"Office Hours": Time to rethink for the organizations?

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Abstract

The way employees work in offices has changed over the last few decades. With the advent of information technology, "work" which was something that employees used to perform to fulfill their needs, when they were located at a specific place (office) for a certain amount of hours (office hours) has changed its face and in most cases, employees can do the same job from a place and at a time which is convenient for the employee. So stating the office address and office hours has become more complicated now.

Today's work is more about finding innovative "ideas" to solve problems and earn profits. In fact, "innovative ideas" is considered one of the most important criteria for sustainability of an organization. Research shows that we get the best of ideas to solve office problems,when we are outing, trekking, watching TV and not when we are in office and actually been instructed to think and come up with ideas. The organizations earn their revenues implementing those "ideas".
If that is the case, should the organization pay the employees for the "work hours "that they put in the company or should they pay them for the development of the ideas.

The researcher in this conceptual paper tries to unravel the features of modern and future work. He has tried to suggest a few methods which can help the organizations to track modern day knowledge workforce more effectively.

Keywords - Knowledge workers; attendance; modern work; future work ideas.

Introduction

Work in the last decade was more of delivery in a predefined place (generally office) at a predefined period of time (office hours), which meant that the employee has to go to work at a particular time and at a particular place. Work was not flexible, neither in terms of time nor in terms of place. So we can loosely say that work had two constant components- time and space.

With the intrusion of technology in day to day schedule and particularly in the organizational functions, the inertia of these two constants had been challenged. Nowadays, in most cases, an employee can work for the organization even though he/she is not physically present in the office. So the idea of being in a particular place at a particular time is no more justified.

The famous German Research Institute, Zukunfts Institute, in their 2008 research article predicted that by 2020, 75% of the total workforce will be using their brain to earn money. This workforce are commonly known as the "Knowledge Employees". This number is in sharp contrast to the number of "Knowledge Employers" in 1900 and 1930. In 1900, only 17 percent of the working population could have been termed as knowledge employees which increased to 30 percent in the year 1930 (Die Zukunft der Unternehmenskommunikation, 2011).

Since the delivery of work has changed over the years so the two constants should ideally change. The modern and future of work has two new constants. First is the development of ideas and second, which will be equally important is the ability to sell or market the idea to the perspective buyer. So, the "time" and the "space" constants have taken a backseat.

Research says over 20 billion jobs that we see today will disappear by 2030 and this is roughly 50% of the jobs that are available in the market now. Most of these jobs will be digested by the rapidly changing technology. Though this piece of data makes the economy look very gloomy, but it will not be so, as billions of new jobs will be created.

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Take an example of the education industry, with the ever increasing list of topics that are covered in MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), the job of a teacher may soon be extinct. MIT started their online courses in 2001 and have made more than 3000 courses available online and these courses have been downloaded more around 150 million times. One can find thousands of courses available in the Apple's iTunes and these have been downloaded more than 500 million times. Most of these courses are free and anyone can take these courses. For some of the courses, one can also get certification from the institution at a nominal fees.

The courses taught by the faculties are being reused. The teacher has to take the session on a particular topic only once, which is recorded and is then sold as a product. So the whole education supply chain model is going through a revolution. It is shifting from a model where teachers used to run the show that there is no room for the "traditional teachers". The role of teachers will be like "guides" or "coaches", who can help them to pick up the right courses for the students among the thousands of online courses. These coaches might have to do a "SWOT" analysis for each student and then develop ideas/plans what will work with the student and what will not. The coach then has to sell his "idea" to the student and his parents. This will not only be the business model in education but also in sports. So, the coaches or the guides will also do a job which is more about "thinking or developing the idea" and "selling" This was just an example, there are thousands of similar examples in all the industries.

Nowadays, most organization talks of creativity and innovation. In fact, "innovativeness" is considered as one of the most important ingredient for the sustainability of the organization.

Innovativeness is about developing novel ideas, which helps in overcoming challenges or solving problems. Most of the "start-ups" globally, have developed innovative business model which helps them to address customer problem using technology as a tool. Even the traditional organizations have adopted the two "mantras"- technology and innovativeness or developing novel ideas.

Now, the questions comes " can employees be asked to think?" for example can the line manager instruct the employee to think and come up with an innovative ideas in a certain period of time or do we really believe that the brainstorming sessions result in the development of innovative ideas. Ask the person who developed an innovative idea which helped the organization to solve a problem or earn millions of dollars as to when did he get the idea. Did he really get the idea in office environment or was it somewhere else, probably in an environment which has nothing to do with the office?

The researcher from his experience and his interaction with the business world, understands that in most cases answer will be the later. The best of ideas click in an environment which has nothing to do with the office or the workplace. The people who are involved in these kinds of jobs which is about generating business ideas and then generate a couple of more ideas in order to decide whom to sell , where to sell and when to sell the idea are generally called the "Knowledge Workers" in modern times.

Technology will take over a lot of jobs but obviously, new jobs will be created and the percentage of knowledge workers will keep on increasing. So we can say that more and more employees will have to involve themselves in developing ideas in order to earn their living.

Objective of the research

The objective of the research was to develop an understanding of the modern day work and how it is different from the traditional form of work. The researcher also wanted to understand whether the traditional "office hours" fits the silhouette of the modern work. The researcher suggests some measures which can be implemented by the organizations which can help them to create an innovative environment.

Research Methodology

The researcher conducted two focus group interviews and 5 personal unstructured interviews. All the participants were from the Service industry, working in the research, quality or the HR department and having at least, 5 years work experience. There were 5 participants in each of the focus groups. The participants were asked open ended questions. It took around 45 minutes to conduct each focus group interview.

The personal interviews were generally carried over via Skype. Average duration of the personal interview was 20 minutes. This paper being a conceptual paper, the researcher's knowledge and experience played a crucial role in the development of the paper.

When do we get our best ideas?

Most organizations are and will be earning by selling "ideas" to their clients. Professional have given several names to this kind of business model, for example: consultancy, mentoring , coaching to name a few. Most of these ideas are developed by the knowledge workers who are associated with them as full time employees.

There are a few questions here which needs to be addressed at this point -

1. When and where do employees get the best ideas which help the organization to solve their client's business problems?

2. Is it in office or out-of-office that these knowledge workers get the best of ideas?

Exhibit 1.1: When do people get good ideas?
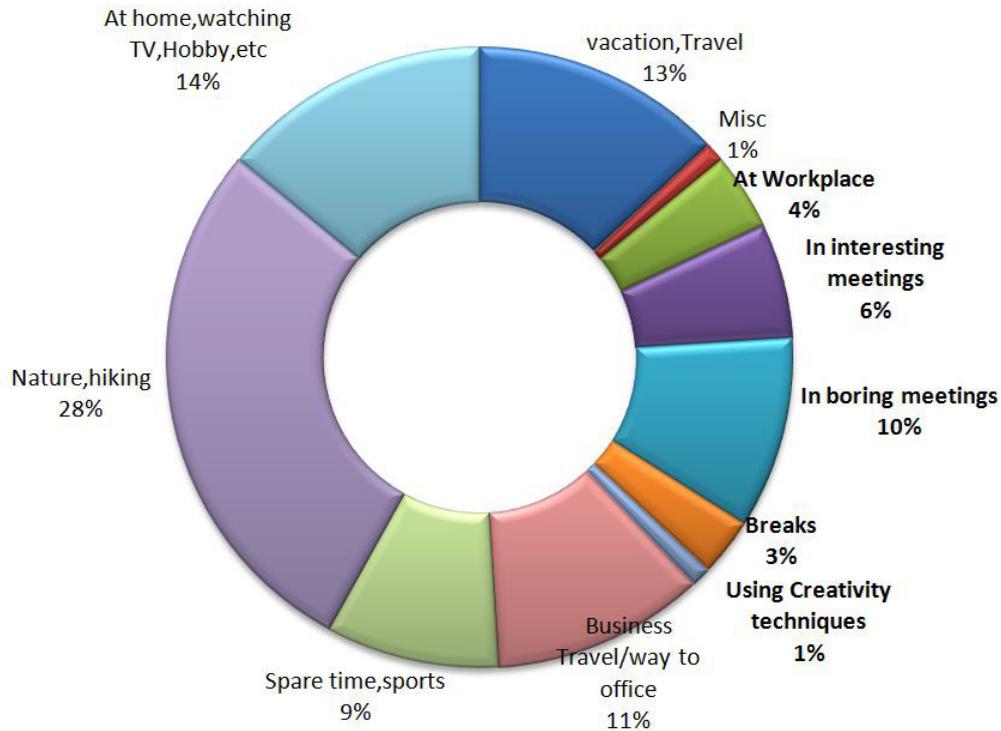
Source: Die Zukunft der Unternehmenskommunikation, Oktober 13, 2011.

The famous German Research firm "Die Zukunft der Unternehmenskommunikation" conducted a study on "when do people get the good ideas". Exhibit 1.1 gives a graphical of the results as compiled by them in the reports. The samples chosen for this research was primarily from Europe. A global research would have given a comparatively clear idea but still it would not have been drastically different from the one that we have in hand.

From the above data, it is not wrong to infer that the best of ideas, generally kicks the mind when the employees arein an environment which is remotely or absolutely not related with the context of the idea.

As is exhibited in the graph, people get maximum ideas when they are hiring, pursuing their hobby, watching TV, travelling or enjoying their vacation. Only 24% of the times people get the best of ideas in environment which are related to the work and amusingly, that includes 10% when employees are in a boring meetings.

The participants of the interview as well as the focus group were asked "when do you get your best ideas" in order to validate the above mentioned study. All the participants agreed to the fact that the best of ideas are generated out of work and rarely in office and particularly during the brainstorming session.

What are the organizations "paying for" to the employees?

Most of us while entering the office, have to punch our card or swipe our finger in the biometrics machine in order, to mark our presence in the office. There is a fixed time to come in and a fixed time to go out. It doesn't matter whether you are a knowledge worker or a hand/manual worker. At the end of each month, the payroll department calculates the work hours/days and freeze the payout for the month.

As explained above, 71% of the times, people solve their business problem not in office but in places or environment which are probably not related to office or best placed, out of the office. So, we are paying people for the time that they spend in the office. It is worth discussing, how important is it for the employers to keep a track of the incoming and outgoing times of the employees. Is it really required? Some may say this has worked for them for so long, but can they really say that this is the best method.

Can the organizations do something else?

Most participants in the study believed that creating a relaxed atmosphere help in the development of new ideas which can help the organization. All of them believed that flexibility in terms of work hours, work location, dressing (formal versus casual), team, team leader, leaves etc. can help them to come out of the daily "rut" and can help in the development of innovative ideas. Some of them acknowledged the fact that meeting or brainstorming does not actually help in coming out with good ideas, generally the result is an idea which they feel is right at that point of time but is soon replaced by a better thought.

Should the organization pay the employees for the time that they have spent in the office or for the number of ideas that they generate in a pre- agreed time-period? It is high time that we think about this question. Yes, there are job which requires the employee to be on time in order to serve the customer, so here we cannot generalize this attempt.

Hundreds of organization around the globe implemented flexibility in their work hours and space and they are also enjoying success in business. The organizations have to start thinking on how to create an environment which can give a feel of "relaxation" to the employees, where they feel that their brains is not being taxed. Employee engagement should actually be directed to achieve this goal. Organizations should actually be training employees and particularly the senior executives on how to make the work environment "relaxed" and "homely".

"Pay for ideas" rather for the work can be a good option. It has to be really remunerative otherwise, the employees will lose motivation. The organizations can also think of having a combination of fixed and variable pay. Development of the presentation in order to sell the ideas to the clients will be more of a team work so the office hours can be used to do the same.

These are some of the ideas that an organization can implement which can create a "win-win" situation for both the employers and the employees. There is no point paying people for showing their faces in the organization.

Conclusion

The question that might be raised here is whether the employees will take undue advantage of such moves by the organization. Several organizations including Google and SAP have successfully implemented such moves and they are doing well in terms of business and people want to join them and build their career.

In the opinion of Joanne Ciulla, if workers of the modern times were over worked, those of the post-modern times are not only overworked but also over managed, also employers appearing eager to try the "flavor of the day" in order to increase the financial performance of their companies. Considering the amount of stress the knowledge workers are already in, organization can actually think of coming out of the office time management or what we call office hours. It will not only help the organizations to get work diversity (as a lot of women workforce will join the organization) but also motivate the current employees to become more loyal to the organization. At the end of the day, it is all about "Employer Branding"

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