

# Do Organizations Benefit from e-Workers?

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## ABSTRACT

In the digitally connected world of today a whole new set of relations between people has been defined which has not left the business environment untouched. Among the outcomes of this trend with unknown positive potentials and, certainly, weaknesses worthy of deeper studies is the newly-discussed topic of e-workers. Though, there have been certain issues discussed by researchers in this field; the results have not yet proved this notion of being merely positive or negative, as a result this issue is still practically dim. In this regard, organizational interrelations, influence of digital relations on worker's trust and commitment, vocational psychology, diversity of the workers and its effects on team working and organizational culture, legal definitions, official issues and internal costs are among the key subjects to be reviewed. However, recent studies have revealed that, identifying all the potentials of e-workers, face-to-face relations are still more preferred. This study paper, which is an open one, is on investigating of the primary steps of developing a meta-analysis on the relevant literature.

## Keywords

e-worker, e-people, e-Human Resource

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This study aims at a deep survey on the topic of e-worker to develop a meta-analysis on the relevant literature. Also, this paper is an open study in the primary steps toward the topic, as well as to offer some introductions and clues for future studies beneficial on developing-countries settings.

In almost all developed countries, the debate of e-workers was opened just a while after internet came into common use. However; the matter came into noticeable interest at its advent, but as every newly born phenomenon (Friedman, 2005), nowadays it is being looked critically and can be argued that the critics of e-worker are not so much less than its defenders (Herman, 1999).

In this study paper, the term e-worker is defined as "those human resources working for a firm not totally in the physical spaces of the firm," meaning that most of their interactions with firm \_managers or colleagues\_ take place via electronic devices namely through internet.

As a result, e-worker is still looked upon as an "informal" kind of human resource (Bland, 2001; Mackenzie, 2010). It may be due to the fact that e-workers have less strong relations with organizations and they are looked as less loyal personnel (Latapie & Tran, 2007). So, it is a very important challenge for managers especially team leaders to make a collaborative atmosphere between e-workers and other members/parts of organizations (Latapie & Tran, 2007; Solomon, 2001; Warkentin, Sayeed, & Hightower 1997). Therefore, new paradigms for team-working and leadership must be created (Golden, 2006; Zuboff, 1988). Considering the given above, it seems that conducting deeper studies are essential to look into the effectiveness and efficiency of e-working concept.

The concept of e-worker necessitates the extant of some electronic infrastructures including proper network, high-quality hardware and appropriate software facilities. Since, obviously some of the essential infrastructures are under the control and managements of the governments; this idea that every firm in every country has the same chance of using e-worker is dimmed. Also, the employees are not in the same and equal positions, while, sometimes even in a same city, the access to the Internet is not offered to all citizens in an equal fashion; so, e-employees are not in equal situations with their e-colleagues in working for the firm (Berment, 2007; Mackenzie, 2010).

However, Looking into the issue from a legal point of view, there would be a serious need for setting new regulations for both employers' and employees' rights especially regarding their time-offs, retirement, and insurance.

Another important factor to be considered here is that since currently organizations have to transfer into Learning Organizations (LO), the features of LO as shared vision, knowledge sharing, system thinking, and etc. must be studied regarding e-workers. For instance, at the first glance it seems that Knowledge Management is easier to be conducted for e-workers but it should be noticed that it is only applicable when people individually have the will to share their knowledge in the electronic space. However creating a Learning Organization in this atmosphere needs deeper studies in all individual, team and organizational dimensions.

Since, in most matured organizations the formal and informal programs of coaching and mentoring are under an important emphasis and as these programs are based on the close and face-to-face relations between coach or mentor and novice, new paradigms are needed when the novice is an e-employee (Merriman, Schmidt, & Dunlap-Hinkler 2007; Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007).

E-working also needs to be studied from the psychological point of view with certainly many dimensions and features. Satisfying needs and then having motivated people and higher performances need to be thoroughly studied (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). While, when it comes to meeting needs as need for status, prestige, affiliation, and power it requires a closer look (Mackenzie, 2010).

"Psychology of control" point of view, which is of great importance for both employee and employer, must be considered when studying e-working concept. As far as "sense of control" and "need for control" are concerned there will be a good pattern. Given that technically, the more sense of control in the mind of e-worker there would be the higher chances of creativity (Bordia, 1997). Studies show that since the sense of control is higher in the minds of e-employees they exhibit more creativity. This is a subject matter which has the capability of bearing interesting results regarding e-worker especially if the concept is deeply studied. In addition, there is plethora of subject matters worthy of going after.

## 2 ADVANTAGES OF HIRING E-WORKERS

There have been some advantages regarding e-worker hiring. First, e-workers are less dependent on the workspace at which they work, so job displacements and transfers to other working teams are much easier for e-employees and as a result they are more flexible in regard to such changes. Second, hiring of e-employees may help the organization to be more flat; a characteristics necessary for modern organizations (Chandra, Kumar, & Smirnov, 2002; Gibson, 2006). Moreover, those organizations preferring the matrix structure will benefit a lot from hiring of e-employees through their higher performance. Finally, higher chances of a superior cross-teams cooperation situation, critical for every firm, are being offered by e-worker hiring. The reason is that e-employees are capable of establishing better and more expanded relationships with other team members, though certainly these relations would not be as deep as face-to-face relationships (Mackenzie, 2010).

There are more advantages regarding the bounds of organization and its relationship with the environment, in which e-worker will spread the operational scope of the firm. Also, by using e-worker, the firm will have more open borders; of course this is not suitable for all organizations but it has been accepted that the benefits of open borders for most of organizations would be more than its costs.

Another advantage of hiring e-employees might be the fact that e-worker hiring provides firms with more diverse employees which has been considered as a superior property of a firm. This happens as a result of the potential to attract various types of personalities in the virtual space. Furthermore, the issue of diversity comes as a beneficial property for working teams for the fact that the employees would simply be able to join more teams in the virtual space. In this regard, the idea of Communities Of Practice (COP) will be implemented better and easier.

However, e-worker hiring may not be considered as a kind of outsourcing; though those firms familiar with e-working are better able to adapt with outsourcing and hence manage it more powerfully. Also, applying crowd-sourcing phenomenon, which is a competitive advantage for firms, is much easier for those firms hiring e-employers because they are accustomed to e-relations and can prevail in its management.

Using e-worker would result in administrative reduced costs. Examples are office entrainment, catering, furniture, and equipments (DeSouza, 2005; Burriss, 1998). This is while the e-employees are more comfortable because they are in their own shaped place such as a home-office. Thus, from this point of view their performance will increase (Mackenzie, 2010).

Those firms adapted to e-working notions are more flexible. For example, they are more readily adaptable in joining with other organizations and making a joint-venture (Solomon, 2001).

## 4 DISADVANTAGES OF HIRING E-WORKERS

A significant disadvantage of hiring e-workers may perhaps be that e-employees are not confident, assured and hopeful; so, they don't exhibit high levels of loyalty. In addition, not having close or face-to-face relations may also be considered as a contributing factor. In this regard, e-workers' commitment may come as a factor in need of careful

studying (Jacobs, 2008; Latapi & Tran, 2001). Another shortcoming of applying e-employment in a firm may possibly be that undiscovered potentials of employees faces less chances to be discovered in a virtual relationship. Moreover, the process of exploring a talent in an individual sometimes happens in a flash, a good example may be the state of a friendly and informal chat. Such flashes take place less in an e-relationship and most of the time will happen in a face-to-face meeting (Mackenzie, 2010).

"E" atmosphere makes a less synergic situation in comparison with a real office place. Colleagues and managers working in a same place and with close relations share energies by creating synergic relation (Garavan & Carbery, 2007; Bland, 2004; Merriman, Schmidt, & Dunlap-Hinkler 2004).

Also another disadvantage is that training e-workers for higher standards and promotions is harder for they are not physically present at the office and somehow they are more independent in setting their own work strategies. Consequently, it may be considered as a rule that e-workers must be accepted as they are.

Moreover, some powerful and especially knowledge-based companies in a strategic view look at their employees as human capital sources. But, based on the analysis of characteristics of e-workers, It seems that e-employees may not be possibly considered as human capitals compared with others (Jacobs, 2008).

While most of noted companies are recognized by their remarkable organizational culture, creating a culture by hiring of e-workers at the first glance would be rather harder. Though, this may be beneficial for those organizations preferring a diverse culture. Generally, creating and maintaining the cultural specialties of an organization is harder by using e-worker (Latapi & Tran, 2007; Solomon, 2001).

One of the most important roles of Human Resource Management sector of each firm is to develop the HRM strategy compatible with the firm's strategy and that seems to be harder with e-workers. Also, official disciplines are always hard to be totally accepted. Bearing this in mind, when a firm hires e-employees, with their own rules of working and cooperating with the firm, those employees who are making themselves adaptable to office rules seem to feel a sense of discrimination which is not welcoming. This is even harder for those who have experienced more years of cooperation with the firm (Golden, 2006; Zuboff, 1988).

## 5 CONCLUSION

In general, e-worker can be looked upon and studied from a critical point of view. Success of the e-worker system is so dependent on the condition, such as the country in which it is being applied, social condition, firm type, and etc. (Qualman, 2009; Bement, 2007). Accordingly it cannot be said that the system always comes prevailing and desirable. Researches on e-working are not limited within the management science and should be studied interdisciplinary, notably in regards with IT, psychology and sociology (Mackenzie, 2010; Qualman, 2009; Bordia, 1997).

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