

Covid-19 Impact on the Business Process Outsourcing Sector in The Philippines: Is Work from Home to Continue?

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Abstract

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many people around the world were constrained to work from home. The unexpected shift to an online structure was challenging, especially for those lacking a proper setting to work effectively from home. After two years into the pandemic, this study seeks to assess the effects of a work from home setup on employees involved in the business process outsourcing industry in the National Capital Region in the Philippines. More specifically, it looks at the factors that shape their productivity and determine their work predilections after the pandemic. The study employed a survey questionnaire to gather data on 75 workers who had been working from home. A descriptive analysis was conducted to analyze the data. It was found that most of the respondents prefer working from home as it enables them to achieve a healthy work-life balance and provides a good working environment. The results also indicate that the level of productivity, job commitment, and job engagement parallels the one observed when working at their office. A majority of them would like to continue working from home even in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Work from Home, COVID-19, Business Processing Industry, Productivity, Job Commitment, Job Engagement

1. Introduction

In The Philippines, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in early 2020, and the first death recorded a few days later (ABS-CBN, 2020). On March 8, 2020, the government declared emergency and calamity for a period of six months and imposed a lockdown that prohibited civilians from going outside their homes except for getting basic necessities (Atienza, 2021). Domestic land, air, and sea transportation was suspended, and large gatherings, parties, and concerts banned. To mitigate the spread of the virus across the country, thousands of police officers and military personnel were deployed to ensure compliance and checkpoints were placed at all entry points in Manila. Moreover, various levels of quarantine were implemented, depending on the severity of the cases. They included: enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ), general community quarantine (GCQ), and modified general community quarantine (MGCQ) (IATF, 2020a: Quieta, 2020; Atienza, 2021). Obviously, the lockdowns enforced by the Filipino government not only affected individuals but also significantly impacted companies, both large and small, as most of them had to halt their operations, which kept a colossal percentage of the workforce from physically reporting to work and compelled companies to seek alternative work arrangements. Employers had little choice but to require their employees to work from home. (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2020).

This type of work set up, though, was not an entirely new construct as, even before the pandemic broke out, a growing number of jobs, most notable in the IT sector, enabled individuals to work from home (DuPlessis, 2019). Besides, before the first Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, most people, whether in agriculture, as skilled artisans, or as household managers, worked from home (Goloboy, 2008). In conjunction with the COVID-19 Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Disease, the Department of Health proposed several arrangements for conducting work from home (WFH), including a ‘hybrid’ work arrangement, i.e., a combination of on-site and remote work (IATF, 2020b). Given the latest advances in technology, companies recognized that employees should no longer be kept from working from home as WFH could be just as efficient (Yang, Kim, & Hong, 2021; Susilo, 2020). Little, however, is known about some of the basic characteristics of WFH, such as its impact on productivity and the standards that determine whether WFH is more or less productive than work from the office (WFO). With no apparent end in sight for the COVID-19 pandemic and the working trends established as a result, it is important for employers to be cognizant of stratagems apt to optimize WFH. Indeed, many firms are likely to continue to promote a hybrid form of WFH even after the pandemic ends, hence the significance of developing effective WFH policies, investing in innovative technologies, and addressing mental health problems. One key issue is whether WFH productivity is lower, higher, or comparable to WFO productivity (Mores, 2022).

This study addresses this issue in the context of the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry in Manila. BPO is a type of outsourcing that involves delegating one or more IT-intensive business processes to a third-party provider, who will then oversee, control, and manage the chosen process according to measurable performance criteria (Yang, Kim, & Nam, 2007). The BPO sector has long been a cornerstone of the Philippine economy, second only to remittances from overseas Filipino workers (Venzon, 2021). Thanks in no small part to the reputation of Filipino BPO employees as good communicators, Manila was recently named the business process outsourcing (BPO) capital of the world (Gallimore, 2021). The BOP workforce, largely made up of educated Filipinos with strong spoken English language skills and a deep understanding and appreciation of Western culture, has helped the country gain a competitive edge in this industry (ASEAN Briefing, 2017). It now holds 10-15% of the global BPO market, serving the USA, Europe, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia (Talmage-Rostron, 2021). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the BPO industry was one of the most stable industries as, due to the nature of its work, it was able to quickly adapt to the work-from-home setup (Venzon, 2021; Gallimore 2021).

Despite the pandemic, BPOs grew by around 1.8% in terms of head count and 1.4% in terms of revenue as they were able to continue with their businesses with 70% of their employees working from home during strict quarantine periods (Aning, 2021, Venzon, 2021). In 2019, BPO revenues contributed 7.3 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). The Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP) estimates that approximately 120,000 jobs were created between 2020 and 2021 (White, 2022). With 1.3 million Filipino employed in over 1,000 BPO companies, the country is seeing a 8-10% growth every year and is expected to surpass its 2022 target of 1.43 million full-time employees and \$29.1 billion in revenues (Ochave, 2022). The Philippines is slated to remain a dominant offshore location for call centers (White, 2022). Expansion in the Iloilo, Davao, Dumaguete and Cagayan de Oro provinces is now contemplated to take advantage of lower costs and limited competition in these areas (Venzon, 2021). These provinces are seen as suitable for the opening of smaller “micro-call centers” and “hub-and-spoke centers” that would provide a hybrid WFH arrangement.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What is the demographic profile of employees working from home?
- Are employees working from home experiencing their most productive self?
- What are the effects of working from home on employees?
- Which factors can contribute to the productivity of employees working from home?
- What are the post-pandemic work preferences of these employees?

2. Review of Related Literature

- *Work from Home*

WFH otherwise known as ‘remote work’ or ‘telework’ refers to a flexible work arrangement in which employees operate in places that are far from their central offices or production facilities and are able to connect with their coworkers there via technology (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990). When the COVID-19 pandemic erupted, many companies shifted their operations and employees to a WFH approach. As noted above, the WFH concept was not novel, though. It had become more popular in the last decade as more occupations rely on computers and telecommunications, resulting in more people preferring to work from their homes and having reliable home internet connection (Gibbs, Mengel, & Siemroth, 2021). Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, several companies have already recognized the benefits of working from home to their businesses and their employees (Invest Northern Ireland, 2021). Working from home became advantageous for employers during the pandemic as it gave some of them the freedom to keep their businesses functioning while prioritizing the health and well-being of their stakeholders as part of their public health responsibilities. The pandemic also provided companies with a realistic assessment of how WFH can affect the business and staff, allowing them to consider working from home as a viable alternative for their personnel (Mores, 2022). Employers now have direct knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages of working from home (Hackney et al., 2022; Wu & Chen, 2020). This knowledge could be extremely beneficial to employers in choosing the ideal working process for their business.

- *WFH Advantages and Disadvantages for Employers*

WFH can be both advantageous and disadvantageous to the productivity of employees. Some studies have shown that WFH may have an insignificant impact on employee productivity and in some cases even increases it. For instance, in their study of IT professionals, Pantajali and Bhatta (2022) found that a majority of them reported an increase in their productivity while working from home, citing, among other factors, the time saved from not having to commute. Awada et al. (2021) concluded that workers' perceptions of their overall productivity level did not change relative to their in-office productivity before the pandemic. They found that during a typical WFH day, the amount of time spent at a workstation increased by about 1.5 hours. People who had children in school, possessed an office desk or an adjustable chair, and had altered their work hours reported working longer hours. Being permitted to work from home, staff will also feel an increased level of trust from their employer, which can contribute to enhancing staff loyalty. Moreover, Promoting WFH may increase job satisfaction as employees are likely to experience higher perceived autonomy, less work-family conflict, and telecommuting efficiency (Schall, 2019). Home-based employees are likely to feel more trusted by their employer as the working relationship is not as closely monitored and employees are allowed a degree of autonomy to get on with their work. As employee job satisfaction increases, the level of productivity also increases which in turn is beneficial to the company (Inayat & Khan, 2021).

All that said, WFH may encourage shirking and result in lower individual work because companies have less opportunities to monitor their employees. Tejero, Seva, and Fadrikan-Camacho (2021) reported that the productivity level of the employees sampled in their study

declined when working from home. Kitagawa et al. (2021) cited unsuitable workspace and communication issues as the main causes of productivity losses. In their studies, Gibbs et al. (2021) found that the amount of time spent on coordination tasks and meetings grew, while the number of uninterrupted work hours significantly declined. While it brings notable benefits to the organization, such as cost reduction and increased employee satisfaction, the new work style also poses challenges to management. WFH can make employees feel disconnected from their colleagues and the organization, which can make managing them and monitoring their performance difficult (Aczel et al., 2021). Although home working removes the distractions that may occur in the office if a worker does not have a suitably quiet and dedicated working space at home, he/she may get easily distracted by household noises or other household members. Where an office provides a clear physical distinction between work and home life, working at home can lead to staff struggling to differentiate between work-life and home-life (Mores, 2022). It can also be harder to maintain team spirit when employees are working at home on their own (Invest Northern Ireland, 2021). In addition, not having staff in close physical proximity may lead to difficulty in maintaining staff development and upgrading skills. Finally, information security problems are more likely to occur when staff are working from home.

- WFH Advantages and Disadvantages for Employees

Compared to working onsite, WFH significantly reduces travel time and offers more flexible working hours for employees. Ipsen et al. (2021) concluded that WFH can increase the efficiency of employees by giving them greater control over their work, leading to an improved work-life balance. It also improves staff health and wellbeing by eliminating the need for a commute to work that can be stressful to employees and by minimizing their exposure to health risks. Employees are more likely to feel happier and more energized working from home. There is therefore less of a chance that their immune system be negatively impacted by burnout. Taking well-being also into account, many employees would find it ideal to work more from home in the future (Bucurean, 2020). This is all the more feasible as new communication technologies and high-speed internet have removed all the hardware obstacles of working from home (Baksh, 2013). Studies on the work-family boundary also show that most participants in WFH programs are able to set a distinct boundary when they work from home. Moreover, disturbances at the workplace have become a key factor for them to work from home (Mores, 2022; Pantajali & Bhatta, 2022).

The switch to WFH, however, can be challenging because of the distractions that may be present at home. It may have a negative impact on employees' mental health if they are unable to find a routine that works for them, are struggling to separate work and home life or are feeling isolated (Gibbs et al., 2021; Teodorovicza et al., 2021). One major drawback of working remotely is the lack of professional boundaries. Indeed, working and living in the same environment might make it difficult for remote employees to distinguish between work and personal life (Wilson, 2021). The loss of work-life balance can be detrimental to one's mental health and overall well-being, which can further affect one's work. Another major disadvantage of working from home is the presence of household chores and responsibilities. Gibbs et al. (2021) determined that employees who had children at home worked longer hours and produced less than those who did not have children. Their study also showed that women experienced a higher decrease in output. Moreover, even though working from home may reduce transportation expenses and increase time spent on work and personal activities, communication and coordination costs rise. According to Teodorovicza et al. (2021), the reallocation of time is heterogeneous among employees and organizations. They found that managers, in particular, redirected the time saved from commuting into additional time spent in meetings, perhaps as a way to offset the impromptu encounters that occur in the workplace

and enable exchanges.

- Business Process Outsourcing Industry

As noted earlier, BPO is a type of outsourcing whereby companies hire a third-party service provider to handle one or more of their business functions ((Yang et al., 2007). Typically, companies engage with BPO vendors to improve their back (e.g., payment processing, quality assurance, and information technology services) and front office operations (marketing, sales, customer relations, and grievance redressal). The Corporate Finance Institute Team (2022) has identified three types of outsourcing, based on the country of origin of the service provider: (i) onshore outsourcing (when the service provider is from the same country), (ii) nearshore outsourcing (when the service provider is from a neighboring country), and (iii) offshore outsourcing (when the service provider is in a different country). Outsourcing call centers can be ‘inbound’ or ‘outbound’. Inbound call centers are centers that receive calls for customer service, technical support, inbound sales, as well as upgrade and renewal inquiry calls. Outbound call centers are centers that call their clients to generate sales for their companies. Moreover, calls can be sub-divided into cold calls (e.g., appointment setting, telemarketing, tele sales, and market research) and warm calls (Butler, 2022). One of numerous reasons why some organizations prefer to outsource some of their business functions. is its ability to reduce costs and maximize profitability (Venzon, 2021). For one, instead of purchasing equipment and hiring more employees to perform those tasks in house, companies can outsource some tasks from service providers. For another, BPO companies generally excel at what they do. Also, BPO can help organizations, especially start-ups, focus on their core business activities. Lastly, it can help them enter new markets as some activities require local knowledge of the market. As noted in the introduction, the Philippines is currently ranked as a top outsourcing provider and is slated to continue to be one of the world’s leading outsource center.

Based on the above discussion, the following conceptual framework was developed

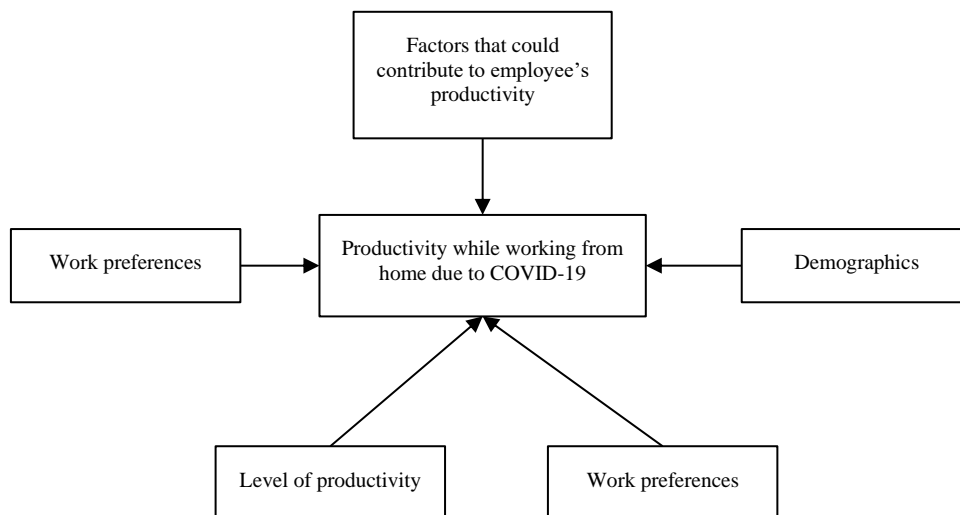


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (created by authors for this study)

4. Methodology

The researchers opted for a quantitative and descriptive research design to achieve the objectives of this study. A non-probability sampling technique (namely, purposive sampling) was used to gather respondents. To be eligible to participate in this study, the respondents had to meet the following criteria: (i) they had to be at least 18 years old; (ii) they had to be living within Metro Manila; (iii) since this study focuses on the BPO industry, the respondents also had to be employed at a BPO company. Due to the limitations imposed by the pandemic-

induced restrictions, the researchers used Google forms to design a survey questionnaire to be exclusively distributed online. It addresses the research questions articulated in the introduction. Table 1 shows the research questions and their corresponding items.

Table 1: Research Questions and Corresponding Survey Questionnaire Items

Research Question	Survey Questionnaire Item
What is the demographic profile of employees working from home?	a) Gender b) Age
Are employees working from home experiencing their most productive self?	a) Positive or negative response on whether the news related to COVID-19 affected their productivity b) Self-rating in terms of productivity level, job commitment, and job engagement.
What are the post-pandemic work preferences of these employees?	a) Workplace preference (office or home?) b) Employer preference (current or change?) c) Job (stay with current job or change?) d) Work schedule (fixed or flexible?) e) Team (remote or face to face?)
What are the effects of working from home on employees?	Rating of their well-being in terms of: a) Feeling exhausted b) Feeling stressed c) Feeling overworked d) Feeling digitally exhausted e) Feeling unconnected and lonely f) Being myself g) Need to energize h) Meeting overload i) Chat overload j) Email overload k) Work overload
What are the factors that could contribute to the productivity of employees working from home?	Rating of their work environment in terms of: a) Suitable and comfortable workplace at home b) Good network connectivity c) Equipment needed to perform work d) Support from immediate supervisor e) Supportive team f) Communication with immediate supervisor, teammates, and colleagues g) Work-life balance h) Rating of digital-related activities i) Virtual meetings j) Chat with supervisor and co-employees k) Responding to emails

The 32 questions included in the questionnaire were answerable using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree or Never to 5 = Strongly Agree or Always. As well as a 3-point Likert scale (e.g., 1 = Less, 2 = Equal, and 3 = More). Following the distribution of the questionnaire, a total of 75 respondents employed in the BOP industry were garnered. The data was analyzed using percentage and Likert scales used to measure people's attitudes, opinions, or perceptions. The following scales shown in Tables 2 and 3 were used for interpreting the data.

Table 2: Data Interpretation for 5-point Likert Scale

Range	Interpretation
1.00 - 1.49	Strongly Disagree
1.50 - 2.49	Disagree
2.50 - 3.49	Undecided
3.50 - 4.49	Agree
4.50 - 5.00	Strongly Agree

Table 3: Data Interpretation for 3-point Likert Scale

Range	Interpretation
1.00 - 1.49	Less/Never
1.50 - 2.49	Equally/ Sometimes
2.50 - 3.00	More/Always

4. Results and Discussion

Most of the respondents (43 or 57.33%) were females. Also as shown in Table 4, 21 of them (28%) were between 21-25 years old, 14 (18,7%) between 31-35 years old and 12 (16%) between 26-30 years old, indicating that the BPO sector heavily relies on a young and predominantly feminine workforce.

Table 4: Age of the Respondents

Age Bracket	Number of Respondents	%
21-25	21	28
26-30	12	16
31-35	14	18.67
36-40	10	13.33
41-45	10	13.33
46-50	0	0
51-55	6	8
56-60	2	2.67
61-66	0	0
Total	75	100

- Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Productivity

As shown in Table 5, an overwhelming percentage of the respondents (90.67%) like working from home. They see working from home as being more conducive to their being dynamic in terms of work and output. 58.67 percent of them said that news regarding the pandemic affected their productivity.

Table 5: Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Employees' Productivity

Answer	Do you like working from home?	%	Do news regarding COVID-19 affect your productivity?	%
Yes	68	90.67	44	58.67
No	7	9.33	31	41.33
Total	75	100	75	100

- Respondents' Overall Well-Being

The participants were asked to score 11 statements regarding their overall well-being as expressed in terms of exhaustion, stress, workload, and work-life balance. As Table 6 shows, for the majority of them, feeling exhausted, stressed, and having to deal with a workload were not issues they could agree or disagree with. Meanwhile, most of the respondents felt that they needed to exercise. This may be because they spent long hours on computers and other

electronic devices. Most of them, however, did not feel they were overworked and unconnected and isolated. As a matter of fact, the majority of them found that they had a healthy work and life balance.

Table 6: Respondents’ Overall Well-being

	Mean	Interpretation
I feel exhausted.	2.57	Neutral
I feel stressed.	2.67	Neutral
I feel overworked.	2.41	Disagree
I feel digitally exhausted.	2.57	Neutral
I feel the need to exercise.	3.71	Agree
I feel meeting overload.	2.53	Neutral
I feel chat overload.	2.55	Neutral
I feel email overload.	2.6	Neutral
I feel unconnected and lonely.	2.49	Disagree
I do not have time to do things I like to do.	2.69	Neutral
I have a healthy work and life balance.	3.93	Agree

Interpretation: 1.00 to 1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.50 to 2.49 = Disagree; 2.50 to 3.49 = Neutral; 3.50 to 4.49 = Agree; 4.50 to 5.00 = Strongly Agree

- Respondents’ Working Environment at Home

The responses shown in Table 7 indicate that most of the respondents had a suitable working environment at home. It is clear from their answers that, after two years of pandemic and lockdown measures, most of them have established a comfortable workspace at home, secured satisfactory internet connectivity, and have all the tools necessary to perform well. Furthermore, since they could easily contact their immediate supervisors and team members, the respondents felt that they were supported by them. Therefore, it can be concluded that one of the reasons why the respondents enjoyed working from home is because they had a good working environment and supportive coworkers, while enjoying being with family members

Table 7: Respondents’ Working Environment at Home

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
I have a suitable and comfortable workplace at home.	4.03	Agree
I have good network connectivity.	3.96	Agree
I have all the equipment I need to perform my work.	3.85	Agree
I have all the support from my immediate supervisor.	4.08	Agree
I have a team that supports me.	4.08	Agree
I can easily communicate with my immediate supervisor.	4.13	Agree
I can easily communicate with my colleagues.	4.07	Agree
I enjoy working from home.	4.09	Agree

Interpretation: 1.00 to 1.49 = Strongly Disagree; 1.50 to 2.49 = Disagree; 2.50 to 3.49 = Neutral; 3.50 to 4.49 = Agree; 4.50 to 5.00 = Strongly Agree

- Working at Home vs. Office

The results shown in Table 8 indicate that the participants often communicated with their supervisors and colleagues and responded to emails. Most of them also said that they occasionally have virtual meetings. Since all the individuals surveyed work in the BPO industry, they would routinely need to communicate with their supervisors and colleagues and answer emails on a regular basis and only have virtual meetings on a *had doc* basis.

Table 8: Respondents’ Work at Home

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
Virtual meetings	3.32	Sometimes
Chat with supervisor	3.99	Often
Chat with colleagues	4.01	Often
Respond to emails	3.88	Often

Interpretation: 1.00 to 1.49 = Never; 1.50 to 2.49 = Rarely; 2.50 to 3.49 = Sometimes; 3.50 to 4.49 = Often; 4.50 to 5.00 = Always

As Table 9 shows, the level of productivity, job commitment, and job engagement of the respondents are consistent with those recorded when they work from their offices. What can therefore be inferred from these results is that working from home does not adversely affect their level of productivity, commitment to their responsibilities, and dedication to their work. Although working from home may increase the level of productivity of some of them, the results indicate that overall, it had no bearing either way.

Table 9: Respondents’ Productivity, Commitment, and Engagement at Home vs. Office

Statement	Mean	Interpretation
Level of productivity	2.37	Equal
Job commitment	2.4	Equal
Job engagement	2.4	Equal

Interpretation: 1.00 - 1.49 = Less; 1.50 - 2.49 = Equal; 2.50 - 3.00 = More

- Post-Pandemic Future Plans

Even when the pandemic is over, 53.33 percent of the participants (40) indicated they would still prefer to work from home in the future. An almost similar number of them, 46.67 percent (35), however, indicated that would rather go back to the office (see Table 10 below). Thus, only a thin majority of the respondents find working from home to be more beneficial than reporting back to their offices even though Table 5 above shows that 90.67 percent of the participants like working from home.

Table 10: Workplace Preference

Workplace Preference	Number of Respondents	%
Willing to work in the office	35	46.67
Want to continue working from home	40	53.33
Total	75	100

Table 11 shows that 71 respondents (94.67%) would like to stay with their current employer even after the pandemic is over while 4 of them (5.33%) would like to change employer. Since earlier findings show that most of the respondents feel they are supported by their supervisors and colleagues and have a manageable workload, it can be concluded that the majority of them would still like to stay with their current employer for these very reasons.

Table 11: Employer Preference

Employer Preference	Number of Respondents	%
Stay with current employer	71	94.67
Change employer	4	5.33
Total	75	100

Table 12 indicates that 70 respondents (93.33%) would like to stay with their current job while 5 of them (6.67%) would like to change job. The reasons why the vast majority of them would continue in their current employment may be similar to those accounting for the results in Table 12. One of the respondents who stated that he/she would prefer to change job indicated

that he/she wished to remain with his/her current employment but hoped to change department and/or position.

Table 12: Job Preference

Job Preference	Number of Respondents	%
Stay with current job	70	93.33
Change job	5	6.67
Total	75	100

As Table 13 indicates, 39 of the respondents (52%) would like to have a flexible work schedule after the pandemic whereas almost the same proportion of participants (36 or 48%) would not. Those who favor a flexible work schedule enjoy the fact that they could adjust their work depending on their level of productivity and spare more time for personal matters. Those still preferring a fixed work schedule may do so because it enables them to better coordinate with their supervisors and colleagues regarding work and makes it easier for them to focus on achieving their goals and meeting project deadlines.

Table 13: Work Schedule Preference

Work Schedule Preference	Number of Respondents	%
Fixed work schedule	36	48
Flexible work schedule	39	52
Total	75	100

Lastly, with regards to meetings, 39 of the respondents (52%) preferred face-to-face meetings while 36 of them (48%) preferred having virtual meetings even after the pandemic-induced lockdown had been lifted. Since both options present advantages and disadvantages, the results for both are similar. Face-to-face meetings provide greater flexibility in terms of collaboration, innovation, and connection-building. Moreover, face-to-face meetings are more conducive for employees to focus on the goals of the meeting as they prevent them from multitasking or completing other tasks. Virtual meetings, on the other hand, save time and allow employees to contribute their thoughts and ideas regardless of where they are.

Table 14: Meeting Set-up Preference

Work Set-up	Number of Respondents	%
Face to face	39	52
Virtual	36	48
Total	75	100

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

One of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is its capacity to influence the attitudes and partialities of employees who in the past may have been impervious to the idea of working from home. So much so that the pandemic is now seen as an accelerator of trends, including the WFH trend, that was nascent in the pre-Covid-19 era. One of the consequences is that, as the number of individuals working from home has substantially increased, the stigma associated with flexible working has lessened. As this study shows, working from home has been gaining currency among companies and employees. Eventually, the pandemic may well be remembered for revolutionizing the way people work. Allowing employees to work in the comfort of their homes allows them to rationalize their time and devote more of it to fecund activities such as spending more time with their families and pursuing personal interests, whatever these may be. While, as can be expected, the COVID-19 pandemic distressed the majority of the respondents employed in the BPO industry at the time it broke out, it can be

inferred that, in the end, most of them were positively affected given than presently, the majority of them prefer to work from home and would still opt to continue working from home even after the pandemic if they were given a say in this matter.

The findings demonstrated that most of the respondents were in a neutral position on whether working from home led to feelings of exhaustion and resulted in being disconnected from family and friends, which further supports the view that WFH can lead to a healthy work-life balance. In addition, most of the respondents indicated that having a functional workspace and experiencing support from managers and co-workers as part of the virtual setup enables them to work effectively and productively at home. All these circumstances account for the fact that, as most of the respondents reported, their level of productivity, commitment, and job engagement when working from home remains very much the same as when they physically report to work. All that said, this study also highlights the fact that despite the aforementioned advantages of working from home as outlined by the participants in the survey, some employees still prefer to report to the office, which brings to the fore the question of why. The answer is multifactorial. One important motivation highlighted in the questionnaire is the desire for more in-person social association amid colleagues. For some, working at home can feel lonely, even though they may have family members around them all day. The lack of adequate equipment or space to carry out the work was also cited as a reason for the preference for an office work set up. Another reason for favoring working in the office is that the confine between work and family life can be difficult to perceive and can make concentrating on one's work a real challenge.

- Recommendations to Managers

In light of the above, it is clear that managers must have unrestricted discussions with employees to determine what working arrangements are best for them, assuming that the job makes the two options possible, which may not always be the case depending on the nature of the job. As also made clear in this study, fulfilling in a properly balanced way work and home-based responsibilities is likely to increase the productivity of employees as they feel satisfied, respected, and valued. In order to reach the right decision as to which approach is more appropriate and suitable to both sides under the circumstances, it is imperative that both managers and employees be transparent about the key targets and goals that must be met, as well as the support that the organization can provide. An open dialogue between line managers and employees is critical in enabling a transference away from the organizational culture of presenteeism and long hours in the office, often perceived as synonymous with staunchness and a search for productivity at all costs, to a culture where employees have more flexibility and as result may be more productive.

Since some employees still prefer to report to offices, in the event there is a resurgence of the pandemic (a scenario far from unrealistic), the management team should come up with employee scheduling strategies to minimize the risk of exposure of the employees to the virus. By limiting the possibility of an outbreak among BPO employees, the company will also avoid disruptions in the production process or the delivery of services to clients. In addition to encouraging an open dialogue and reorganizing operations so as to accommodate those wishing to work from home and those choosing to report to the office, management should articulate clear and effective guidelines to ensure the safety, health, and overall well-being of their employees even if they are working from home since employees need time to focus on their personal health and personal responsibilities as well, whether working at home or in the office. For those opting for a WFH approach, these guidelines may include daily reminders for them to exercise for a few minutes in between their work to prevent them from neck or back ache and eyestrain caused by prolonged computer use. Thanks to such guidelines, employees will be able to improve their health and well-being which in turn can improve their productivity.

Emboldening their subordinates to have a work-life balance will also show the latter that they are valued. In short, they will create a win-win situation for both sides.

- *Limitations of this Study*

This study used the perspective of the BPO sector in one area of the Philippines to analyze how COVID-19 impacted BPO employees' home productivity and determine their post-pandemic work setup preference. A wider perspective covering several sectors, possibly in different regions with different sub-cultures, would be a valuable complement to this study.

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