

Analysis of Management Support of Flexible Work Options During COVID-19



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Introduction

In early 2020, a pandemic swept across the world, causing a panic in nearly every country. COVID-19, an unknown virus at the time, impacted millions across the world by the end of the year. Many people lost family members and loved ones, many lost jobs, or businesses, and many scrambled to keep up with the new norm of quarantine, social distancing, and working from home.

For professionals, working from home can be a considerable adjustment. Many had to transition immediately to a home setup, where there are distractions, such as their children or pets. Some faced technological issues, like slow internet, or inadequate technology for the needs of their job. For some, this transition was easy, and support from their companies was incredible. For others, it was difficult, especially if their employer did not have available technology to manage internet-based operations. The success of the companies who did continue operations depended on how well they managed the transition to online work, and how well they were able to support their employees through this transition. It typically fell on the company's management to create an action plan with goals and a comprehensive action plan to meet the goals virtually.

Background

During a pandemic in the 21st century, few businesses are considered essential to the entire population. Because these businesses almost always require the presence of employees onsite to interact with customers, most of these businesses were able to continue some form of operation during the pandemic. However, in-person work now poses a significant threat to the health and wellness of employees. It may not be possible for employees to quit their job or find other work if they do not want to work at an in-person job. Nearly every other type of business either shut down for a length of time, or it transitioned to a virtual work environment. In cases where virtual work was not possible, the business may not have opened at all during the imposed quarantine, or even after that. Some businesses temporarily closed, and were able to reopen at a later time during the pandemic. The ever-changing conditions and regulations that stem from the virus impact employees greatly across the country.

The transition to a virtual work environment was easy for some companies. Those companies who already had virtual employees or who worked online while even in the office had less of a transition. Even so, new problems arose to help support operations and ease the transition for employees. Technological issues were at the forefront of these issues, but many companies also faced new problems like home distractions for employees and possible technological incompetency from some employees.

Companies that did not previously have a virtual component often faced newfound difficulties, and existing problems were amplified, while undertaking a virtual transition. The transition could be difficult on employees, especially while they adapt to the new normal. Employees have faced new problems that they haven't encountered before, and support from their management is the key factor in their outlook on their job. All of these conditions increased the stress and decreased productivity of employees, and the company overall unless they were able to adapt to a virtual workspace rather quickly.

Testable Question

In considering a variety of industries, did upper management adequately support the transition to a virtual workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to analyze the feelings of employees in various industries. The survey estimates how well the employees feel that upper management evolved their organization to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions and work conditions through the pandemic. If virtual work was possible, participants were asked how well their employer supported their transition. If virtual work was not possible, participants were asked to share their experiences of working with managers for in-person work.

Methods

To test the effectiveness of management support of the transition to a virtual workspace, participants were given a survey. The survey contained extensive questions regarding the employment status before the COVID-19 pandemic, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey addressed the industry that the participant works in, as well as an opportunity for the participant to express how and why the higher management did or did not support a transition to a virtual work environment. The survey was given anonymously and presented to a wide range of students and professionals.

Analysis

The participants are mostly younger people who may not have a professional job yet, if they are still in college. The industries that the participants provided ranged among many different areas. However, many of the participants work in the food service industry.

Many of these participants were laid off or took a leave of absence during the pandemic. Whether or not they were offered other options by their employers, those participants who were laid off or took a leave of absence can be considered as having somewhat supportive managers because this option was offered to them.

Those participants who were employed in other industries, like education, engineering, and business were more able to convert to a virtual work environment because most in-person services can be conducted in this manner. Participants seemed to have an easier, more effective transitions when management offered adequate technology and training that benefitted the employee.

Based on the sample, about 50% of the participants believed that the management of their company provided support throughout the transition to a virtual workplace. The management did this by providing tools and training necessary to feel confident in the work that their position requires. This was done through providing company technology as needed, as well as training on virtual applications and platforms that are used in that specific company.

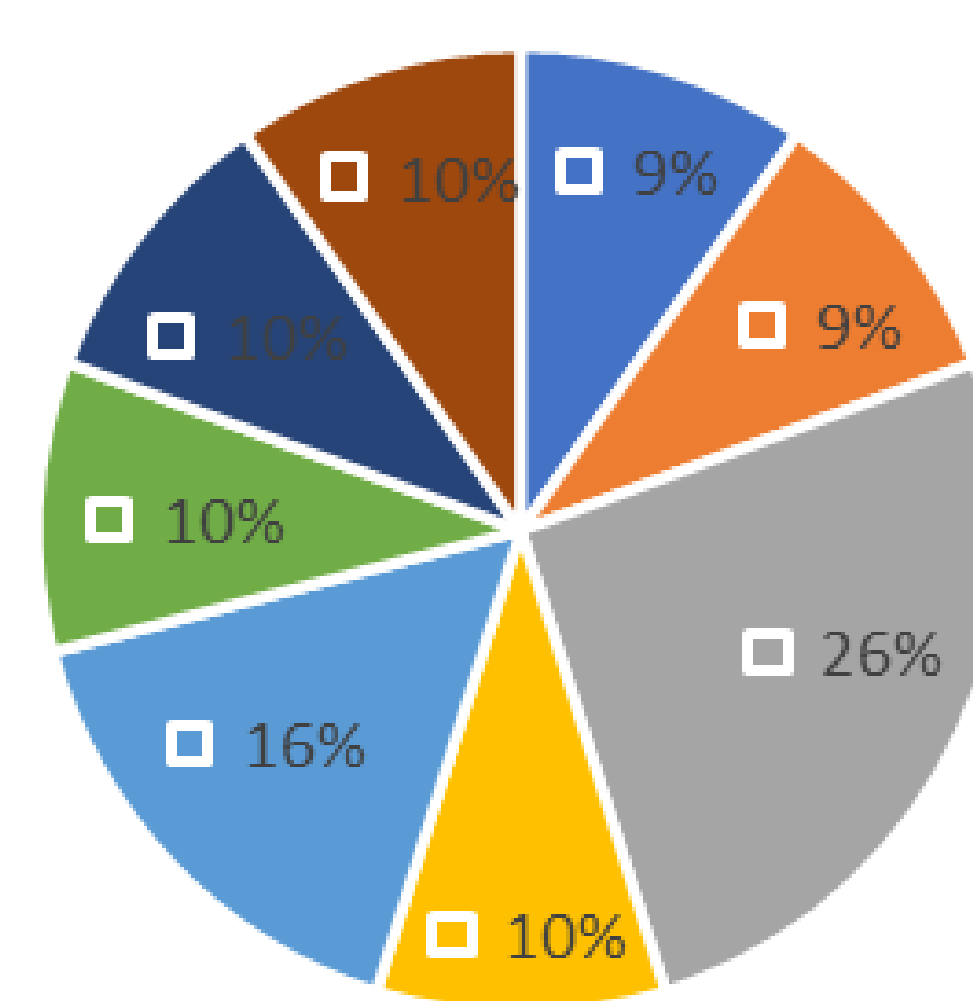
Some other ways that the participants reported management support are flexible hours while working from home. The flexible hours aspect allows employees to create a better schedule for themselves that supports their other responsibilities (e.g. school, other jobs, caring for children, and etc.). Flexible schedule and work options allows the employee to choose the work environment and schedule that best fits their needs. Management that offers these options are more likely to have happy and productive employees that feel supported.

The other 50% of the participants reported that their management did not or could not support a transition to a virtual workspace. There were some reports of layoffs, which were caused by the pandemic. Some of the participants reported leaves of absences as well, which were optional, based on the needs of the employee. Arguably, it can be considered support from management if the company is able to offer leaves of absence for employees. Overall, about 50% of the sample reported that their employer was supportive of a virtual workplace transition and about 50% reported that their employer was not supportive. Since the feedback from participants was evenly split, it does not give complete insight into how all employees feel. Because there are many factors that play into employee responses (like specific industry, "good" or "bad" managers, and an individual's own situation), each response is impacted. Overall, it seems like managers supported to the best of their ability in the transition to a virtual workplace, when the transition was possible.

Conclusion

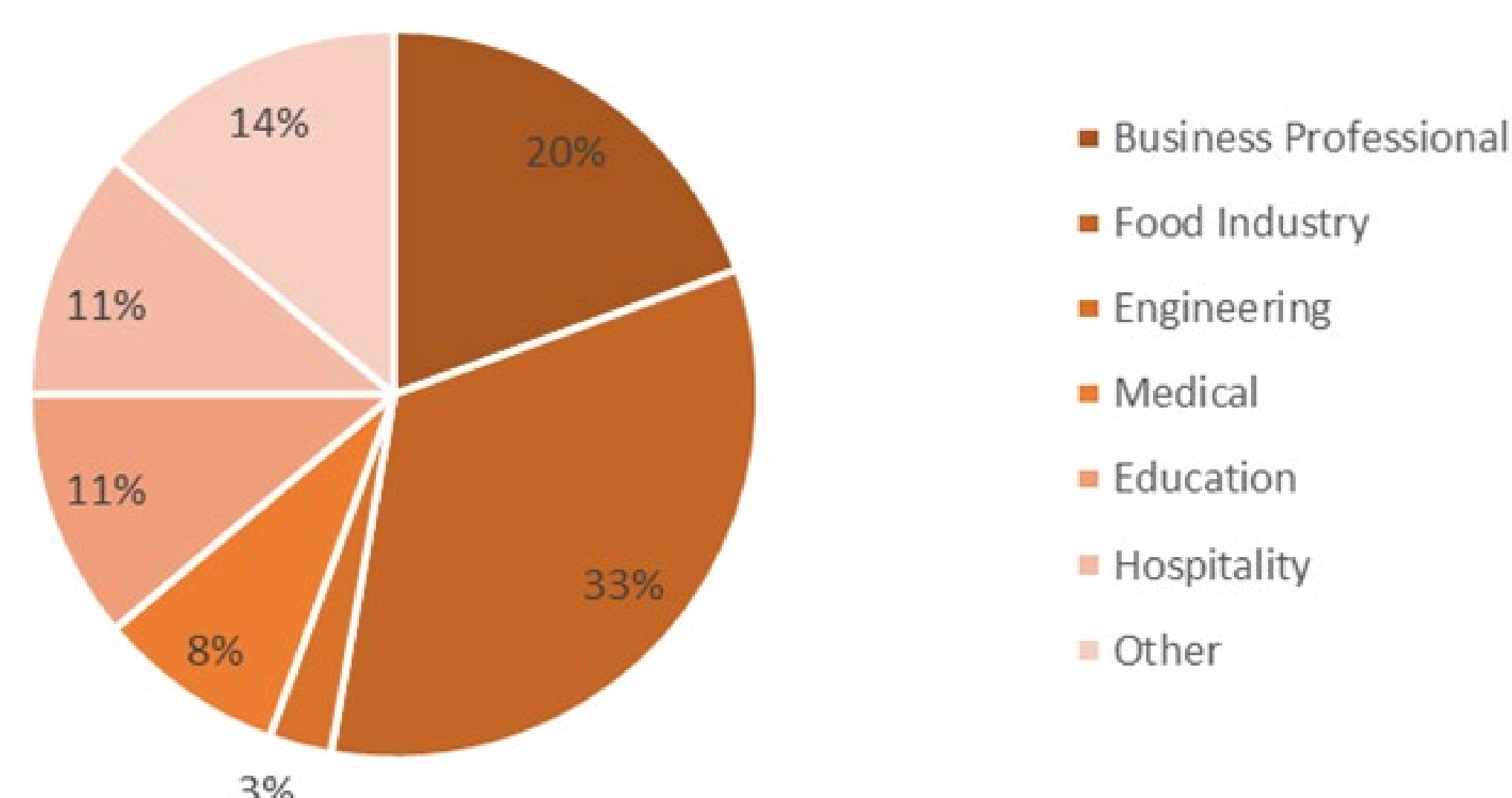
The COVID-19 pandemic has affected employees and employers in many ways, primarily negatively. Although a virtual workplace is possible for some industries, it is not always possible for industries or jobs where in-person or hands-on work is required. Management support in the transition to a virtual workspace included training in the virtual programs utilized, adequate technology provided, and a flexible schedule. In some situations, management could not support a virtual workspace, which resulted in employees feeling discouraged, or even being laid off from work. As the pandemic continues, management and employees have the task of maintaining resilience and perseverance, while continually evolving to match the needs of the company to the restrictions of the pandemic.

How Management Did or Did Not Support Virtual Transition



- Provided training and equipment
- Laid off/leave of absence
- Understanding Management
- No training given
- Flexible Hours
- Virtual Work Not Possible
- Corrupt Management
- No support from management

Industry Breakdown



- Business Professional
- Food Industry
- Engineering
- Medical
- Education
- Hospitality
- Other