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Trinity Saint David

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Managing People

Assessment 1

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INTRODUCTION

Sainsbury's is a chain of supermarkets based in the UK. It is the second-largest supermarket chain in the UK. It was founded in 1869 by John James Sainsbury in London (Sainsbury's, 2022). It has more than 1428 retail markets in the UK. After the Coronavirus Pandemic, Sainsbury's and its managing directors are now thinking of shifting their work culture to flexible working practices through various measures. The human resource manager is responsible for the integration of the flexible work culture in the company and the various aspects related to flexible work cultures like diversity and inclusion. This study is about the approach of a human resource manager of a huge company like Sainsbury's and how he/she will implement the practices in the company without any negative consequences.

PROMOTION OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION THROUGH FLEXIBLE WORKING

Flexible working can be understood as a working pattern that is partially or entirely different from the regular or conventional work method (Austin-Egole, *et al*, 2020). After the Coronavirus pandemic, many companies around the world changed their working methods, and work from home prevailed due to the complete shutdown of the cities across the globe. This change in the working methods can be described as flexible working and was adapted due to the Pandemic but turned out to be great for many companies in the world. Working from home created a great work-life balance for the employees leading to improved well-being and much better productivity (UNIDO, 2022). Apart from working from home, the flexible working practice includes many other changes in the working culture which are not conventional but can be very effective for increased productivity, like part-time work for some employees, providing suitable working hours to employees, target-based working hours, etc.

Diversity and Inclusion are also very prominent factors in any company and managing diversity and inclusion while maintaining flexible working is also a challenge that a Human resource manager has to deal with. Merging promoting diversity and inclusion with flexible working is very essential for the company and the human resource manager needs to look after it to make sure it has been implemented precisely and properly. Diversity and inclusion in the workplace are as vital as the success of the company.

Diversity means including various needs of employees who are from different cultures, different social and financial backgrounds, different religions, etc. Diversity of the employees also includes and takes genders and disabilities into consideration. Inclusion can be understood as the involvement and insertion of people of all kinds of diversity into the employee base of the company regardless of their religion, gender, disability, etc. The government of the UK has also implemented laws and acts to promote equality and inclusion of employees from diverse cultures and backgrounds. The equality act 2010 (GOV.UK, 2022) is one such act that enacts obeying various laws and rules in the country.

Flexible working and flexibility at the workplace is the most important thing for diversity and inclusion. Without flexibility diversity and inclusion are not possible. Diversity at some point can be noticed much more easily than inclusion because of the diverse nature of the society and the laws made by the government for the diverse diaspora. But inclusion is something that depends on the working and ethical

culture of the company and the employees of the company. Here, flexibility comes into play, it is easier for people with flexible working styles to accept and adapt to different people. Flexibility is not just about adapting to different working hours or different working methodologies like working from home etc., but it is about the mindset and the adaptability at the workplace which defines flexibility and thus this mindset allows the space for inclusion at the workplace (Vargas, 2020). Therefore, flexible employees and staff will not face any problems while welcoming people from different cultures or backgrounds. Companies that are not flexible in terms of working face more challenges regarding inclusion as well as productivity and results. Flexibility is basically about promoting different working methods, different working hours, and different working locations - like working from home, if and when possible - according to the needs of certain employees. This capacity to adapt to the needs and welfare of the employees creates an inclusive and happy workforce for the company and generates more productivity. The human resource manager must make sure that diversity and inclusion are achieved through flexibility, which makes employees happier and increases productivity because of the positive and inclusive environment created by the human resource manager. This kind of flexibility and inclusion in the workplace creates a soothing environment that allows the employees to work without any stress and thus increases the productivity and creativity of the employees. Flexible working is directly linked to employee satisfaction which in turn encourages inclusion and positivity at the workplace. The emphasis on flexible working is so extreme because of its excessive need. Certain people like disabled people, single parents, aged people, need a flexible working style because of their compulsion and therefore flexible working is so important for such people and for their inclusion in the workplace without any hesitation or complication (Timewise, 2022). The human resource manager at every step is responsible for flexibility, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace and to promote all of this it is very necessary to create flexible roles at the company to meet the needs of a wide range of people. Sainsbury's is one such company with various departments allowing flexibility, diversity, and inclusion, and the human resource manager at the Sainsbury's is responsible for all this and must make sure that all of this is properly practised inside the company.

Ever since the Coronavirus pandemic hit the world, flexible working became the need of the hour and the whole world has now adapted to flexible working. Flexible working is now the future of work. Enabling Environment Guidelines (EEGs) were created by the United Nations industrial development organisation in 2019 to create a more diverse and inclusive work environment (UNIDO, 2022). The idea

of these guidelines was to create a diverse, and inclusive work environment that is beneficial for the organisation as well as the working personnel. The working conditions in which the pandemic forced the world was the first ever experience like this for the majority of the people around the world, for instance, working from home was a very new concept for the world but its success now triggered people to bring further flexible changes in the work environment to increase flexibility and inclusion. These changes are considered the fourth industrial revolution which was bound to happen sometime in the future but the pandemic forced it earlier in an abrupt way. For flexible working and its positive impacts on diversity and inclusion to work, managers and employees must build trust between them and the strict and inflexible environment at the workplace must end. One of the perfect examples of flexible working can be seen in the efforts by the UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS). UNAIDS gave a window of 12 hours, from 7 AM to 7 PM, to their employees to finish their work at any time in between according to their ease. With the emergence of the pandemic and changes in the working style, the new generation of employees is now eager to notice more flexible changes in the work environment which will promote diversity and inclusion.

FLEXIBLE WORKING AND INEQUALITY

More women are choosing to work from home after the pandemic but it could easily destroy their chances of success in the future. After the pandemic, everyone wanted to work from home and the companies could not deny it, so they had to give work from home options to their employees, regardless of their gender. Women had been demanding work from home for ages because of their responsibilities to their families but new research suggests that the work from home trend can increase gender inequality at the workplace (Partridge, 2021). Katherine Mann, the policymaker at the Bank of England even went further and said that the women who accept work from home are risking their future and damaging their careers by doing so. She said that because of the fact that women who chose to work from home won't return to the office to the same degree as men after the pandemic is over. She suggested that digitalisation and modern technology could not replace the live and face-to-face conversations held at the office that are very significant for growth and the future. Despite the fact, more women chose to work from home because of their responsibilities towards their families and were seen taking on more responsibilities during the pandemic including work, household chores, and caring responsibilities. The work-from-home flexible environment has been accepted by people around the world but for some people, it has been a setback and not easy. This is the case with the women who have children and are responsible for looking after them. This thus creates some kind of inequality for women when opting to work from home because of the burden of household responsibilities as well as work responsibilities falling on their shoulders. To this day the responsibility of the child and the home management is utterly tied to women, which doesn't give them any freedom despite flexible working, on the contrary, it can increase their problems instead of opting for work from home. Another big issue faced by women during the pandemic and the flexible working system such as working from home was the decreased pay scale. Women received less money as compared to men while working from home. Men and Women both are choosing to work from home but it is women who will suffer more from this. Various studies have supported the fact that more women have suffered the impact of the pandemic and flexible working conditions than men, and more women, especially young women were unemployed compared to men in the United Kingdom, as a side-effect of the pandemic (Chung, et al, 2021). All these studies clearly state that the pandemic and flexible working like working from home have affected gender equality for the worse. Owing to all this hassle and issues created by flexible working, the human resource manager is highly responsible for appeasing the situation and somehow lessening the inequality caused for the betterment and welfare of the women. The human resource manager also

comes into play because women are the ones most exploited as a result of flexible working due to the pandemic. The pay scale of women has also been compromised because of the reducing working hours due to household responsibilities. Men on the other hand are earning more because of the increased working hours due to work from home. This is a classic argument about gender equality and needs to be addressed. There are prevailing challenges in ensuring that men and women both benefit the same from flexible working and gender inequality is a matter of concern here. At Sainsbury's, the human resource manager must encourage and allow women to work in the labour market so that they can maintain their income while working flexibly. This could be immensely useful in reducing the pay gap between men and women. The human resource manager is responsible to take such initiatives to promote gender equality in workplaces and an inflexible working environment. Apart from the household chores, home schooling was also highly performed by the mothers, since the schools were closed during the pandemic. This extra burden deprived women of their work and adequate pay scale. Rise in the work from home was also more in women and this also led to more gender inequality and discrimination because of the obvious social and cultural trends that are going on for years, that women are meant to take care of the home and men are the ones responsible for earning. According to a survey, more than 50% of people including men and women think that women carry out more or all household chores and childcare tasks during work from home.

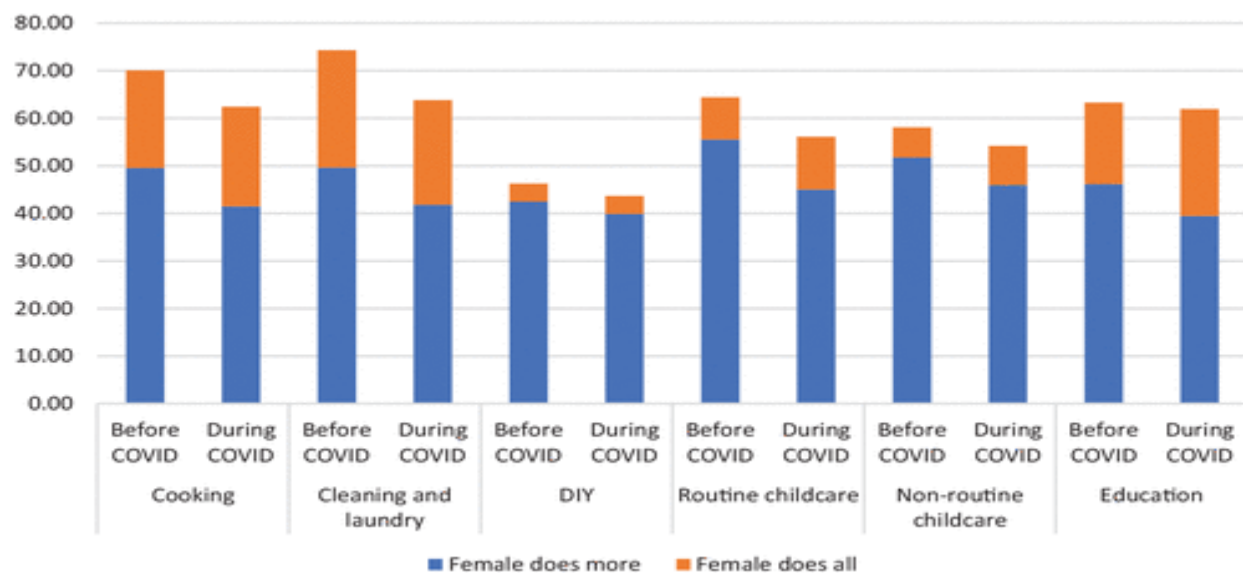


Figure 1: Division of household work and child care between man and women before and during the COVID-19 Lockdown

(Source - Chung, et al, 2021)

So, to understand it more precisely, we can say that rise in flexible work like working from home has led to more gender inequality and discrimination against women due to various reasons. The reason behind this inequality is the fact that due to work from home the demand for household work and childcare has drastically increased and the impact of which was solely faced by the women in most of the cases, which affected their work life and pay scale. Now, after the pandemic, the demand for flexible work has soared and more and more people are inclining towards work from home. This may lead to an even further increase in gender inequality if the issue is not addressed timely and effectively. The negative impact of this trend shift is mostly endured by the women, and the human resource managers and the men in the house need to think about making certain changes in their professional as well as personal life to share the burden equally and to maintain gender equality at work as well as at home. As the human resource managers themselves are in support of flexible working, according to a new report, they must also look to find a way to maintain gender equality and an equal pay scale for men and women. Work from home is also highly appraised by the companies and managers because it helps in cost-cutting because of little to no use of the infrastructural facility. This is also the reason for enhanced flexible working and increased gender inequality as a result. To make up for this, the human resource managers must work to promote gender equality in their company as well as encourage others to do so by setting an example. This is the duty of the human resource managers to endorse gender equality and equal rights for women, regardless of the circumstances. They must find new ways to empower women in these hard times and must encourage gender equality through their arduous efforts.

CONCLUSION

This study is dedicated to providing detailed and elaborated knowledge about flexible working and its effects on diversity, inclusion, and inequality. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on work culture around the world and the negative and positive effects of work from the home culture in companies. This study explains In detail the meaning and importance of flexible working, diversity, and inclusion and also emphasises problems of inequality caused by flexible working and work from home working culture. This study aims to point out the reasons leading to the inequality and to find out the ways to eradicate the inequality problem and establish equality and an equal pay scale.

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