

Influence of Remote Work Pattern on the Well-Being of Academic Staff in Selected Ghanaian Private Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

The advent of information technology has created new work paradigms; where work related activities can be conducted beyond the confines of the physical work environment and the nine-to-five office hours which has been the conventional working pattern. Employing the remote style of work stemmed from the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and it's hinged on empowering employees to interact and work across diverse geographical areas, boundaries and scope. Based on this notion, this study investigated remote working and well-being among academic staff of selected private tertiary institutions in Ghana. The self-efficacy and boundary theory underpinned the study. Data were collected using the multistage sampling technique. Result from the study provided that remote work affects employees' well-being with ($R^2= 0.931<0.05$) and remote work also have a significant association and connection with employee work-life balance with ($r=0.874$, $p\text{-value}<0.05$). The study concluded that remote working system a veritable tool for improving and enhancing employees' career development and their mental health, thus, if employees' job is to be enriched; primacy should be accorded more on the efficiency and core offerings of the remote working system. Therefore, management of these institutions should establish flexible work arrangements by adjusting time stipulated; to improve work efficiency.

Keywords: Employee wellbeing, Remote Work, Telecommuting, Virtual Work, Work-life Balance.

JEL Classification: [M54, M12, O32]

Introduction

There is a change globally in the mode and pattern of work and this can be attributed to the novel Covid-19 virus which ravaged the universe between 2019-2020. The most profound contribution of this Virus is the changing nature of the work system especially from the Ghanaian scenario. Working remotely has been in existence in the developed nations but such practice is alien to the African continent especially Nigeria whose ideology is premised on the 8am-5pm work framework but due to the advent of the Covid-19 created an alteration in the system of work in Nigeria where many organisations sought for alternative process and finally resorted to the remote pattern or work (Akinlabi et al, 2021). From the above statement, it is no gainsaying that the concept of remote work is here to stay as an alternative work system (Popovici, 2020); and this is as a result of the outcome of technological advancements (Melluso et al., 2020); whose intended motive is to establish more time for employees to stay close to their loved ones even while carrying

out organisational activities (Snouwaert, 2020). From the above, it can be adjudged that remote working has come to replace traditionally office based pattern of work and created a slide shift in the business world. According to Ardill, (2020) organisations like Fujitsu, Dropbox and Siemens have made significant attempt in closing majority of their offices on a permanent basis.

Remote work implies the process and practice of working outside the environment of the traditional office space and this can either be for a temporary period or permanently using a location that is spatial in scope (Olson, 2018). Well-being as conceptualised by Ryff, (2015) implies a considerable degree of positive relations with mastering an environment, understanding other persons and work processes as well as seeking a purpose in life through personal development coupled with the acceptance of one's self. Well-being has under its purview autonomies and competencies established in formulating processes resulting into individual fulfillment (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2017). Work-life balance can be described as the manner in which we strike a balance between work and life so as to protect the human psyche from being overstretched (Akinlabi *et al.*, 2021).

In spite of the amount of positive offerings of remote work, some studies by Davis and Green, (2020); Burke, (2020) have put forward that concerning percentage of employees find it challenging to adapt to the concept (remote working) and this has brought about unfair treatment from employers who capitalized on this weakness on the employees' part. Surveys of various kinds have also supported the above assertion and clearly expressed that significant amount of burnout and anxiety have been experienced by employees due to working from home (Debouk, 2020) and countries such as Finland, the Netherlands, Ireland and France have the highest percentage of employees with mental health issues on an individual basis among countries under the European union (OECD, 2018). Consequently, this sudden shift towards a remote culture of work which has extended beyond COVID-19 establishes many degrees of challenges as the opportunities it created. Based on the foregoing arguments, this study investigated remote working and the well-being of academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

Globalisation has changed the face of work reality across the continent and introduces a new pattern of work. Also, due to the pandemic remote working legalized and slowly representing the traditional working system. Remote work pattern is adjudged to have huge benefits to organisations and individuals in the aspect of reducing costs, increased productivity and fostering of higher work concentration. Nigeria and many parts of Africa are now trying to adjust to the remote whose practice is alien is generating a lot of controversy and Ghanaian private universities is not left out; meaning that there is a need for examine the implication of remote work in private institutions on the employees to see if aligns with what is obtained globally. Despite these advantages, Lazarova (2020) was of the view that several social disadvantages are associated with remote work and the most prominent among these challenges is the difficulty in keeping boundaries or striking a balance between work-family; thus, an infraction from this end is presumed to be an impediment of employee well-being (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). Based on the fact that the Nigerian terrain of work is not inclined with the practices of remote work and its principle beg for investigation and setting a new paradigm. Hence, this study examined the

influence of remote work pattern on the well-being of academic staff in selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

The broad objective of this study was to investigate the influence of remote work pattern on the well-being of academic staff in selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions. The specific objective was to examine the effect of remote work on the well-being of academic staff in selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions; and investigate the relationship between remote work and work-life balance among academic staff in selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

Literature Review

Remote Work and Employee Well-Being

Remote work refers to a strategy and move arising from employees' desire to manage and maintain contacts with both work and family (Lord, 2020). Remote work also signifies an unplanned move and new work development created by the pandemic and organisations leveraging upon for the sake of ensuring flexibility (Akinlabi *et al.*, 2021). However, despite the advantages preempted as offering by remote work system; an element of warning is inherent in its scope; thus making scholar assert that such a system of work might not be suitable for all (Sawatzky & Sawatzky, 2019). Remote pattern of work is adjudged as a flexibility tool which has been embraced globally especially by developed nations such as the United States of America and considerable number of countries under the European Union. Oyedele, Willoughby, Olaniyi and Oyero, (2019); Lord, (2020) expressed that remote work is a situation in which work activities are being conducted at a location other than the environment of work itself on a regular basis.

Remote work can be regarded as one of the most profound and transformative changes experienced in the work process since the last 10 years with many organisations now subscribing to its offerings and benefits by affording their employees the opportunity to work from home. Remote work can be synonymously referred to as 'telecommuting,' or 'teleworking' which is the ability of employees' to use technology in working remotely so as to facilitate communications with the parent organisation (Raišienė, Rapuano, Varkulevičiūtė & Stachová, 2020). In a bid to expand the base of what remote work represents; "agile working" has been adduced as one of the terminologies used in conceptualising remote work based on its degree of flexibility. In this wise, remote work infer the process of adjusting work practices and making it flexible to meeting changing demands of the market (Grant, Wallace, Spurgeon, Tramontano & Charalampous, 2019; Olanipekun, 2022).

From the submission of Ryff, (2015), well-being can be perceived as the process for attaining a balance from both challenging and rewarding life events. From the perspective of integration and orientation in comprehending benefits sprouting from life's process of development through mental health; and from the clinical view point. Well-being denotes the efforts of individuals towards realising their real personal potentials. Ryff, (2015) explained well-being from the angle of psychology and asserted that it is a form of relating positively with mastery of the environment as well as having a good understanding of the other person(s), finding and having autonomies, and establishing a purpose in life which

in turn leads to personal growth and developing one's self. As expressed by Ryan and Deci (2017) psychological well-being comprises autonomy, high competencies and relationships established and coordinated. Psychological well-being when viewed from the lens of Waterman (2019) it implies making efforts and striving towards ameliorating challenges. From the opinion of Hati and Pradhan (2019) employee well-being measures as the quality of work-life which is borne out of the level of workplace interventions; thus, well-being can be categorised as physical, psychological and emotional/mental health of employees (Bellamy, Juniper & White, 2011).

When employees begin to operate on an alien system of work they are previously not used to; there is always a kind of friction and this is because in previous years their modus operandi were to operate in an office where they get so familiar with other colleagues; thus creating an atmosphere for integrating and physically engaging team members. But due to the new change brought about by the novel Corona Virus, established the need for organisations to impose a work from home policy which now brings personal lives at close proximity with employees work-life and by this reason, work and personal continues to interface on a continuous basis. Let's take for instance, during the Covid-19 where parent who are employees were working from home and their wards who are students are also with them; this increased employees' responsibility as they function as both parent and employees at the same time; this consequence of this is that their degree of well-being will be affected; as they will continue to struggle to separate responsibilities, which will have attendant effect on their overall well-being (Staglin, 2020).

H0₁: Remote work has no significant effect on employees' well-being among academic staff in selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

Remote Work and Employee Work-Life Balance

Olanipekun and Olanipekun, (2024) defined work-life balance (WLB) as the flexible working schedules that allow people create a balance amid the personal and employment responsibilities. Work-life balance is a crucial concept that concerns different workers in both the public and private industries.

Lula (2018) viewed work-life balance as getting a balance between work and family duties. Traditionally, the theory of work-life balance dispute concentrated on the effects of family needs on employment. But today, the concept extends to include the effect that employment poses on family well-being, individual relationships, and stress management (Mungania, 2017). When an experience at work place interferes with family life, a worker tends to encounter work-to-life conflicts. This type of dispute emerges due to interpersonal conflict at the workplace, unsupportive management style, inflexible working hours, and high work overload. On the other hand, family-to-work conflicts takes place when work life interferes with family life such as unsupportive family members, an interpersonal dispute within the family and the care for both the elderly and children (Baral & Bhargava, 2010).

Work-life balance is described as division of one's time and focus between working and leisure activities daily. The bulk of leisure activities would be spending quality time with

family members (Oderinde & Olanipekun, 2023). It requires prioritisation between career ambition and lifestyle. Aspects of lifestyle includes health, spirituality, pleasure, leisure and of course family (Auka & Nyangau, 2020). Three facets of work-family balance are important which are time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance (Ijeoma, 2018). Work can be remunerated or voluntary. Leisure is the opposite of work, where one decides what to do with one's time (Nwagbara, 2020). In this study, work-life balance was measured with leave policies, flexible working arrangement, and welfare policies.

The significance of remote work on work-life balance is a product of diverse discipline ranging from management, organisational studies, organisational behaviour and so forth; all of which resulted from a body of previous empirical analyses (Beigi & Shirmohammadi 2019; Powell, Greenhaus, Allen & Johnson, 2019). Studies of these two constructs have produced mixed outcomes which thus necessitates that series of studies should be conducted to compare and validate results; this is because remote pattern of work can have positive and negative outcomes on work-life balance (Sullivan & Lewis, 2016). Few evidences abound round the notion suggesting that employees following the remote working style may experience a form of blurry boundaries between the work and family domains (Musson & Tietze, 2017). This experience manifest in diverse manners among employees subscribing to the remote working style; it can be asserted that in many instances, blurred boundaries have been adjudged as being negative while on other occasions, it has proved positive (Peters, den Dulk, & van der Lippe, 2019).

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between remote work and employee work-life balance among academic staff in selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

Theoretical Underpinning

In the words of Vogt, (2015), theory symbolizes a statement that provides information on how certain events work; theories assist in hypothetically testing relationships by predicting the occurrence of an activity, phenomenon or events. Theories employed in this paper are the boundary theory by Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) and self-determination theory by Deci & Ryan, (2020). These theories were considered because they clearly give a comprehensive analysis of the study under review.

Boundary Theory

According to the (Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2010) who are scholars of this theory, they were of the opinion that there is high degree of variation in preferences from the perspective of individuals towards segmenting between the domains of work and non-work. So, those who have high preference of segmentation always ensure that their domain of the work is kept private and separated from their non-work domains while those who possess low preferences of segmentation are always of the opinion that the domain of work be blended with the non-domain and thus integrating or blending them together (Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2010). At the moment, Studies are still very few in terms investigating individuals with preference for integrating together both the work and non-work domains as compared with those whose preference for segmentation which demonstrated that work segmentation is inversely at variance and establish conflict between work-to-non-work which invariably induce stress (Muthoni, Mwaura & Waweru,

2020). and positively relates with detaching work and life satisfaction in the psychological sense of it (Lautsch, Kossek & Eaton, 2019).

Self Determination Theory

The tenet of this theory is the need for belongingness which denotes that a connection of an individual with other persons such as colleague, co-worker is made paramount (Deci & Ryan, 2020). Previous researches have submitted that the inability to meet up with the above identified basic needs bring about negative consequences but the outcome of fulfilling them proves otherwise (Deci et al., 2017). The Self Determination Theory was employed to underpin this study as theoretical bedrock in order to sufficiently explain how much significance the concept of remote work is on the well-being of employee from the perspective of the Ghanaian tertiary institutions.

Methodology

Survey research design and quantitative research approach were adopted in this study. Three selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions were used in this study because the remote work system was greatly employed by the management of the institution during the era of the Covid-19 pandemic and that policy is still in place as the technique is regarded as the new normal.

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive in nature; this design was found appropriate because it explained the variables under study (Remote Working and the Well-Being of academic staff in selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions) in a succinct and sufficient manner.

Study Population

The population for this study was Two Hundred and nine (209) academic staff of selected private institutions in Accra Ghana. This comprised of both male and female.

Sample Size Determination

Drawing from the population of the study which was Two Hundred and Seven (209), from this population, a sample size of One Hundred and Thirty-Six (136) was drawn at 95% level of confidence and 0.5 error rate. This sample size was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) sample size calculator.

Sampling Technique

This study employed the multi-stage sampling technique; this included purposive technique which was used in selecting the study location. Afterwards, the stratified sampling techniques was employed as a means of ensuring that all academic staff from all cadres well represented and from the identified groups, the simple random sampling technique was employed to selecting respondents who filled the questionnaires administered. The simple random ensured an adequate form or representation of all cadres of staff in the selected institution.

Instrument for Data Collection

For this study, primary data was obtained using a structured questionnaire which was divided into various sections to cater adequately for the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was close-ended, on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from =1 “Strongly Disagree” to =5 “Strongly Agree”. In measuring remote work, the five-item scale by Raišienė et al. (2020) at $\alpha = 0.791$ was employed, for employee well-being, a ten-item scale, developed by Pradhan and Hati (2019) was used at value of $\alpha = .95$ of reliability. For Work-Life balance, a scale seven-item developed by Grant, Wallace, Spurgeon, Tramontano and Charalampous, (2019), was used to assess employees' work-life balance with a reliability value of $\alpha = .93$.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

In validating the study instrument, the researchers conducted a pilot study and pre-testing using employees of three private polytechnics in Lagos State. This was carried out so as to ensure the content, construct and criterion-related validity of the research instrument was achieved. For reliability, a pilot group of 40 academic staff from three (3) College of Health Sciences were selected in testing the reliability of the instrument for the study. This was actualised by first of all stratifying the staff of the selected polytechnics according to their employment status and cadres. The reliability test result was ensured not to yield below 0.70 co-efficient which is the globally acceptable standard; and this was obtained through the test re-test method.

Method of Data Analysis

For this study, the quantitative data obtained were analysed using descriptive and inferential degree of statistics through frequency distribution and simple percentages, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Regression and Correlation analysis were employed as statistical tools for testing the hypotheses stated in the study.

Results

A total of 136 copies of questionnaire were administered, 132 copies were retrieved and 130 copies were found usable; this showed **96.2%** response rate; which was found to be positive and significant, so, it was accepted for the study. There is no fixed recipe for presenting the findings of a study. We will, therefore, first consider general guidelines and then turn our attention to options for reporting descriptive statistics and the results of the hypothesis test.

Hypothesis One

H0₁: Remote work has no significant effect on the well-being of academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

Table 1: Regression analysis explaining the effect of remote work on the well-being of academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.803 ^a	.812	.812	.587	6468.560	.000 ^b

From the analysis presented under table 1 above, result proved that remote work has a positive and significant effect on employees' well-being. This delineated that variation in the well-being of academic staff is as a result of remote work. So, remote work positively and significantly affected employees' well-being among academic staff within the selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

Hypothesis Two

H0₂: There is no relationship between remote work and work-life balance among academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

Table 2: Results of Linear Correlations analysis showing the relationship between remote work and work-life balance among academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions.

		Remote Work	Work-Life Balance
Remote Work	Pearson Correlation	1	.874**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	130	130
Work-Life Balance	Pearson Correlation	.874**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	130	130

Table 2 above presented correlation analysis reflecting the relationship between remote work and employee work-life balance among academic staff of work-life balance among academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions. Finding from the table provided that a positive and significant relationship existed between remote work and work-life balance among academic staff of the selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions with ($r=0.874$, $p\text{-value}<0.05$). This signposted that a considerable degree of association and significant relationship exists between the two observed variables (remote work and employees work-life balance). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected because results proved otherwise, meaning that, remote work significantly connects with the work-life balance of academic staff in the selected private institutions in Ghana.

Discussion of Findings

The overall objective of this study was to examine remote working and employees' well-being among academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions. Based on the objectives and the hypotheses tested in the study, it was discovered that for hypothesis one which sought to find out whether remote work has no significant effect on the well-being of academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions. It was observed from the study findings that remote work significantly affects employees' well-being among academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions; this finding aligns with the outcome of a study by Prasad, Rao, Vaidya and Muralidhar, (2020) where it was postulated that remote working pattern is a better alternative and healthy for employees well-being as they will not need to bother about dressing formally while carrying out their daily activities at home; and when there is no policy requiring a formal kind of dressing, it keeps employees in a relaxed and comfortable mood while on the job.

Again, the findings of this study agree with the submission of Gajendran and Harrison, (2017). whose study outcome accentuated that remote working system is good for individual well-being because it allows for flexibility and offers opportunities to learning new things, acquire new hobbies and being more proactive to work. In the same manner, this study's finding corroborates the position of Hayman, (2019) who was of the view that remote working style helps and give employees the autonomy of how to carry out their job s without interference, and this can help organisation meet their expected objectives in due course.

The second objective which sought to investigate whether a relationship exists between remote work and employees' work-life balance among academic staff of selected Ghanaian private tertiary institutions, finding revealed that remote work has a connection with employee work-life balance and this findings supports the opinion of Akinlabi et al., (2021) whose study submitted that ensuring work-life balance via remote working system helps in concluding that management has a good working plan in place and making flexibility a top priority.

In the same vein, findings from this study aligns with the submission of Martinez-Amador, (2016) whose study outcome found out that remote working was connected with greater work-life balance of employees as it helps to reduce to length of time in commuting and provide more time for employees to attend to personal pertinent issues. Finding from this study negates the position of Crosbie and Moore, (2012), whose study found posited that remote work does not significantly affect employee work-life balance; finding from this study is also at variance with the outcome of Fedakova and Istonova, (2017) whose study submitted that remote working system makes creates disruptions in activities, and has the likelihood of exacerbating family pressure.

Conclusion

Remote working style was a product of the Covid-19 experiment and the outcome of this study further strengthened the consequential nature of remote working as not just the new normal but as a tool which allows for flexibility for employees and helping them attend

to other salient life issues; so, while doing the bidding of the organisations, employees can as well fulfill and meet their needs at the same time; this will increase job satisfaction and foster greater degree of commitment towards higher productivity. Based on the outcome of this study, it can be concluded that remote pattern of work helps employees to adequately discipline themselves and manage distractions emanating from the home front.

Based on the outcome of this study, the following recommendations sufficed:

- i. Management should ensure that focus with the working plan is aligned with by academic staff while working remotely.
- ii. A code of conduct should be established to guide the regulation of remote work, as an avenue for enhancing academic staff wellness and promoting the institutions.
- iii. Clear-cut expectation from academic staff should be adequately communicated hinged on the protocols required to attend virtual meetings.
- iv. Management should set realistic work objectives and flexible work scheme for academic staff to enhance performance.
- v. Management should adjust workload accordingly to pave way for a compressed work week/schedule to reduce.

Limitations of the Study

There is no perfect study and this explains the significance of this section. One of the limitations of the study is time, as academic faculties were busy, due to the nature of their jobs. Other studies should therefore look at sectors such as manufacturing, print media and Fast Moving Consumer Goods firms to ascertain if results from this study could be replicated. In addition, a triangulation method could be used to strengthen findings on this study. This study surveyed tertiary institutions within Accra, other studies may combine two to three geographical locations. Another limitation is that the study was conducted among faculties of private institutions, other study could examine the public domain, to compare results.

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