in learning and development. The study also examines the impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability of business in the post-pandemic era and suggests business sustainability initiatives such as the importance of corporate social responsibility, training on sustainable practises, following compliance and regulations, and community development activities to engage the employees and bring them together with a sense of drive, passion, and purpose to sustain business. The study concludes by highlighting the role of HR in implementing employee-friendly HR policies to give more thrust to the health, safety, and well-being of employees and to initiate sustainable activities to achieve organisational objectives and attain business sustainability.

Key words: COVID-19, Post-pandemic, Digitization, Flexibility, Remote working, Learning and Development, Sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility, Community Development.

JEL Classification: L23

## **Introduction**

Industrialization in India has undergone metamorphosis in many phases, starting post-independence. The new economic policy, which came into existence during the last decade of the twentieth century (1991), has given a boost to industrial automation and the modernization of the workplace, which has created an arena for global business. The advancements in communication and information technology at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century have given a further boost to reinventing the workplace. While the unprecedented changes and rapid advancement in technology have necessitated the business environment to be more competitive to create a niche in the global market environment, the COVID-19 pandemic, which tumbled as a storm at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, has disrupted mankind and shattered businesses across the planet. Following the crisis and repetitive lockdowns, the post-pandemic period began as the "new normal," which became the way of living and doing business operations across the globe to combat the pandemic. This research study aims to get an insight into the changes or modifications that have changed the nature of work, the way people work, and the strategies adopted in the new workplace in the post-pandemic era and analyse their impact on the sustainability of business.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The rapid advancement in technology and the digitization of the market environment, particularly in the second decade of the twenty-first century, have led business enterprises to be more competitive than ever before. Furthermore, the diversity of the workforce engaged and the need for operational flexibility have necessitated organisations to redesign the nature of work and reorient workplace strategies to motivate, retain, and engage talents with commitments to achieve organisational goals. The unprecedented havoc caused by the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the living conditions of people, including business operations and the nature of work, which led to a post-pandemic transformation known as the "new normal." This study is distinct

from other research studies that have attempted to analyse how the nature of work has changed and what workplace strategies have been adopted in the post-pandemic era to sustain business and gain a competitive advantage.

### **Objectives**

- To have an overview of the stumbling and rampant effects of COVID-19 pandemic.
- To get an insight into the changing nature of work in the post-pandemic era.
- To analyse the workplace strategies adopted in the post-pandemic era.
- To examine the impact of the post-pandemic on the sustainability of business.
- To make recommendations for business sustainability in the post-pandemic era.

### **Methodology**

This research study is based on the secondary data available through online sources from various published research studies and journals on the changing nature of work and the workplace. During this review process, strategies adopted to sustain business have been considered in line with the subject of the study.

### **The COVID-19 Pandemic: An Overview**

COVID-19, or coronavirus illness, which first erupted in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, wreaked unprecedented havoc for human beings and disrupted businesses in all sectors around the world. The unforeseen and dreadful outbreak of COVID-19, which shattered across the globe, severely affected the economy and all sectors of business and triggered panic and agony for humanity with uncertainty, terrible effects on the health and safety of human beings, loss of life of family members, feeling of being disconnected from social life, loss of employment, and depressing living conditions that caused dismay and unanticipated agony in every walk of life. Further, the outbreak of the coronavirus resulted in the loss of employment for tens of millions of workers and the closure of various sectoral businesses. The government mandates, followed by lockdown restrictions to combat the coronavirus, caused a slowdown of the economy, a major decline, and a loss of revenue in the hospitality and service sectors. Furthermore, a large number of people struggled for daily food and earnings for survival, disrupting social activities. These

aside, lots of small and medium-scale organisations, particularly in the service sector, were closed as there was no other choice.

While some of the sectors, like IT/ITEs, already had the option of remote working or working from home, it was enforced as a compulsory measure for their employees, whereas in other sectors, the government imposed the concept of the "new normal" (social distancing, sanitising, wearing masks) that forced the people and employees working to strictly adhere to precautionary norms in order to operate in a post-pandemic world. Until a vaccine was identified and herd immunity was achieved, the terrible virus posed a serious threat. Following the vaccination and a decline in the number of COVID-19 cases after a year of despair and struggle, the post-pandemic has transitioned human lives and the business environment into a new way of living and doing business.

#### Perspectives on the Changing Nature of Work in the Post-Pandemic Era

Though globalisation and rapid technological advancements forced businesses to reengineer their systems and processes and redefine the work environment in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the widespread turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath in particular have reshaped the nature of work and people's living conditions like never before. The study brings out some of the prominent changes in the living conditions and nature of work, such as flexibility; remote working; and hybrid models of working; increasing use of virtual platforms; digital transformation; and cyber security as a measure to protect organisational information systems and data.

#### **Flexibility:**

While the manufacturing and logistics sectors were the worst hit by the outrage of the pandemic, its brutality severely ruined people's living conditions and led to the loss of lives. However, the enforcement of government regulations to prevent the spread of viruses and lockdown restrictions has dramatically changed the way the world works and has necessitated people to become accustomed to living a simple life with less stress and more flexibility, as well as saving time commuting to work, or, needless to say, in every walk of life. Further, the pandemic has taught humans to live in harmony and cooperation, which has also led to a reduction in pollution, changes in fitness routines, and better hygiene conditions.

After a long gap of more than a year in combating the COVID pandemic, businesses in manufacturing, hospitality, and other service sectors resumed working, keeping in mind the health and safety of their employees by taking precautionary measures, and have made phenomenal changes in their employee working conditions and work environments as well to protect their employees from the deadly coronavirus. However, IT and ITES continued to offer the option of remote working or working from home for their employees (Sreeradha Basu, 2022).

### **Remote Working:**

While the practise of remote working and flexibility was an option available for the employees working in sectors like IT and ITES prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the facility was utilised by them based on their needs once a week or so. When the employees were compelled to work from home on a continuous basis in these sectors throughout the year during the pandemic, the office space was relocated to their home, converting a portion of their home for remote working. Further, even when the employees were given the option of flexibility to come to the office or as appropriate in the post-pandemic situation by their employers, they preferred to continue working from home as a matter of comfort and to save enormous time and money on commuting (Darja Smite, et.al, 2023)

### **Hybrid Model of Working:**

Consequent to the reshaping nature of work in the post-pandemic period, some companies, particularly in the IT/ITES sector (a few examples include Infosys, Microsoft, Google, Facebook, etc.), have worked out the option of a hybrid model of working by extending freedom of choice and flexibility to the employees and allowing them to attend the office or on-site on any day of the week of their choice, which tends to influence more effectiveness and a collaborative approach in their output (Valentina Romei, 2022).

### **Virtual Platforms:**

Though virtual platforms were in use prior to COVID, the post-pandemic period has witnessed substantial momentum and visibility among a majority of individuals, companies, and many more. While some of the video conferencing platforms like Zoom, Team, Google, and

WhatsApp have become more significant and extensive in use by most companies and educational and training institutions, they have become increasingly important not only in the working environment, but these platforms have also become an important source of virtual face-to-face connectivity with families and friends (Willem Standaert, 2021).

### **Digital Transformation:**

Indeed, digitalization of business operations and processes is not new, but it gained sharp focus and accelerated digital transformation subsequent to the outbreak of COVID-19 with rapid technological advancements such as cloud computing and innovations in Artificial Intelligence (AI), block chain technology, natural language processing (NLP), the Internet of Things (IoT), and so on, which led to a massive shift in consumerism and e-commerce. Furthermore, digitization also led to a greater emphasis in companies on gaining a competitive advantage and fostering digital collaboration, which facilitated meeting the needs of today's younger workforce as well. Furthermore, it is also evident that digitization has garnered several advantages, such as improvements in efficiency, productivity, additional security, and agility for companies and customers as well. However, digital transformation has bridged the gap caused by lockdown restrictions and social distancing, further contributing to COVID-19, which otherwise would have brought business and livelihood to a grinding halt (Hank Prybylski, 2022).

### **Cyber Security:**

With the increasing need for employees to work remotely due to the widespread COVID pandemic and the lockdown restrictions followed by social distancing, businesses have been forced to protect their data, systems, and networks from digital attacks using cyber security applications. Further, in today's business environment of the new normal and with the extensive use of cloud computing, it is a mandate for organisations to manage their information systems and assets, which are dispersed widely in multiple locations. Hence, cyber security as an effective strategy plays a crucial role in securing an organisation's information systems and compliance plans, which are linked to overall business operations. It is achieved through coordinated efforts across all information systems that focus on confidentiality to protect

against unauthorised disclosure of information; integrity to protect against unauthorised modifications such as change, addition, or deletion; and robustness to ensure that the information and data are available when required by authorised users to make decisions in the organisation (Mike Azzara, 2022).

### **Workplace Strategies in the Post-Pandemic Era: A Perspective**

The coronavirus pandemic has transformed mankind into a new way of living and doing business as well. While the nature of work has been redefined and changed dramatically in the post-pandemic era, the role of HR is essential and acts as a nodal function of the organisation in balancing and maintaining harmonious employer-employee relations and engaging the employees through workplace strategies to improve productivity and achieve sustainable business. Some of the HR strategies that require realignment with the changing business processes in the post-pandemic era are explained here below.

#### **Workplace practices:**

By and large, organisations endured a big challenge in the revival of business operations in the post-pandemic era, besides making their employees resume work to embrace the new reality. While the health and safety of the employees is the main concern, preventive measures were given priority by adhering to the regulations in the manufacturing and service sectors, whereas the employees in the IT/ITES sector continued to work remotely based on their nature of work. Hence, it was deemed necessary to redefine workplace HR practises for organisations in order to cope with the changing working environment and to facilitate remote working employees, including those working with flexible work schedules, to enable them to work with a commitment to improve productivity.

For instance, initiation of a robust attendance monitoring system to manage remote working employees; collaboration with departments to make necessary changes in policies and structures to align with the new way of working; redefining job descriptions to accommodate employees who have the option of working on flexible work schedules; refining the employee

performance management and compensation system to reflect the changing nature of work; effective implementation of tools such as digital assistants or chatbots to share the latest information on company policies; updates on health and safety and workplace guidelines; and implementing AI in the recruitment process for new hires and the like.

### **Connecting People through Digital Communication**

COVID-19 augmented digital transformation, which resulted in a paradigm shift in the way people communicate, whether as individuals, organisations, communities, or as cultures at large. Communication is the most important aspect and lifeline of an organisation, as all business transactions solely depend on the way people get connected and communicate their ideas. Indeed, this is a fact, with the use of digital media as a means of communication being given more thrust to have connectivity with the remote working employees during the pre- and post-pandemic eras by the organisational leaders with the utmost concern for their health and safety and to extend moral support besides monitoring performance. Studies reveal that digital or virtual media of communication are more effective than direct or face-to-face communication, i.e., to communicate a point in a digital medium, one has to be clearer and more concise to express the message quickly and directly. Furthermore, studies show that post-COVID has led organisations to develop consistency and transparency in communicating digitally with employees about company policies, information about processes, and technological updates, and to create more opportunities for open discussion and employee feedback for improvement, which in turn will increase credibility and trust and improve the organisational culture (Evan DeFilippis, et.al. 2022).

### **Employee Wellbeing in the Post-COVID Era**

The COVID pandemic has not only reshaped the nature of business and the way people live but also transformed the needs associated with their wellbeing. As a result, organisations have realised that they must manage the needs developed by the concept of the "new normal" in the post-COVID era to ensure the wellbeing of their employees and the organisation as a whole. As

a step in this direction, organisations focused on remote working and flexible work arrangements to ensure the health and safety of their employees.

It is opined from research studies that employee wellbeing has a direct impact on organisational wellbeing. That is to say, when employees' wellbeing is ignored, organisations experience stress, anxiety, burnout, demotivation, job dissatisfaction, poor work performance and relations, etc. among their employees, which results in a decline in individual productivity and organisational performance. Interestingly, some of the HR initiatives, such as community programmes, reward schemes, cultural events, occupational health programmes, etc., could benefit and leverage employee wellbeing, which in turn improves employee engagement and productivity.

In one of the research studies conducted by GRiD (a UK-based human-centric research and policy initiative organisation), it is opined that, particularly in the post-COVID era, it is necessary for organisations to initiate a holistic approach to employee wellbeing that includes the fulfilment of the overall physical, psychological, emotional, financial, and social needs of their employees, which are inextricably linked to employee productivity and organisational performance (Sharon Ng, 2023).

### **Learning and Development in Post-Pandemic**

With the changing times and advancement in technology, the concept of training has transitioned to Learning and Development (L&D). While training is just an activity and part of learning and development (J. Reynolds), it aims to teach the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that could be used in a specific job. Learning and development encompass a set of activities designed by an organisation to develop and improve the skills and competencies of its employees to achieve business objectives. In other words, L&D includes building more inclusive and dynamic teams with a focus on improving learner experiences as well as learning experiences. Further, while the global pandemic has dramatically changed the business environment, continuous upgradation of workplace skills and learning is one of the areas heavily impacted as a result of COVID-19. Hence, particularly in the post-pandemic era, organisations anticipated the need to continuously reinforce upskilling and reskilling through e-learning, virtual platforms, and a greater emphasis on social learning methods. Further, with the changing business environment and the context of

remote working, L&D is considered to be more strategic and operations-focused (Katherine Quiroz, 2023).

### **Business Sustainability and its Impact in the Post-Pandemic Era**

In today's competitive and globalised era, sustainability is gaining momentum and becoming more significant in an organisational context, which has a greater impact on stakeholders' ability to gain a competitive advantage. It is perceived from a much wider angle and goes beyond profitability, encompassing the economic, ecological, and social environment of an organisation. In other words, the effectiveness of an organisation is determined based on its sustainability, which comprises the financial strength of its products or services, the conscious and cautious utilisation of organisational resources, environmental-sensitive practises, equity, and the well-being of employees. It is evident from the research studies that sustainable initiatives enable the organisation to enhance brand image and marketability, increase productivity and reduce costs, attract and retain talents, create opportunity for investors and growth in shareholders' value, increase business ability in compliance with regulations, make effective and efficient use of energy, maximise utilisation of resources, and reduce waste. Further, research studies explicate that sustainability initiatives and employee engagement can harness a culture that has a positive impact on the organisation, employees, and the communities they live in. While it is rather difficult to make a majority of employees fully engaged, sustainability initiatives such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), training on sustainable practises, compliance and regulations, community development, etc., stimulate those employees who are not engaged or actively disengaged to come together with a sense of drive, passion, and purpose to unleash their potential to make a difference. Further, such initiatives also inspire the employees to associate themselves to drive the organisation towards performance improvement and in achieving the business goals, and they also enable them to resonate in their domestic front to make better choices in serving the family, community, and environment as well.

But the unprecedented COVID-19 global pandemic has not only disrupted human health and living conditions but also had a severe impact on the survival and sustainability of a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises, besides the voluntary or compulsory closure of many businesses. As a result of COVID-19, global economic conditions were adversely affected,

particularly in the IT/ITES sector, making business sustainability extremely challenging. However, some manufacturing organisations strive to manage through process automation and use agile manufacturing techniques. Further, in such an uncertain situation, organisations are still in the transition phase and finding it difficult to make informed decisions and generate enough profit, even when employees are given the option to continue working remotely and by providing more flexibility through a hybrid model of managing the business (Sanket Ray, 2022).

### **Implications for Business Sustainability in the Post-Pandemic Era**

Indeed, the survival, success, and sustainability of an organisation are contingent on the competence, ability, and skill level of its workforce. More importantly, how the employees are nurtured and inspired by the leaders steers the organisation forward. It is imperative that, in the post-pandemic era, it becomes necessary for organisations to redefine the work culture and reformulate communication strategies, which in turn facilitate managerial efforts to improve employee morale and productivity in order to reinforce and restore business sustainability.

To reap the benefits of sustainability, organisations need to establish a culture of openness and fairness with their employees to foster collaboration, creativity, and transparency in their processes and operations. Further, involving and educating employees across the levels in sustainable initiatives such as corporate social responsibility, training on sustainable practises, compliance and regulations, community development, etc., facilitates the employees' sense of belonging and results in improved organisational productivity.

Further, the organisation's leadership plays an important role in rebuilding trust and connectivity with the employees, which inspires them to work with a cohesive approach and enables them to share their concerns and opinions during the crisis, which also facilitates unanimity at the workplace and aids in sustaining business.

Precisely, organisations should maintain the enduring practise of enhancing the skill level of employees working remotely through online and virtual learning and development initiatives to leverage innovative and creative approaches to improve individual competency and organisational efficiency. It is implied that organisations responding to employee well-being and

assistance programmes not only aid in sustainability but also foster employee ownership, enhance productivity, and result in competitive advantage.

### **Discussion and Findings**

The global pandemic has resulted in trauma and quashed as a big storm in the living conditions of people and has severely impacted businesses as well. While the employees have become accustomed to the 'new normal' in the post-pandemic era, it certainly takes a long time to regain business potential. However, some of the lessons taught during the pandemic have given a new way of life to the people and a new direction to the business. The following are the findings of the study:

The nature of work and the workplace have undergone dramatic changes, both from the employee's and employer's perspectives. Flexibility at work has become an essential need of today's workforce more than pay and benefits. While remote working was the option available for employees in most industries during the COVID period, the majority of employees even today continue the option of remote working as they feel comfortable planning their work schedules and demonstrating their commitment to tasks and deliverables. Besides being stress-free from commuting, they also enjoy work-life balance. In addition, the employees also have the benefit of the hybrid model of working given by the employers, particularly in the IT and ITES industries in the post-pandemic era. As physical presence and social distancing were hindrances during the COVID period, virtual platforms have significantly gained importance even in the post-COVID period, particularly for business meetings, HR training and development programmes, hiring processes, etc. Further, the rapid technological advancements, specifically in areas such as cloud computing and increasing applications of AI and digital transformation, have made business processes much easier than ever before. Nevertheless, the application of cyber security is becoming significantly important in view of the remote working of employees dispersed widely in multiple locations and to secure organisational informational systems and protect against unauthorised disclosure or modifications without prior approval of authorised decisions in the organisation.

While the nature of work witnessed pragmatic changes in the post-pandemic era, organisations were required to give a thrust to redefining HR practises to cope with the changing needs of the

employees, which ranged from attendance monitoring systems to job roles to refining performance management and compensation systems. Further, digital media as a means of communication has acquired a predominant place in connecting employees in organisational communication and HR systems and processes. Furthermore, organisations anticipated the need to continuously reinforce upskilling and reskilling through e-learning and virtual platforms and instilled greater emphasis on social learning methods. The post-COVID era also necessitated organisations to initiate a holistic approach to employee wellbeing in fulfilment of their physical, psychological, emotional, financial, and social needs, which supplements employee morale building and influences productivity improvement and organisational performance.

Indeed, business enterprises suffered severely from COVID-19 and had a huge impact on operations and profitability, and it certainly takes a long time to regain normalcy. In the post-COVID era, though employees are given the option to continue working remotely and organisations are providing more flexibility through a hybrid model of working, they are still in a transition phase and finding it difficult to make informed decisions and generate enough profit. Hence, sustainability initiatives such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), training on sustainable practises, compliance and regulations, community development, etc., can stimulate those employees who are not engaged or actively disengaged to come together with a sense of drive, passion, and purpose to unleash their potential to make a difference.

## **Conclusion**

This study has made an attempt to accentuate the changes and causes affected by COVID-19 in the nature of work and the workplace. As today's workforce is more sensitive and sensible to changes, work-life balance is perceived as a priority, and flexibility and remote working are considered appropriate options besides digitization in the changing nature of work. As fully engaged and competent employees are the backbone of an organisation, transformational leadership makes the difference in visualising and driving the employees to achieve the desired goals. HR plays a vital role in implementing employee-friendly HR policies, giving more thrust to the health, safety, and well-being of employees, and initiating sustainable drives such as CSR, training on sustainable practises, and community development, which may facilitate the

employees in fully engaging to achieve organisational objectives and attain business sustainability.

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