

RESEARCH REPORT

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An Examination of the OTTO Work Arrangement: Personal and Professional Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this research study is to examine the challenges that OTTO employees face and the use of personal and organizational coping strategies. This report represents the findings from the first exploratory phase of the study based on 34 semi-structured interviews with OTTO employees and managers. Twenty-eight of the OTTO informants are IBM employees. The following highlights the key findings related to two significant challenges: 1) workplace isolation and 2) work-life balance issues.

High Experiences of Workplace Isolation

Deliberate actions by employees and managers are critical to minimizing the effect of workplace isolation. In particular, the informants identified a lack of informal communication, face-to-face communication, and visibility to management as the key challenges associated with workplace isolation. Employees reported the use of technology (IMs, IBM Blue Pages, telephone, etc.) to increase informal communication as a means to reduce feelings of isolation, to build camaraderie, and as a partial substitute for face-to-face communication. In addition, employees suggested increasing opportunities for face-to-face interactions as well utilizing their own personal social networks to help address isolation perceptions. Findings suggest that workplace isolation may be more of a concern with new members of the team. Newcomers should be matched with a mentor and/or a traditional office employee to assist them in being more effective in the OTTO environment. Our results suggest that managers should provide support, mentoring, training (conferences, teleconferences, workshops, etc.) and work on developing community activities to help OTTOs address isolation issues. It was specifically recommended that the manager should meet face-to-face with each OTTO at least once every year.

Challenge in Managing Work-Life Balance

This study demonstrates that OTTO employees find it more difficult to disengage from work and tend to work longer hours. This tendency to overwork results from the lack of boundaries between work and home life and the nature of OTTO work (i.e., increased communication/conference calls and working with team members/customers in different time zones.) We suggest that OTTOs should set routines to establish a work structure enabling them

to disengage from work. OTTOS should also communicate to managers and team members when they are not available. We also recommend that OTTOs should create physical boundaries between work and home life. Managers should help OTTOs limit overwork by setting priorities on tasks. Finally, we recommend that both managers and the organization set clear OTTO work norms (i.e., not working on holidays, child care).

In conclusion, our qualitative findings enrich our organizational understanding of the best coping practices to address the challenges of virtual work from both employee and manager perspectives. An empirical study with survey responses from a larger pool of respondents will help us validate the findings and to enhance the knowledge base.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND GOALS

Virtual work or other than traditional office (OTTO) work arrangements, where professionals are working remotely from home and other non-traditional locations or simply traveling on the road from one customer location to another, is becoming common place.¹ However, there is a lack of comprehensive and empirical research regarding the personal and organizational challenges and coping strategies for successful OTTO workplace arrangements. This research intends to close this gap by identifying: 1) problems that OTTO professionals face with this virtual setup, and 2) strategies, both personal and organizational, that are effective in coping with these issues. Further, this study is aimed at examining the impact of a critical issue with the OTTO workplace, workplace isolation, on employee's attitudes, behaviors, and business performance.

This research project is structured to be conducted in two phases: 1) a qualitative exploratory study conducted via interviews and 2) to be followed by a quantitative survey. This report provides a summary of the findings of the first phase of this project that used participants from Fortune 500 companies. The report is organized in the following way. First, under the research method section, we provide a description of how the study was conducted and the informants of the study. This is followed by the research findings where we identify the five key problematic areas among OTTO employees and managers. In addition, for each OTTO challenge, we also identify causes and suggest personal and organization coping strategies. We end the report with our overall conclusion about the nature of OTTO work and strategic implications for companies that utilize it.

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to understand the challenges with OTTO work arrangements from the employee perspective, a qualitative research approach was undertaken. The qualitative approach allowed us to generate new research insights that emerged by bringing the employee's voice and personal perspective into the forefront of existing research. The report is based on findings from 34 semi-structured interviews with OTTO employees and managers conducted in the months of October, November, and early December 2007. The existing theoretical background on virtual work and

¹ Note: To remain consistent with IBM internal terminology, we will use the term OTTO to indicate virtual work situations or other than traditional work situations.

the goal of the study determined the content of the interview guide (McCracken, 1988). An efficient, focused, pre-organized interviewing technique, such as the semi-structured interview, was deemed suitable to use in a study of high-level bureaucrats and in the phone interviewing context (Bernard, 2002). Even though two separate sets of questions guided the interviews with managers and employees, all the interviews were organized around the following topics: 1) OTTO personal, organizational, and customer benefits, 2) key personal and professional challenges in working or managing OTTO contexts, 3) workplace isolation, 4) organizational communication, 5) promotion and performance, 6) relationship building and trust, and 7) issues related with work-life balance. Most of the interviews were conducted by phone and were recorded and transcribed. The interviews lasted, on average, one hour.

The goal of the study is to identify OTTO work related issues from both the employee and the management perspective. We used a convenience sample of employees that work in OTTO situations and managers of OTTO employees. Informants were recruited through the snowballing technique. Thus, our current sample consists predominantly of IBM employees (28 informants) and six non-IBM employees. Consistent with qualitative sampling, we purposefully sampled a diverse group of informants along variables that may lead to variations in results. We recruited informants with diverse professions, tenure with company, and types of OTTO arrangements. The types of professions explored in the sample consists of OTTOs in the fields of communications, sales and marketing, PR, finance, technical/software development, and support staff. Twenty-four of the informants work in OTTO arrangements, the majority of which represent full-time remote work from home. Other OTTO arrangements in this group include three part-time remote employees who also work a maximum of two days a week at a company site near their location; consultants who not only work remotely, but also travel frequently; and remote employees who work at customers' sites. In addition to OTTO employees, we also interviewed ten managers of OTTO teams, eight of whom are in OTTO work arrangements themselves.

Transcribed interviews constituted the data for this study. Following the qualitative research approach (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), the process of data collection and analysis were iterative; interviews were first analyzed after an interview with an informant took place. Those results were used to tweak the format of the next interview. Data analysis involved a continual process of comparison between data, field notes, their interpretations, existing theory, and study

expectations (Burawoy, 1991; Spiggle, 1994). After all the interviews were conducted, each of the researchers read the transcripts carefully to familiarize themselves with the OTTO challenges and coping narratives of each informant. Within-case analyses were conducted at this stage to examine the ways that personal work situations, personal history, tenure with company or in the profession, type of job, and relationships with the manager may structure OTTO challenges and coping strategies (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Next, cross-case analysis was conducted to compare findings from each informant with the others. The data were coded first through a list of preliminary codes derived from the theoretical background and theoretical expectations of the study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The list of codes was continuously revised as the analysis progressed with new categories that emerged from the data. At the end, findings derived from the data analysis and interpretations were compared with the study expectations and theoretical background to identify theoretical extensions and contributions. Next, we provide a summary of the key findings that emerged in the study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Consistent with prior work, we also find that OTTO work arrangements have many organizational, individual, and customer benefits. However, for the purposes of this report, we focus only on the key challenges that OTTO employees face and provide recommendations to deal with them. While many of the issues are familiar and have been researched before, there were several interesting findings. The following is a summary of the five major OTTO work issues that surfaced during our telephone interviews. The findings are organized the following way. First, we provide a description of the OTTO challenge and its causes. We then identify coping mechanisms that enable the OTTO worker to deal with the challenges and follow up with prescriptions for management.

1. Experience of Workplace Isolation

One of the major challenges in working in an OTTO arrangement is the experience of workplace isolation. This is consistent with past research of telecommuters and sales employees who indicated that isolation was a major issue among them (Marshall, Michaels, and Mulki, 2007; Pinsonneault and Boisvert, 2001). Informants described the experience of workplace isolation as “being disconnected from others in the organization”, having “no one to turn to when

they needed advice or to bounce ideas”, and not knowing where or whom to turn to when questions arose. When they were able to contact someone, it took them longer to get the advice and support they needed as compared to traditional office arrangements. There was also the disadvantage of not knowing or having seen the people on their team. Moreover, our data suggests that feelings of workplace isolation are higher among newcomers to the firm.

Additionally, working in OTTO arrangements causes feelings of social loneliness. Informants described the home as a “prison”. Several of the informants who experienced isolation perceptions felt that they missed the social environment of a traditional workplace, especially the informal chats, “coffee breaks”, personal time with colleagues, getting to know them, and the opportunity to build relationships. Social isolation experiences were particularly an issue among employees who live alone, are newly relocated, or are newcomers in the organization.

We found that the main cause of the workplace isolation experience is management action/inaction. For example, managers did not conduct one-to-one meetings, did not follow up on action items, and, at times, gave the impression of not being organized. The manager’s role was critical in addressing isolation issues particularly when the team was new.

Personal Coping Strategies with Workplace Isolation

Overall, we find that OTTOs are reflexive regarding this condition of the OTTO arrangement and act deliberately to cope with it. Prior research indicates that isolation perceptions result from absence of social interaction, informal communications, and absence of support (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; Marshall et al., 2007; Mulki, Locander, Marshall, Harris, and Hensel, 2008; Pinsonneault and Boisvert, 2001). Personal coping mechanisms that emerged in our study were also directed toward increasing informal communications, participating in informal team or organization events, and informal virtual meetings. Some of the suggestions included:

1. Communicate frequently and personalize it. To decrease feelings of isolation, we find informants prefer to use communication technologies that enable social presence, such as instant messaging, as a substitute for informal communication with other coworkers and the telephone for socializing. Several of the manager informants deliberately included

personal and informal information during regular staff communications to develop camaraderie with other team members, some of who they have never met. Informants also used personal profiles in IBM Blue Pages and developed lists of people to regularly communicate with. Instant messaging back and forth, exchanging e-cons and personal pictures, and straying off into social topics during the conference calls helped informants to create a feeling of an informal environment.

2. Increase opportunities for face-to-face time with other employees in similar OTTO situations or at a regional company office. Informants in specific locations designated one day a week to come to the traditional office and carry on their regular work instead of working at home. This worked very well as people had a chance for informal interaction, catching up with each other, and the potential for "give and take" advice, thus providing an environment of camaraderie while conducting their tasks. OTTOs also attended functions at a traditional office in the same area. This was particularly helpful when they knew some of the employees in the traditional office. It was suggested that the company could provide a mentor or a contact in the local office for new OTTOs making it easier for the newcomers to mix with the group.
3. Utilize personal social connections to substitute for the lack of workplace social network as a way to address isolation perceptions. Many OTTO employees combated social loneliness by going out for lunch or informal meetings with other OTTO employees, retired employees, or family and friends. In one instance, OTTOs in adjacent locations met each other for lunch once a week or so and alternated the meeting place between the two towns. Other OTTOs used networking with parents of kids in their children's school to help mitigate some of the isolation perceptions.

Management Strategies in Coping with Workplace Isolation

Most of the informants felt that managers play a critical role in addressing isolation perceptions. The manager often becomes the conduit for communication and the sense of belongingness with the firm. As such, our data suggest that management and the organization should act to foster higher social interaction and include OTTOs in the social aspects of the

workplace. Successful OTTO managers in our sample made deliberate efforts to ensure that OTTOs were included in social and other activities that occurred in teams or within the organization. Some of the managerial practices that helped employees to minimize isolation included:

1. Provide support and mentoring for OTTOs who experience isolation problems. Conduct frequent informal one-to-one or team meetings to check on their status and understand issues and concerns related specifically to those with OTTO work arrangements. Informal discussions facilitate a way to seek and provide advice without making the recipient self-conscious (DeSanctis, 1984). It also highlights the significance of the manager's availability and support to OTTOs. Informants cited examples of some managers who do this very well and, thus, have been able to develop strong commitment and belongingness among their team members. These managers are also known to have met all OTTO team members face-to-face.
2. Reduce perceptions and experience of workplace isolation by enhancing social interactions among virtual team members and between the manager and the OTTOs. "Good" managers used formal weekly meetings to share informal and personal news. Managers could support innovative programs to foster social networking among OTTO employees, such as the one practiced in some of the teams. An example of one such program is a contest called "where in the world are the remote employees" where OTTO participants from various geographical areas and functions exchanged pictures and anecdotes about vacations, presented themselves, and engaged in games with prizes. This worked well as a fun program and brought the group together. Interestingly, we also noted that some managers continued to utilize similar socializing mechanisms as used in the traditional office. For example, managers would use ritual celebrations and holidays as an occasion to connect with employees at a social level. Some examples of this phenomenon include managers giving OTTO employees gifts (such as mugs with hot chocolate), Christmas or birthday cards, and virtually sharing recipes or holiday pictures and traditions.

3. Pair OTTO employees with traditional office employees to help OTTOs adjust to the virtual situations. This is particularly helpful if there is a local traditional office where the remote employee can attend social events and informal meetings along with their traditional office counterparts. Other successful examples include the institution of a mentoring program or a "buddy system" of pairing new OTTO employees with other experienced OTTOs or managers in the organization, preferably in different departments or teams.
4. Provide new OTTO employees with welcome packages that contain a list of team members with pictures, personal information, and contact numbers. Current remote employees on the team should call and welcome the new employee with offers of help.
5. Managers can promote community and social spirit in locations where there is a critical mass of OTTO employees. In addition to developing local contacts, this can also serve as a means for OTTOs to form a social network among themselves, as well as in the community. Senior officers from the company could host events in the community on an annual or semi-annual basis. Informants spoke very positively about some of the managers who hosted informal get togethers at their homes for the OTTO employees on their team. While there is a general awareness of budgetary constraints, it was felt that companies should set aside some funding to make this happen at least nationally.
6. At the organizational and cross-department level, forums, conferences, workshops, and teleconferences can be organized with all OTTO employees to share perspectives and successful experience in working in the OTTO arrangement. Additionally, for technically savvy or technical employees, we found that virtual socializing tools such as socializing on Second Life, playing virtual computer games, and competing on software design provided useful venues to create social connections virtually, thereby decreasing workplace isolation.

2. Lack of Face-to-Face Communication

In remote working situations, electronic communication, such as IM, email, and the telephone, is the primary mode of communication for team members and supervisors. Lack of opportunities for face-to-face meetings and communication is a major issue contributing to workplace isolation perceptions. This can also hinder the development of personal relationships. The findings are consistent with past research which has highlighted some of the problems associated with electronic communication (Daft and Lengel, 1986; Daft, Lengel, and Trevino, 1987).

Electronic communication generally lacks the richness² and social presence associated with face-to-face communication.³ The study informants noted that communication that takes place in the OTTO arrangements takes longer and requires a greater amount of explanation because of these missing cues. Consistent with prior research, we find that in electronic communication settings, the volume of communication may increase, however, the efficiency may be poorer. It takes longer to form impressions in virtual contexts. We find that the lack of attentiveness, misinterpretation, and the absence of contextual cues and norms resulting from a reliance on electronic communication can lead to feelings of frustration and negligible interpersonal affections in interdependent groups.

Personal Coping Strategies with Lack of Face-to-Face Communication

Our study suggests several coping mechanisms to deal with the problems caused by a lack of face-to-face communication in the OTTO environment. We also find that an employee's familiarity and length time with a manager may be an important predictor of the perceptions of remote work effectiveness. Further, we find that the problems with the lack of face-to-face communication are less of an issue when the relationships are already established. In this regard, some informants prefer video conferencing as a more effective tool than phone or email to cope with lack of face-to-face interaction. While there was general understanding of budget

² Information richness is the extent to which media are able to bridge different frames of reference, carry multiple cues, reduce equivocality, and minimize ambiguity (Daft and Lengle, 1986).

³ Social presence is the degree to which the communication medium conveys the physical presence, non-verbal and social cues of the participants (Daft and Lengle, 1986). This is particularly true for emails and IM that are devoid of facial expressions, gestures, vocal intonation, as well as indicators of social position (Daft, Lengle and Trevino, 1987).

constraints, there was also a desire for more frequent face-to-face meetings, especially with the direct manager. Other suggestions include:

1. Instant messaging to other OTTOs - side conversations during the conference calls.
2. Use of Blue Book – a user defined list of employees, their position in the company, interests, and contact information. Getting information about other OTTOs help to visualize team members. Add pictures, profiles, and other information to the Blue Book.
3. Make an attempt to attend social events in the traditional regional office to network with other OTTO and traditional employees.
4. Deliberately attempt to meet with managers face-to-face. None of our OTTO employees liked a work situation with a remote manager they had never met face-to-face. Informants would utilize personal or professional visits to a company location or headquarters to introduce them and meet with management or other team members.

Managerial Strategies to Facilitate Challenges with Lack of Face- to- Face Communication

1. Manager facilitates and coordinates a face-to-face meeting with other employees when the OTTO employees visit the traditional office site.
2. Manager arranges and attends social events in a location with several OTTO employees in the team, thus bringing together OTTO employees in a physical location.
3. Use of conference calls, instant messaging, and emails as a partial substitute for face-to-face communication.
4. Supplement formal communication about goals and activities with relationship building informal messages.

3. “Out of Sight, Out of Mind” - Lack of Visibility

Another important concern among our informants was the perception of lack of visibility. While this was not a challenge for all informants, many of them believe that as an OTTO employee, one must work harder to be promoted. To advance within the organization, an OTTO must be always “on,” prepared, and organized. OTTO employees are concerned about their lack of visibility to the management team and at their headquarters impacting their career potential. Informants indicated that being "out-of-sight" could lead to being "out-of-mind" for recognition, assignment of projects, and promotions. Some informants felt that this could be a major problem for them given their reluctance to trumpet their own self-achievements. One informant explicitly stated that he/she would never succeed professionally by being a virtual worker. There is also concern that the lack of visibility could lead to missed opportunities to collaborate with others and one’s contribution to the organization not being recognized, as well as lower performance evaluations. In the traditional office, close proximity to the supervisor ensures that the work is noticed and often resulted in instant feedback and recognition. Thus, visibility enables employees to be relevant and position themselves in a favorable light for top assignments, promotions, and awards.

Personal Coping Strategies

Informants understand that remote offices are going to be the norm in the future and are looking for ways to stay visible while being "out-of-sight". There was a strong feeling that it is necessary to communicate one’s achievements to managers as well as to others in the organization. Many indicated that they take on projects involving cross-functional teams to increase their visibility. It was also recognized that they have to make conscious and deliberate efforts to promote themselves to the organization. Some of the ways this could be done include:

1. Self-promote through progress reports on personal and team projects. For instance, making sure to include a recent achievement or completion of a project on time or under budget. Further, structure these reports to set themselves apart from the others creating differentiation.

2. Use of weekly/monthly meetings (virtual) of the team and one-to-one meetings (virtual) as useful vehicles to communicate achievements to others in the team and department.
3. Plan visits to the company headquarters/traditional offices to meet face-to-face with senior management personnel.
4. Get to know the people in the company and on other teams. OTTO employees must make deliberate efforts to collaborate and talk with others, as well as participate in skills training and other professional development opportunities.
5. Communicate professional career goals and aspirations clearly to direct managers and mentors within the organization. While we found mentoring support from the manager on career and promotion issues, OTTO employees need to deliberately manage and promote their career and work closely with managers on such issues. OTTO employees should also request and find a mentor in a particular career path and discuss how going virtual will effect his/her career. Informants recommended that OTTO employees take advantage of company programs that relate to career building, training, and visibility (such as programs called “Shadow a Boss” or simply by attending company social events).

Management Strategies to Facilitate Issues Related with Lack of Visibility

Research findings indicate that employees see managers as surrogates for the organization (Strutton, Pelton, and Lumpkin, 1993). Management styles have been found to be critical predictors of employee job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and turnover intentions (Challagalla, Shervani, and Huber, 2000; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Sucharski, and Rhoades, 2002; Jolson, Dubinsky, Yammarinot, and Comer, 1993; Mulki, Jaramillo, and Locander, 2006). We find that managers' actions, such as greater support, seeking inputs in setting standards, participatory decision making, frequency of communication, recognition of achievement, coaching, and mentoring may affect employee job satisfaction and performance (Brown and Peterson, 1994; Challagalla and Shervani, 1996). We also find that in the contemporary virtual workplace, there is general recognition that face-to-face communication is not always economically viable. However, informants also indicated that managers can help

substantially in reducing employee uncertainty, ambiguity and "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" concerns. Some of the managerial strategies include:

1. Managers should increase their availability to talk, formally and informally, on organizational and personal issues, especially to OTTO employees. Managers need to check regularly for problems and concerns of individual employees during weekly conference calls or one-on-one calls.
2. Managers should initiate effort in "tooting their horns" for his employees; promote achievements of individual employees throughout the organization and, more importantly, let OTTO employees know of efforts on their behalf. One manager stated that he/she makes a point of emailing his/her boss each week with the key accomplishments made by each individual on his/her team.
3. Managers should plan and organize a team building event once a year or so where all the team members come together. This was highly recommended in our data.
4. Managers need to develop and communicate clearly and openly their work and communication expectations of all OTTO workers (e.g., response time on phone calls, emails, and follow up items.)

4. Work-Life Balance Issues

All our informants concurred that employees and managers in OTTO arrangements find it difficult to disengage from work and tend to work more, in general. Our informants testified to working more hours per day, working on weekends or holidays, working evenings or when family life dies out, and during hours when they would be commuting. Checking the last email or voice message before going to bed or ending the day has become an ritual for most of our informants. Additionally, when probed on issues of absenteeism, we found that OTTO workers tend to work even when feeling sick or in situations when they would have left work in traditional office arrangements. Overall, we find a sense of urgency to prove oneself as a remote employee by putting in more hours for the company. At the same time, informants hinted at an

organizational expectation of remote employees to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

While they saw working overtime as a benefit to their organizations, most of them also find themselves in an overworked and stressful situation. Because they are overworked, several of them suggested that they would switch to a traditional office environment if the opportunity arises. In one case, a remote manager quit the job and moved to a traditional office arrangement for a competitor. However, it appears that the biggest disadvantage of overwork is that it challenges the main benefit of OTTO arrangement, *work-life flexibility*.

We identify two main causes of OTTO overwork. First, OTTO workers tend to overwork because of the absence of the traditional boundaries between work and personal life or home. In a traditional office arrangement, workplace norms indicate when one starts and ends work. However, in OTTO arrangements, employees have to personally control and manage their time allocating parts of the day to work or home life. As such, informants testify that it is difficult to disengage from work or restrict oneself to work only during certain times of the day. Additionally, the physical boundary between work and home is absent in OTTO arrangements. Home and work lives tend to blend together without opportunities for making transitions from one social role to another (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate, 2000). Informants often find it difficult, if not impossible, to disengage from work because “it is always there” at home or with them through portable technologies (e.g., PDAs, cell phones, laptops). A second cause of overwork relates to the nature of OTTO work. We find that work tends to be carried out differently in virtual settings. For instance, a typical day of work in OTTO arrangements is filled with conference calls and more frequent communication to various parties as compared to contact in a traditional office. OTTO workers typically work in teams or with clients in different time zones requiring them to work at odd times spread throughout the day. As such, OTTO workers have to work more to get their work done and meet deadlines.

Flips Side of OTTO Work-Life Flexibility

We found that one of the key reasons for working remotely (full- or part-time) is to take advantage of the work-life flexibility that OTTO arrangements offer. Our informants understand OTTO flexibility as having the ability to conduct personal and household chores during normal working hours. For new mothers or mothers with small children, working from home gave them

the flexibility to send the kids off to school and pick them up, to spend valuable time with the child, or simply take care of the child when very young. For other informants, working from home enabled them to carry out household chores, like home maintenance, or maintain doctor appointments.

However, in practice, the work-life flexibility idea has been challenged. Not only do OTTO employees find it difficult to integrate personal life into their work schedules, but work is constantly overlapping with their personal life and causing family distress. Informants talked of the myth of being able to do housework or spend more time with the family while working out of home. They found themselves overworking and struggling to make time for their personal life. Often, it is not possible to conduct personal chores during work hours as some OTTO employees end up working set office hours anyway. Families of OTTO employees may also develop the expectation that the person staying at home will also manage all household chores, such as cooking and child care. When this is not the case, the illusion of managing both family and work leads to disagreements and family distress.

Personal Coping Strategies

Overall, we find that OTTOs attempted to re-establish spatial and temporal boundaries between work and home/personal spaces and control overwork. We found that this was practiced by all OTTO managers we interviewed, but only some of the OTTO employees. Informants attempted to create boundaries between work and family spheres by: 1) establishing separate work spaces in the home, and 2) establishing separation and integration rituals between work and family life.

Establishment of social and personal control mechanisms helps disengage from work. In addition, establishing work routines helps to create a work structure that is currently lacking in many OTTO arrangements. Our informants have established personal rules to help them disengage from work and better structure their work day. Some of the examples are:

1. Taking breaks from work (but not necessarily joining the family) during the regular work hours (e.g., full hour lunch break). Preferably get out of the house/work location and engage in a social or fun activity.

2. Using self-discipline to establish a routine and start/end work every day at particular times. Avoid working on Sundays, holidays, during family get togethers, and family time.
3. Using family or social pressure to help disengage from work. Some informants have established family rules of when to work and when not to work during family time. Others stop working when the family is back at home from work.
4. Leaving technical or work gear behind after work hours (e.g., switch off their computer when completing the work day).
5. Communicating clearly to managers and team members regarding periods of availability and non-availability. Establishing periods when it is not appropriate to handle business calls, how to handle matters that may arise during family times, etc.

Additionally, we also recommend that OTTO employees reflect on the amount of family/household duties that one can carry out during working hours. The managers we interviewed all agreed that it is not a good idea to engage in family chores or taking care of family when the employee is focused on work. However, there are also employees who are struggling to manage family life during work hours. Thus, we recommend that:

1. OTTO employees outsource family care during working hours (e.g., we had examples where parents or partners would take care of kids while the mother was working).
2. OTTO employees should set clear expectations within their family of what they will accomplish in terms of family chores during their work hours. They also need to communicate clearly to their family the OTTO's work time and job responsibilities.

Management Strategies to Facilitate Work-Life Balance

Company and management should set the tone on overwork: The manager needs to help OTTO employees to learn to switch off from work. OTTO employees and managers felt that the

company needs to recognize the difficulty of disengaging from work in their situation. As such, the company should share responsibility in setting OTTO work norms and helping employees balance between work and family life. Some of the recommendations include:

1. The manager should set the tone on work/overwork norms (e.g., not working on holidays or weekends, tell OTTO employees to sign off at certain times, forbid employees from taking a Blackberry during family vacations, and reward employees that manage to successfully balance work-life within the team).
2. Communicate clearly working styles and hours that you, as a manager, can abide to.
3. Provide feedback on the priority of tasks given to the OTTO employee. Often employees felt that there was no end to work and all the projects they were getting required the same sense of urgency. They expressed a desire for management feedback on how to prioritize their tasks.
4. Recognize the nature of OTTO work. Our study suggests that OTTO work is conducted differently than in a traditional office involving more frequent and different types of communication, more self-promotion, more self-management of time, and constant multitasking of family-work life. We suggest that management should consider the time considerations of OTTO work during planning and task prioritization.
5. The company and management should establish organizational norms regarding managing family life during working hours. We found discrepancies in these norms within IBM. For example, some OTTO employees had clear guidelines from management regarding the outsourcing of family care during work hours; however, this was not the case for others.

5. Development of Trust and Relationships

Overall, we find that both the social aspects of relationships and trust continue to remain salient aspects of the work environment even in OTTO contexts. However, data suggest that creating and maintain relationships and trust in the virtual context is more difficult and requires a

very deliberate effort from all team participants. It is crucial that OTTO employees take the initiative and responsibility of creating and maintaining the social glue in a virtual context.

The major difficulty with developing workplace relationships in OTTO arrangements is that establishing relationships takes longer and requires a larger personal investment. Most informants agreed that it takes twice as much time and effort to create and maintain virtual relationships. Further, developing relationships virtually takes a much more deliberate effort to start and maintain the flow of communication. Informants also spoke of the difficulty in relating to someone they have never met face-to-face. The relationship issue was a major challenge, particularly for newly recruited OTTOs, for those who have not been in the company for a number of years, for those who only worked remotely during their tenure with the company (and, as such, do not know the employees in the traditional office), and for those who recently joined a different division. We did not find this problem among managers we interviewed.

There is a general agreement among informants that trust was essential in maintaining a working relationship in any OTTO environment. However, they also suggested that it is more difficult to create and maintain trust in a virtual context as compared to a traditional office context. We found that trust was facilitated in cases where the OTTO employee continued to work under the same manager during the transition from traditional to OTTO or simply worked with the manager previously under other projects. Prior work-based relationships with the manager strengthened the virtual relationship under OTTO conditions and eased the transition process. Otherwise, informants strongly urged a face-to-face meeting with managers and other team members as essential for building trust. No one recommended starting out in OTTO arrangements with a manager with whom they did not have a prior relationship with or any experience working together.

Data suggested many strategies for workplace trust and relationship development. However, we focus below only on those that are more relevant for the OTTO arrangement.

Personal Strategies for Establishing Trust

1. Meeting goals and commitments becomes even more important in a virtual arrangement as this is the first cue your team and management have to trusting you.

2. Be available. Respond promptly to IMing. However, when not available, let your team and management know. We found availability and quick response especially key in managerial positions. OTTO employees expect management to be available to them, not only through IMing, but on the phone as well.
3. Over communicate your current activity and your achievements. Utilize daily conversations with your manager and other team members to communicate your achievements. Communicating is the one way you can create transparency in what you do.
4. Take initiative and deliberately participate in projects throughout the organization. Further, be an active participant in team conference calls and meetings. These will strengthen your personal reputation and credibility.
5. Know your colleagues (be it team members, managers, or other employees) personally. With a lack of face-to-face communication, trust can be facilitated by getting to know and relate to others on a personal basis.

Manager Strategies for Establishing Trust among OTTO Employees

1. Understand the challenges/issues that OTTO employees face in addition to other work related issues and try to provide solutions and mentor them on such issues. It is important that the manager recognizes the complexities of OTTO work and acknowledges it to the employee.
2. Recognize OTTO employees and team efforts and achievements and promote them within the organization. Our informants agreed that this was the job of the manager.
3. Keep communication flowing in both directions. This enables OTTO employees to know what you, as a manager, are doing and provide them with a view of your work achievements and ethics. We also found that not sharing work-related or informant

information or organizational “gossip” with OTTO employees is seen as a sign that you, as a manager, do not trust them. Keeping the information flow open facilitates a trust based environment.

4. Do not micro-manage! OTTO employees are typically self-starters and independent personalities. They are committed to their work. Furthermore, they choose to work remotely because they like the flexibility of managing their own work schedule and deadlines. Thus, we found that none of our informants like micro-managing managers and they saw this management style as a sign of distrust.
5. Start with the premise of trusting the OTTO employee until proven otherwise. As confidence is difficult to establish in a virtual context, it is important to start with a trusting presumption. However, managers talked about continuing to check and monitor the performance, workload, and experience of new OTTO employees. Some managers use weekly status reports or weekly conference calls with OTTO employees to assess their performance.
6. Clearly state your expectations as a manager for the OTTO employees. Because of the virtual nature of OTTO arrangements, clarity of communication becomes essential. Additionally, be fair in terms of making sure that everyone on your team hears and receives the same information.

Recommendations for Relationship Building in OTTO Situations:

1. Take the lead to initiate a personal phone conversation with other OTTO team members and managers to introduce yourself, as well as to get to know the others personally.
2. The manager of the virtual team should take the initiative to have a one-to-one communication with each team member individually and then have a team conference call. More frequent communication was recommended at the beginning of team projects.

3. Managers should facilitate social interaction among team members in addition to work-based communication. Additionally, the manager should utilize work opportunities to integrate new and old team members together. For example, one manager talked about using senior team members to train newcomers.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this study finds that OTTO work arrangements are demanded and well received by employees and managers. However, we identify five key issues in working in OTTO situations: 1) high incidence of workplace isolation, 2) challenges from the lack of face-to-face communication, 3) experiences low visibility to management, 4) challenges with managing work-life balance, and 5) challenges of developing virtual relationships and trust. We elaborate on the issues related with each of these five challenges and suggest numerous ways of managing OTTO work better individually and organizationally.

Moreover, our study provides insights into the different nature of OTTO work and management's approach. OTTO work is different from traditional office work. Our study suggests that when compared to traditional work, OTTO work differs in the following ways: 1) it involves more and various forms of communication and, as such, it may take longer to conduct business, 2) it is conducted in contexts that may be socially and organizationally more isolated, 3) it is more self-managed and self-directed, and 4) it occurs in a context where the boundary between home and work roles are blurred. We recommend that companies need to recognize the diverse nature of OTTO work and the challenges that come with it. Companies and management need to provide the support (technical, staff, professional, financial, etc), training, and mentoring programs to enable OTTO employees to identify and better cope with OTTO challenges. Further, management needs to plan and develop ways to compensate for the lack of social and face-to-face interactions in the virtual workplace. Additionally, management should recognize that OTTO work may take longer and require different forms of communication and performance evaluation systems. Finally, developing workplace relationships and trust in OTTO situations is more challenging and requires more time and personal investment. Organizations need to provide venues to facilitate networking and relationship building among OTTO employees and management.

This study also finds that the work-life flexibility, which constitutes the key employee benefit for the OTTO work arrangement, is difficult to manage individually. We suggest that organizations need to recognize the difficulty of separating work and home responsibilities in OTTO contexts and the challenge of maintaining a balance between the two. Organizations need to be aware that the “over productive/overwork” ethic that drives the cultures of virtual organizations may cause employee burnout, work-life stress, and high turnover. Organizations and management need to set work norms that guide balanced work-life practices and reward employees that practice them. Further, direct managers of OTTO employees need to regularly mentor these workers on work-life balance and help them prioritize projects, deadlines, and even personal career and life goals.

Finally, this study hints at the reflexive and self-deliberate nature of OTTO work. Our data suggest that not everyone can be successful in working in OTTO arrangements. As such, virtual organizations need to make strategic human resource management decisions in hiring the right type of independent, self-starter, self-confident, outstanding communicators to operate in such work arrangements. We plan to address these personality characteristics in the follow up survey study. This study further suggests that newcomers in an organization or in a profession find it more difficult to perform successfully in OTTO situations, and require more mentoring and management. More importantly, OTTO employees need to understand that working in such situations mean that they need to be reflexive and self-manage their career, communication, performance, and networking much more than in a traditional office setting. While we have suggested ways for management and organizations to enhance self-management and self-control, we believe it is ultimately the responsibility of the OTTO employee to be deliberate in self-promoting, communicating, and developing relations, as well as asking for help and support.

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