RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

How About the Psychological Pandemic? Perceptions of COVID-19 and Work–Life of Private Sector Employees—A Qualitative Study

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Abstract COVID-19 had a devastating and profound impact worldwide. The business world has been turbulent, and countries' economic landscape has shown dismal performance. There have been massive downsizing of employees and deductions of pay in most organisations as the pandemic outbreak negatively impacted the business environment. The study aimed to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the psychology of employees working in private organisations. A qualitative analysis was conducted with 22 middle-level Indian employees employed in private sector organisations. Content analysis was performed from the transcripts and themes; coding categories were developed. Participation in the study was voluntary and was carried out through informed consent. The results demonstrated that the participants experienced psychological stress, social disconnectedness, and a sense of loneliness over the lockdown period.

Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews also revealed the perceptions of the job, career prospects, and the fear of the imminent looming future ahead. The pandemic has raised serious questions on the employee's mental health and engagement issues. Managerial implications have been discussed with suggestions to alleviate the current professional and psychological challenges.

Keywords COVID-19 · Home · India · Loneliness · Organisation · Social disconnectedness · Social distancing · Work

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Introduction

Wuhan, a Chinese city, reported a unique pneumonia triggered by the coronavirus disease at the end of December 2019 (Li et al., 2020).

The World Health Organization (WHO) had officially named the disease COVID–coronavirus disease—where CO stands for corona, VI stands virus, and D for disease (CDC, 2020). Within a short period, it had reached across the borders and in different countries and continents worldwide. There were only 80,151 cases as of March 2, 2020 (Jianbo et al., 2020). There has been a tremendous surge of person-to-person contamination and infection even outside China within a short period; by 30 March 2020, the confirmed cases increased to 498,945 (WHO dashboard, 2020). The World Health Organization declared that the COVID-19 pandemic could be described as a critical and dangerous disease worldwide (World Health Organization statement, 2020, issued on January 30). The emergence of COVID-19 catalysed the already sluggish conditions prevailing in the Indian economy, as evident in recent months. The entire supply chain network has suffered a collapse affecting the tourism, hospitality, and aviation sectors. Even the sudden closure of malls and shopping complexes reflects on the detrimental effect on the retail business. Other sectors negatively affected are automobiles, consumer durables, and chemical products (Hasan, 2020).

The study's need is manifold as it aimed to explore the mental health of the private sector employees of a leading Indian metro city, Bangalore. At the onset, there were virtually no researches carried out except fragmented resources from online news and resources. It needs to be mentioned that Indian private sector employees have mostly been overworked, stressed, and involved in multitasking in work. Above all, the ominous lockdown's

inception had frozen the normal process of working and living, sending panic signals to everyone. The previously demarcated existence between work and personal life was now blurred and had triggered a sense of ambiguity and lack of clarity about life itself. This research aimed to understand the psychological desolation, anguish, fear of the unknown and sum up the employees' mental health. In such a precarious situation, the focus on work–life priorities was questionable. The research also tried to understand the HR/organisational support system that should have been given to the employees for better mental health and work engagement practices. The study has explored the impact of the lockdown on psychological well-being and affects on the private sector's employees' work–life balance post-Covid-19.

Overview

Though big brands like P&G and Microsoft anticipated the psychological challenges of coping with the turbulent times, such gestures are still far-fetched for medium and small organisations. These large companies have already engaged psychological counsellors and mental health practitioners to offer assistance to their employees working from home due to the long lockdown period and the repeated emphasis on social distancing after the announcement on 24 March 2020. Companies in the majority have been silent and unconcerned about the mental health of their employees post-pandemic and during the pandemic period. Some exceptions were there, and the examples were Microsoft (who has brought experts to talk to employees and supervisors on emotional well-being); Deloitte (set up counselling helpline offered by the HR); and P& G (hosting webinars and asking experts)– Dave, 2020.

One of the severe manifestations of the COVID-19 is the acute sense of loneliness and strain that have affected people's psychological well-being across the globe. The need for social distancing has also resulted in psychological damage. The feeling of loneliness resulting from pandemic can also trigger depression, physical health complaints, and even deaths, especially in older people, as loneliness can also affect the immunity system (Chen, 2015). Throughout the country, people are working from home. Schools and higher education institutions have taken the resort to virtual classes. All individuals have been strictly prohibited from meeting in groups—videos of suggestions, advice, and consequences of not following the enforced rules and regulations have been circulated in official and social media sources. One cannot blame the policymakers as these are the main plans/steps undertaken to prevent the transmission rate. Nevertheless, social and mental health issues are enormous as directives lead to more emotional isolation and disconnectedness. Under the current unfortunate circumstances, individual employees are experiencing acute loneliness and social isolation, which is the primary focus of this research.

Literature

Loneliness, Social Disconnectedness, and Distancing

Loneliness is termed as subjective social isolation. It increases when the individual's perceived social relationships do not match the individual's ideal social relations standard. The mismatch of the relationships releases a frustrating feeling that is commonly called subjective social isolation. The variables that affect the individual perception are the degree of sensitive social disconnectedness, the capacity to self-monitor one's own emotions in the phase of isolation, and the sense of rationale and mental framework regarding other individuals (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). Earlier definitions of loneliness encompassed the response to the absence of some specific kind of relationship (Weiss, 1973), emotional anxiety to the actual or perceived lack of social association (Young, 1982), and the negative experiences emanating from the person's social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981).

The psychological agony produced by subjective social isolation is a grave issue, and the impact is incessant and recurring (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). The trauma of this kind of isolation can have far-reaching detrimental psychological effects and damages (Gustafsson et al., 2012; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Westerlund et al., 2012). Besides, there is a considerable volume of literature on the adverse mental effects of social isolation and is similar to desolation and loneliness (Biordi & Nicholson, 2013). Loneliness even hampers the persons' normal working of the information processing, inspirational, and psychological mechanisms (Brewer, 2005). Furthermore, the social environment's strong impact cannot be overlooked (Zavaleta et al, 2014). Past literature demonstrates intriguing findings—it blends various isolation components, and compares isolation and loneliness (Gierveld & Hagestad, 2006). Therein emerges the concepts of social disconnectedness and perceived isolation. Social disconnectedness is represented by the lack of association or contact with others. It may imply a small social group, uneven social interaction, and low or no involvement in social activities and associations. The individual can also feel a sense of limited support and friendship, and that is perceived isolation. Loneliness is weakly correlated with social network size and interaction frequency with the social group members (Hawkley et al., 2003; Hughes et al., 2004). In social connectedness, individuals may receive mental support from the group members who help in the

adjustment process and alleviate stress (Waite & Hughes, 1999). The research demonstrated that individuals who feel a supportive social group surrounds them could face contingent situations effectively, and have higher self-respect and self-monitoring abilities (Cornman et al., 2003). All these qualities can diminish the harmful effects of stress (Steptoe et al., 2004). The Government had strictly restricted almost all movement activities. Citizens were instructed to stay at home; all offices, institutions, and business places were closed (Gupta, 2020).

With the increase in harsh measures taken to keep people isolated and distanced from each other and to curb the spread of the deadly Coronavirus, it has been predicted that the long period of disconnection from social associations will come with a hefty price and mental health issues generated due to it would be difficult to heal.

There is a paucity of research related to the psychological impact of social distancing during epidemics on private sector employees. Still, a current study demonstrated the emotional manifestation of people under quarantine during past pandemic phenomena like SARS, HINI flu, Ebola, among others since the first half of the 2000s. According to Brooks et al. (2020), the long period of forced social distancing can have severe psychological consequences. According to Huremović (2019), as the social distancing phase extends over a few weeks, there are health- and other related issues. There are also the secondary effects of the pandemic, and that can be the anxiety and psychological problems associated with unemployment, economic recession, and acute mental disorders. The situation is worsened due to less pay, burdensome schedules, and long working hours, all resulting in a constant state of mental exhaustion (Joshi, 2018). This qualitative research aims to understand the impact of the social disconnectedness and perceived isolation levels of the respondents who got stuck in the declared COVID-19 lockdown and its eventual extension. Working remote may initially appeal to the employees; however, socially disconnected and isolated conditions bereft of peer interaction and cut-from office ambience and facilities may gradually brew stony inertia.

Method

Participants

The qualitative research consisted of telephonic interviews made with 22 middle-level Indian employees working in different functional areas of Indian companies and MNCs in India. Thirteen of them were male employees, and nine were female employees. The age range was from 30 to 50 years. In qualitative research, it has been suggested that there should be 30 participants approximately (Fridlund &

Hildingh, 2000). Nevertheless, the sample size should be decided based on the depth and richness of information obtained (Patton, 2002) (Table 1).

The selected participants were ordinary individuals who have been working in different sectors of private organisations, mainly in junior- and middle-level positions. The study's purpose was to understand how the respondents were dealing with the crisis. The employees' perception of their job responsibilities then and the day-to-day life of overlapping professional and personal obligations, especially in the Indian context, were the research's predominant focus. The convenience sampling method was used to get access to the study. However, only those prospective candidates were approached who were in their mid-career and employed in the private sector. Since it was difficult to access the participants during that particular period, snowballing technique was used. Morgan (2008) describes this method as initially getting hold of a small pool of respondents who then nominate through their professional and personal networks. The participants were approached once they met the eligibility criteria.

Ethics

Participation was voluntary, and the necessary permission was obtained. Each interview was conducted informally after the mutual confirmation about a convenient time for the respondent. Each conversation took around 20–30 min on average. However, about six respondents carried on and discussed for 45 min to 1 h.

The interview questions were:

1. *How did you psychologically respond to the COVID-19 and lockdown?*
2. *Describe your random thoughts on living life now.*
3. *Discuss your organisation's responses to the pandemic situation.*
4. *How have they changed their responses to work and the treatment of the employees?*
5. *What are your thoughts about the future?*
6. *Do you feel lonely? Or miss your everyday life before the lockdown?*
7. *What are your perceptions regarding the changes taking place in the professional sphere?*
8. *How are you psychologically planning to lead your professional and personal life post-pandemic?*

This working cohort's responses touched various facets and their general outlook on their present and future apprehensions. In talking about their view of life in the social distancing time, their responses were mixed:

"I have planned my days, exercises, listening to music, reading, and of course, spending time with my family…" (Participant -4).

Table 1 Respondent's demographic profile

Category	Subcategory	No. of respondents	Responses	Percentage
Gender	Male	22	13	59%
	Female		9	41%
Age	Below 30 Years		1	5%
	31 to 35 years		4	18%
	36 to 40 years		7	32%
	41 to 45 years		9	41%
	46 years or more		1	5%
Position	Junior Level		2	9%
	Middle Level		13	59%
	Senior Level		7	32%
Experience	Below 10 years		2	9%
	11 to 15 years		7	32%
	16 years or more		13	59%

Some participants revealed that it was a physical break for them to get out from the regular grind of travelling to and fro the office, the fatigue involved: "I am having a break after a long period…am sleeping, watching T.V and playing indoor games… getting leaves from my company has always been a difficult thing altogether". (Participant 11).

However, some responses expressed the difficulties faced by the respondents too.

" After all these years of working non-stop, I really do not know how to handle this free time…apart from home assignments from office, I am clueless and don't know how to handle the closed down period". (Participant 18).

Both male and female respondents came out with the following responses regarding work-to-home and life balance.

"There is the constant pressure of household chores to be done with no domestic help coming…in between, there are long zoom sessions, and I have to look professional in-office attire…" (Participant 21).

The lockdown period also highlighted the gender stereotyping that affected household work and related activities. The majority of the male respondents expressed their frustration and irritation with heavy housework that suddenly was given on them:

"Out of the blue, from morning to evening, I have been bombarded with cleaning, washing, cutting vegetables, dusting, and what not…it is like an ongoing cycle from where there is no escape." (Participant 9).

"My sleeping cycle has gone full topsy-turvy…every day, I go to bed late because work is not done routinely… till the middle of the night, I stay awake, fall asleep around dawn and get up late…" (Participant 1).

" I am going insane by so much work, children to take care of at home, their online classes, my assignment I have to send every evening…not to forget the chores". (Participant 13).

On the psychological front, the responses were not favourable in the majority of the interview narratives.

"I don't know what has happened to me … I keep on cleaning every hour; a speck of dust unnerves me. I take a lot of time washing clothes and arranging things in my wardrobe." Another participant revealed, "I feel terrified with the world ending with this coronavirus… I feel afraid … I pray many times a day …now". "I don't think I would be able to embrace or hug anyone like I used to do before once the crisis is over", a participant disclosed. (Participant 6).

Khanna and Srinath (1988) referred to this kind of behaviour as Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD). They found in their research that the obsessions cover mainly a fetish for cleanliness, praying and doing repetitive activities.

"I am always under the stress of the regular zoom sessions… internet connections… my appearance… how I present. With so much household work all through the day… the kids …I feel under strain". (Participant 10).

"My manager is a psycho… he keeps on calling me…emails me every hour to check whether I am working. I am really struggling to live up to his expectations". (Participant 16).

According to Khanna and Srinath (1988), these can be referred to as overanxious disorder and panic disorders. The entire process of data collection took around a month, and because of the lockdown, the participants could devote

more time to share and discuss the issues in an elaborate manner.

Procedure and Analysis

The content analysis approach has been used in the research. Content analysis has been described as an evidence-based, process-oriented presentation of the communication contents. It has been termed as a reliable method that can be learnt (Berelson, 1952). A more recent definition of content analysis has regarded it as that can be replicated and also having valid conclusions drawn from respective sources (Krippendorff, 2004). Furthermore, the rationale for using content analysis is that it can be used in almost all kinds of written texts irrespective of the material's source. There is flexibility associated with the usage of this method (Berg, 2001; Burnard, 1991), mainly, in-depth interviews (Wann-Hansson et al., 2005), focus group (Golsäter et al., 2011), open-ended questions (Donath et al., 2011), observations of situations (East- wood et al., 2011). The crucial aspect is the intelligent choice of the data collection method has a deep impact on the analysis's depth (Bengtsson, 2016).

A set of semi-structured telephonic interviews were conducted to give participants autonomy to be imaginative and original, as suggested by past research (Longhurst, 2016). The participants were given information about the research and requested their participation through informed consent. The participants attended the interview but were free to opt-out at any moment from the interview process. Before the meetings, the researcher and the participants had an explicit talk about the ethical considerations and the anonymous aspects of the study so that the participants felt at ease and settled during the actual process of the interview. Even after the completion of the interview process, the participant was given the scope to assess the interview, ask questions, and add value by providing suitable inputs.

As the coding categories created were directly developed from the responses obtained, a conventional content analysis was performed using a deductive and inductive approach following the iterative process (Kondracki et al., 2002). Responses were categorised under different codes. These codes represented an appropriate response to understand the number of times a reply containing certain information given and the number of circumstances mentioned in totality. More coding schemes were generated as the transcripts scanned multiple times, and initial codes were created utilising a constant comparison to oversee the differences and commonalities in the interview sessions. The coding schemes designed were then merged in a deductive approach to a single coding scheme resulting in the four main threads: work–life balance, mental aspects, work, and the near future. After this step, one transcript each was coded, and as a result, the response code was renamed, revised, and even as required, new regulations were created. The manifest analysis technique was used to describe the participants' words and responses and mainly had remained close to the transcribed text. In a way, it explains what is observable, easily perceived and apparent in the text (Berg, 2001; Downe-Wambolt, 1992).

Findings

Table 2 presents the general overview of the coding scheme results: coding category, code description, example, and the total amount of codes within the respective group. It has to be mentioned that because the coding process was continuing, some codes were adjusted during codification.

Discussion

The research has demonstrated some interesting findings. Firstly, perceptions of social distancing were expressed in terms of the anguish and its vulnerability. The majority of the participants had in different ways described the sense of desolation and disconnectedness they had experienced throughout the months. Alienation was another recurrent theme in the study, and participants had emphasised the impact on their mental health and life itself. This study has been supported by two studies conducted during the period. Jacobson et al. (2020) examined and found that there have been intense searches in Google to find about stress, insomnia, negativity, and even suicidal thoughts. In their qualitative research, Williams et al. (2020) mentioned that participants reported their helplessness in adjusting longer-term and experienced issues of non-adherence in seeing or hearing others at the beginning of the social distancing measures. The present study also demonstrates the psychological state of the participants after suffering financial losses, facing perpetual work-life challenges, and trying to comprehend the fundamental meaning of existence after the pandemic outbreak.

The theme of work–life balance was a salient finding. Interestingly, the women employee participants had been vocal about the pressure and the heavy work responsibilities taking a toll on their psycho-social well-being. Complaints about continuous chores and duties within the home sphere surfaced in the interview responses. Cesaroni et al. (2018) had highlighted the aspect of the high percentage of time devoted to home tasks and responsibilities. This is a source of future research direction facing the pandemic outbreak challenges. Though some studies have discussed the benefits of work from home (WFH) affecting Work–life

Table 2 Coding representation

Coding category	Codes	Description	Example quote	Total
Lockdown life	Social distancing	The lack of physical proximity due to COVID-19-negative	"It is disheartening not to hug and touch people I am fond of…"	87
	Chores	Overwork–negative The household work of cooking, cleaning, washing	"As maids are not allowed in this period… I have to slog morning to evening and become really tired of anything."	56
	Children	Responsibilities–stress-	"My children are kind of stuck at home …they have become cranky, and with their online classes going on from school… I am going crazy… the internet has become very slow."	49
	Hobbies	Creative and search of hidden talents–positive-satisfaction	"After many years, I picked on my sketching and enjoy it now…don't know whether would be able to continue with this once office calls back."	34
	Work–life balance	Distribution in work and personal life–mixed responses	"I am simply suffering from fatigue with so much housework, no help…with so many video meetings and presentations of the office every day…" "I am trying to reorganise my life… am into reflection about future, interests, quality time with my family…"	46
Psychological	Death due to Covid-19	The fear of the unknown and infection–negative	"I wear mask always…even at home …I keep on washing my hands every half an hour …I am scared to die… the videos and the horrible images of corona patients worldwide coming in all media has shaken me…"	72
	Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	Fetish–negative	"You know I sweep and mop many times a day" or "I clean the door handles and knobs at set up time reminders"	54
	Alienation	Sense of isolation and loneliness–negative	"I am stuck in this city…family is in another city… I suffer deep loneliness"./"I don't know why I feel I am alone and isolated nowadays…maybe we are all alone at the end of the day."	41
	Depression	Moods and swings–negative	"Not able to sleep", "Don't feel like doing anything", "feel sad and disconnected"	33
Organisation	Trust factor	Mistrust from the supervisor–negative	"My boss keeps on calling me for meetings more than he used to do at the office" "She suspects I am having free and cool time at home and has loaded me too many assignments"	65
	Communication	Video Communications-zoom, Google—mixed	"From morning the zoom sessions start…the management expects me always to sit alert and be prepared"	47
	Measures	Compensation, downsizing, etc.—negative	"My salary for the month has not been credited–have been told it will be delayed and may be reduced", "My boss has been giving hints in the meetings that some may be fired soon"	31

balance, interview responses have stated that it led to more hours of work and overlapping hours of professional and personal duties (Grant et al., 2019). Moreover, Arntz et al. (2019) showed that WFH enhances the life satisfaction of childless male workers satisfaction. From the findings, it was evident that the participants, in general, were experiencing a lack of stability and balance in the professional and personal activities. Furthermore, some complained about a lack of focus and persistence in handling the schedule and time factors. Previous research has demonstrated that self-regulation, ability to handle autonomy, and time management were the essential requirements (Baruch, 2000), and even family factors like the family size,

structure, and age of the children in the family played an eminent role (Baker et al., 2007).

Another point revealed by some of the participants was related to the costs involved with the resources associated with WFH. Leaving out three firms from the research, others were not reimbursing the expenses incurred. This work motivation dimension was also highlighted by another study (Purwanto et al., 2020). The adverse pandemic lockdown circumstances that led to social distancing and compelled stay-at-home directives had resulted in negative repercussions on productivity and subsequent psychological distress. WFH, in such challenging circumstances, has been perceived as a captive situation with no respite. Trust of supervisors was a pertinent dissatisfaction

area discussed in the interview sessions. Several aspects discussed the constant behavioural control imposed by the supervisors by giving tasks, making calls after office hours, and instructions for extra assignments. Research has shown that the trust of supervisors had demonstrated a positive correlation with the virtual working patterns of employees, WFH being one of them (Grant et al., 2019). At an individual level, Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD) behaviour was shared by some participants, and this has been supported by research conducted during this period (Fineberg et al., 2020; Fontenelle & Miguel, 2020). Finally, participants had also expressed their anxiety and fear about the thoughts of probable death in case infected by the virus and the futility of life itself in the present conditions. Menzies and Menzies (2020) stated in their research that there could be a causal relationship between death anxiety and psychological distress. This relationship may be triggered in the current Covid-19 outbreak too.

To sum, India, along with the other countries worldwide, is passing through a disastrous phase; employees are experiencing excessive stress levels both in the personal and professional areas. The forced dictates such as social distancing have further aggravated the individuals' mental agony, leading to psychological isolation. The situation of uncertainty and low predictableness has impacted the mental stress and anxiety level rapidly. Individuals in the interview have repeatedly expressed their apprehensions on the duration of this pandemic's existence and the repercussions on their career and professional lives, even their mortality. Some respondents were candid enough to discuss the problems they have been facing due to the complete lockdown with no domestic manpower support at home, high demands of the job and work from home assignments, time-bound deadlines, less independence, and high expectations of the managers. There were different issues shared in the conversations. The majority revealed the intense psychological tension of possible loss of a job or reduced salaries, the constant sense of surveillance carried out by the company, especially managers who show little consideration for the stressful times, the never-ending domestic chores and above all, the psychological feeling of isolation due to the extended periods of lockdown. The pandemic has been the worst disruptive nightmare that has invaded the lives of millions of employees across the country. The existing state of unclear and, to a great extent, confusing future will lead to higher levels of stress and tension. According to Schweiger and Denisi (2017), what is required is transparent and clear communication with the employees in turbulent times.

Similarly, anxiety attacks are found in those kinds of work profiles with high requirements but low control from the employee (Karasek, Jr., 1979). Consequently, employee's life expectancy has been demonstrated to be

shortened because of the severe work pressure and reduced control (Gonzalez-Mulé & Cockburn, 2017). Stress can be a double-edged sword for individuals. On the one hand, it can be perceived as a trigger to higher levels of drive and excellence in performance; on the other hand, it can create a massive obstruction leading to lower morale and performance (Podsakoff et al., 2007). Recent research demonstrated that the variables causing employee depression are ambiguity in work systems and processes, multiple, confusing instructions, organisational power, and political dynamics (Bolino, 2020). Social disconnection and loneliness were the predominant emotions expressed by the participants. Social disconnectedness and isolation may affect health in unique ways (Cornwell & Waite, 2009). As discussed before, social connectedness's positive aspects, like mingling with close social groups, can continually improve health (Kinney et al., 2005). A body of research also suggests a positive association between perceived isolation and mental health challenges, namely depression (Weeks et al., 1980). Different threads on loneliness demonstrate efficient insights that enable understanding of the associative dimension of the individual. It poignantly highlights that the individual's perception of the dissatisfying psychological returns of the social relationships as compared to the expected ideal standard of relations and attributes to the intense degree of loneliness.

The latest survey titled People Matter COVID-19 conducted on 22nd March in different companies throws grave concern aspects (Sharma, 2020). The study was conducted on 276 companies in India and South-East Asia. The findings were universal in the sense that they applied to the organisations' phase of indecisiveness and unpreparedness. Firstly, there were questions raised on the operational points of the manufacturing sector, the lack of clarity on the payment policies, the resilient attitude in preparing to face COVID-19 or any similar calamity/pandemic and the associated challenges. Hence, it is not an unfounded fear of the employees interviewed about their bleak career prospects and job security in this qualitative research. Only 44% of the companies surveyed revealed that they were somewhat prepared with the policies to face such a crisis.

The research has demonstrated some significant findings: firstly, the empathetic role of the manager/supervisors had failed during these turbulent times. The interviewed employees had openly expressed the lack of understanding and support from their superior's side in professional assignments. Secondly, the employees' mental health is not a priority of consideration for the management of most organisations. Finally, the imposing of the social distancing measure has increased the sense of alienation and the employees' social disconnectedness as isolated entities.

Managerial Implications

In this hour of crisis, the employee's well-being should be the utmost concern of the management. The period of lockdown is challenging because it is the first time in many employees' lives. Digital tools are the only resort that has to be taken by the employee to complete his assignments and connect to the supervisor and peers. There will be gloomy periods of depression and low morale. Hence, all meetings should not be professional, but there should be brief sessions between, preferably on a one-to-one basis, to empathise with the subordinate and keep them engaged. It should be the manager's proactive approach to remind the team members that he is always accessible and can be communicated. This gesture will alleviate the pangs of working in social isolation. HR should ensure that employees maintain a healthy work–life balance even when working remotely. Email tips and visually appealing healthy recipes, easy-to-do exercises, and funny jokes can be sent to the employees from time to time. Also, the list of popular entertainment programmes of TV and movie lists can be posted too. Company psychologists or counsellor can have weekly virtual sessions to offer the necessary assistance in the form of Employee Assistance. Herein comes the HR/manager's role, which cannot depend on the organisation psychologist to break the news. The supervisor's primary responsibility is to gradually convey the unpleasant story of either handing over pink slips or cutting the package with a proper rationale so that staff morale is not destroyed. Companies should not be opaque and vague in their disclosure because, during such difficult times, employees expect empathy and transparency. Downsizing should be the last resort, and jobs can be retained by re-aligning, job-sharing and rescheduling the work and processes. The companies' grim challenge to balance between generating business and focusing on the employee's psycho-social needs during this outbreak.

There are some managerial techniques to bring out the most productive output from the employees. Employees would appreciate it when the manner of supervision is clearly explained to them (the sign-ins, sign offs the time of contact). A consistent schedule helps in understanding things and planning efficiently. Official communications should be in video-conferencing modes, and in case the supervisor wants to check out any personal well-being, it can be performed through personal audio call. For formal sessions, at the end of each session, a summary of the topics discussed has to be carried out to prevent slips. Managers can schedule informal chats over lunch, snacks over video sessions to avoid mundane virtual meetings.

Moreover, the disbursed mode of work from home has detrimental effects on the employees and the employers. The employees' mental health issues have to be focused on

and understood due to prolonged isolation and social isolation. Additionally, the physical health of the employee also takes a toll due to the indoor lifestyle. Motivational and engagement techniques have to be discovered to sustain the home-bound employee's productivity.

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