ANTECEDENTS OF ONLINE WORKING PROFICIENCY (OWP) POST PANDEMIC FOR CONTINUED REMOTE WORK FROM HOME EMPLOYEE OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The global pandemic has brought in widespread disruptive changes in the way organizations work today. In order to cope up with the unprecedented situation, organizations during the pandemic had adopted the Work from Home to accommodate the new normal, which seem to have found acceptance and viability post pandemic as well. With these organizational changes practitioners need to re-evaluate and re-think practices in the so called post pandemic era as the rules of the game have changed. The present study has tried to explore the antecedent factors influencing the Online Working Proficiency (OWP) of employees working in firms located in North India with remote working. The study deployed sequential mixed method research methodology, the first phase of which constituted data collection through interviews (qualitative study) from industry leaders which led to the theoretical conceptualization of the dependent variable Online Working Proficiency (OWP) and identification of the antecedent factors like Accommodation, Ambiguity Tolerance, Team-Work and Leadership Acumen. The second phase which was quantitative in nature deployed survey method for data collection and the data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) approach. The results of the study reveal that Team-Work and Leadership Acumen emerged as major contributors influencing the Online Working Proficiency (OWP) among the respondents working remotely from home. Accommodation was found to act as a mediator for developing Team-Work under the influence of Ambiguity Tolerance. The study explores new dimensions of employee efficiency measurement and the ways in which their efficiency can be enhanced post the pandemic.

Keywords: Online Working Proficiency, Work From Home, Post Pandemic, SEM, Mixed method research methodology, Accommodation, Leadership Acumen.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the workplace is shifting from ideas of a physical location to a state of mind. Physical location of a working place has been gradually losing its importance due to growth of information technology. Modern working life adapted the system of work from home. Work from home referred as the concept of working in a concern where the employees do not

have to commute to a central and single place of work. It is also called telecommuting and remote work (Anne, 1993). The development in information and communication technologies has made it very easier to complete the tasks outside of the workplace because of good internet connectivity as well as reasonable price, more user-friendly computers, laptops and other similar gadgets. This made working from home easier as well as feasible to perform tasks and likely reduced the employer costs of providing such arrangement. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted organizations globally, especially the huge displacement of employees physical work locations too remotely' located. Due to the pandemic outbreak employees have been urged to stay at home and to reduce social contacts. Many countries in the West were already acquainted with work from home arrangements of working, however, in India; the concept of work from home got more popularity due to the inevitable conditions of the pandemic outrage. During the process of this new arrangement of work, many organizations realized that this new business model was viable w.r.t economic cost savings, improved productivity hours, and increased employee satisfaction. This made working from home easier as well as feasible leading to a promising new way of working in times to come (Shah & Dave, 2021; Al-Azzam et al., 2021).

The outcomes of work from home arrangement, however, have certain advantages and some challenges. Work from home provides employee's convenient environment to focus on their work tasks, greater autonomy at work, work-life balance (Morgan, 2004), reduced leave, reduced attrition, and many more, with certain challenges like stress, decreased control by colleagues or the supervisors, work avoidance, lack of interpersonal communication, etc. Amongst the challenges faced by employees, the most obvious challenge was to adopt the challenges of digital work-life. In this context Abioro et al. (2018) pointed out the relevance of four important work abilities that have evolved due to this digital work life. These included abilities like adapting to digital practices, connecting with others, processing information and digital competence (Abioro et al., 2018). Thus, employees required new ways of measuring productivity in this newer space of working which has been the prime most purpose of the study. As environment changes the rules of the game change, which organizations need to explore, in the current context the researcher tries to delve into Online Worker efficiency (OWP) as a new variable to measure employee productivity.

From the above discussions, it would be rightful to state that '*work from home*' is the new business model that organizations have found viable and adopted, which would continue to exist, also the digital spaces of work have evolved which the employees need to adapt to be able to harmonise in the new workplace settings. Thus, under these changes that have gradually proclaimed themselves in the organizational settings the organizations need to create newer practices and procedures to be able to accommodate these dynamic alterations of work place settings. Recent studies presented a theoretical discussion on the relevance of employee digital know-hows and competence in order to contribute effectively towards the digital projects and assignments initiated by their organizations.

However, it is interesting to note at this point that Work from home has not been a novel concept, it was prevalent even a decade back, had expressed that computer-supported technology is a way to decrease the interpersonal conflicts within organizations which would increase autonomy among employees. Desanctis (1984) stated in his work that an increase in flexibility had a direct impact on the responsible attitude of employees also the real-time cost of expanding

good talent and tapping resources would be another significant impact due to work from home (Bendor-Samuel, 2020). However, there were some scholars in past like Olson & Primps (1984) who proposed that work from home could be limited in scope due to demoralizing issues individuals faced at work which became difficult to combat. However, the diverse opinions were brought to rest as the pandemic left no choice for organizations but to adopt this model for all irrespective of hierarchies, departments and job roles.

As stated by Desyatnikov (2020) work from home had been a normal for many employees since long past. However, most of the studies related to efficiency pertaining to work from home were carried out under stable and predictable conditions in the past, unlike the current pandemic crises where the sudden and abrupt changes led to disruptive changes in the business models under unpredictable circumstances making the study even more relevant. This can be further understood through the event-oriented theoretical system, termed Event System Theory (EST) (Morgeson, 2005; Beeler et al., 2017). According to this theory, organizations are dynamic, hierarchically structured entities. Certain dynamic changes in organizations due to events create meaningful impacts lasting across space and time on organizations. In current context pandemic has been one such event for organizational changes. We address this opportunity and gap by developing an understanding of some salient variables like team work, leadership, ambiguity tolerance, leadership acumen which have created new behaviors among employees in organizations during work from home business model post pandemic. Understanding 'work from home' as an event system theory provides a needed shift in focus of research by developing higher insights among variables that impact online working efficiency under the post pandemic conditions which could have lasting impacts on organizations to continue this model for times to come.

In brief, the present study has tried to explore and evaluate the new dynamics of employee proficiency in a digital era through measuring the constituents of Online Working Proficiency (OWP), and understanding the factors influencing Online Working Proficiency among employees in Indian sub-continent which work remotely as Work from Home (WFH) mode of operations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The impact of the pandemic on work from home has tripled and increased relentlessly. The benefits of working from home have been found advantageous for both the employer and the employee. A study conducted by Stanford over 16000 workers spread across 9 months (2021-22) found some interesting revelations like work from home increased the productivity of the workers by 13% which was significant rise. The reasons cited for the same have been due to the increase in the calls per minute which has been possible due to convenience at work (home) and an increase in the working hours as sick leaves and breaks have become minimal (Source: Surprising Working From Home Productivity Statistics (2022). In a similar study it was even found that the attrition rate of the employee has gone down by 50%.

A review of past literature conducted on work from home has been detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1 RECENT STUDIES RELATED TO WORK FROM HOME BUSINESS MODEL		
Research Paper Title	**Year**	**Implications**
The impact that working from home has on the overall motivation and performance levels Banking organization	2017	Overall it was clear to see the high levels of positivity surrounding working from home and how this impacts positively on employee motivation and performance levels, which can have positive effects on employee well-being, employee work life balance and also job satisfaction
Working from home: characteristics and outcomes of telework	2019	The research has tried to explore relationships between theoretically grounded telework factors and various individual and organizational outcomes of telework (overall satisfaction with telework, perceived advantages of telework, career opportunities and self-reported productivity). Reduced communication with co-workers, supervisor's trust and support, suitability of the working place at home were found to be the most important telework factors impacting different telework outcomes. Higher self-reported productivity was related to reduced time in communicating with co-workers, a suitable working place at home and the possibility to take care of family members when teleworking
The effect of work from home during the covid - 19 pandemic work life balance and its impact on employee performance	2021	This study intends to examine the effect of work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic on work-life balance and its effect on the employee performance of the Aceh Communication, Informatics. Work-life balance also acts as a partial mediator, which can be influenced by work from home and affect employee performance
Work from home during COVID-19: Employees perception and experiences	2021	Willingness of the respondents to work from home is dependent on having the comfortable space at home also willingness to work from home is dependent on the good internet connectivity at home
Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, its effects on health, and recommendations: The pandemic and beyond	2021	It is crucial to develop and implement best practices for working from home to maintain a good level of productivity, achieve the right level of work and life balance and maintain a good level of physical and mental health.
A study on the impacts of work from home among IT employees	2021	The study revealed that health issues and a lack of proper communication due to work from home model. However, work at home has helped to decrease their traveling time and also the cost for the same

As seen from Table 1 above most of the studies conducted on work from home have tried to explore the employee perspectives through cost savings, stress, autonomy, work-life balance, health issues, etc. However, the studies in the past have been inadequate to evaluate the changing dimensions of employee efficiency in the digital remote spaces and assess the factors impacting the online digital efficiency which have been identified as the research gaps so that correct diagnosis and solutions can be applied for increasing employee productivity. Many salient variables like accommodation among social peers, tolerance at work, leadership and teamwork challenges have been focused at in the current study which measures the constituents of Online Working Efficiency (OWP). These variables have been discussed below:

Online Working Proficiency: Employee productivity has been defined through various nomenclatures such as organizational performance (Farooq, 2016), employee performance (Anitha, 2014), corporate performance and new product development performance. The employee productivity is primarily indicated as the financial and the non-financial outcomes that impact the organizational growth (Anitha, 2014). Employee productivity has been measured through subjective and objective measures. Bendor-Samuel (2020) had proposed that before an organization tries to improve its productivity (even in the WFH model), it should be able to understand what are the measures on which the productivity of employees get measured. Sadly, many organizations have adopted the old model of measurement of employee performance on the new format of work from home which would adversely impact employee performance measurement and their job satisfaction eventually. A recent study indicated the relevance and importance of digital literacy in employees for bringing about organizational effectiveness which was found critical in today's space. In this context, other authors like Fabbri et al. (2019) indicated that with more and more use of digital technologies in today's organization employee outcomes needed constant monitoring and focused attention in terms of achieving organizational goals and objectives (Gerda, 2017).

Through the current study, the researcher has tried to re-conceptualize the understanding of efficiency of employees in post pandemic and digital era through exploring Online Working Proficiency as a variable that encompasses procedural knowledge, digital strategies, digital teams, and digital expertise as constituents of measuring employee productivity.

Next the study has tried to explore the factors that impact Online working proficiency like ambiguity tolerance, accommodation, team work and leadership acumen which have been discussed as follows:

Ambiguity Tolerance: Anderson & Kelliher (2020) contended that successful implementation of remote working depended on various factors which were earlier identified by authors like (Kelliher & de Menezes, 2019; Morgan, 2004). Of late, authors like Hamouche (2020) identified factors which influenced the mental health of employees during the COVID-19 emphasizing on the impact of stress inducing factors like perception towards risk, threat and employee safety as important variables that have been addressed through ambiguity tolerance as a constituent of Online working proficiency The studies conducted by Garfin et al. (2020) & Shigemura et al. (2020) had a clear indication that employees and people in general have been stressed out by the perception of danger and threat caused by the global pandemic. Whereas other authors like Zhou et al. (2020) & Brooks et al. (2020) indicated that the impact of growing financial instability due to the lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions could be other criteria's which could impact work from home model of working. In this regard, Hamouche (2020) discussed that issues pertaining to job insecurity could also be attributed towards the sense of uncertainty and risk in employees. Another study conducted by Al-Rabiaah et al. (2020) justified that home quarantine affected the physical and mental well-being of people.

Accommodation: A recent article published by Yellow Brick Consulting (2020) indicated the importance of adjustment as an essential priority for effective project management during crisis as posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study conducted by Carnevale & Hatak (2020) argued that there was a need for HR practices in organizations to ensure that their employees could effectively cope with and adjust with the altered work processes due to the global pandemic. A similar perspective was also reflected in the research conducted by Chawla

et al. (2020), Tsionas (2021) & Caligiuri et al. (2020). The study conducted by Dhawan (2020) also emphasized the importance of adjustment for adopting with the online form of education during the pandemic which justified that similar implications might exist for employees using work from home mode of operations. Hence, the online working efficiency variable is measured through accommodation as a constituent to explore work from home business model.

Teamwork: A recent study conducted by Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi (2020) indicated that teamwork played an important role during communication; networking and managing interpersonal connect during the COVID-19. Wildman et al. (2021) discussed the relevance of collaborative teamwork so as to manage the challenges of virtual operations particularly when people were socially distanced from one another due to the pandemic. The need for such collaborative engagements was also reflected in the study conducted by Brenan (2020) & Brynjolfsson et al. (2020). The study conducted by discussed the importance of team processes in organizational approaches during the COVID-19.

Leadership acumen: In a recent research study, Grint (2020) discussed the importance of three strategies namely leadership, management and command for effective management in organizations during the COVID-19. Earlier Underwood (2019) discussed the importance of developing leadership abilities in employees in order to face and adjust with the challenges of digitalization in organizations. However, the findings of the study were not related with the pandemic which left scope for authors like Harris (2020) to discuss and highlight implications of leadership perspectives in the COVID-19 scenario. Harris (2020) in a recently conducted study discussed the role of adopting leadership perspectives in academic institutions during the COVID-19 in the scenario where traditional teaching-learning practices were being challenged by newer modern learning practices. A white paper published by Accenture (Accenture, 2020; Chanana, 2021) indicated that the importance of leadership with compassion in organizations during the global pandemic could be interesting to explore. Authors like Donald (2020) indicated that facilitating leadership and management practices would be instrumental for managing the disruptive challenges posed by the pandemic.

The review of the existing literature clearly indicates that a gap exists in the understanding of the variable for measuring Online Working Proficiency post-pandemic era. Also, a study of past literature states that most of the studies adopted are quantitative in nature, unlike the current study which has explored this phenomenon conceptually (qualitative) and rationally (quantitative) by adopting a mixed-method design. These research gaps (Table 2) led to the understanding of the below mentioned research questions, namely:

	Table 2	
	RESEARCH GAPS EMERGING FROM REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
Sl No.	**Research Gap(s)**	**Research Question(s)**
1	There is lack of understanding on what it meant by Online Working Proficiency of employees who are working from home mode of operations during the COVID-19	RQ1.What is the constituents of Online Working Proficiency of employees using work from home mode of operations?
2	There is lack of understanding of the factors influencing the Online Working Proficiency of employees as a productivity parameter in Work from Home mode of functioning.	RQ2. What are the factors that influence the Online Working Proficiency of employees during Work from Home format?

3	Factors like adopting towards remote working, risk & uncertainty, autonomy, adjustment, collaborative engagements, teamwork, leadership identified from a review of literature needed quantitative validation.	RQ3. What is the impact evaluating the Online Working Proficiency of employees using Work from Home mode of operations on employee?

Source: Authors.

Based on the above research questions the following research objectives and the initial conceptual model (Figure 1) were outlined, namely:

1. Firstly, to explore the constituents of Online Working Proficiency of employees as a variable to measure the WFH work effectiveness.
2. Secondly, to develop an understanding of the factors influencing the Online Working Proficiency of employees working in consultancy firms located in North India using work from the home mode of operations (during the COVID-19).
3. Lastly, to study the impact of antecedent factors influencing the Online Working Proficiency of employees.
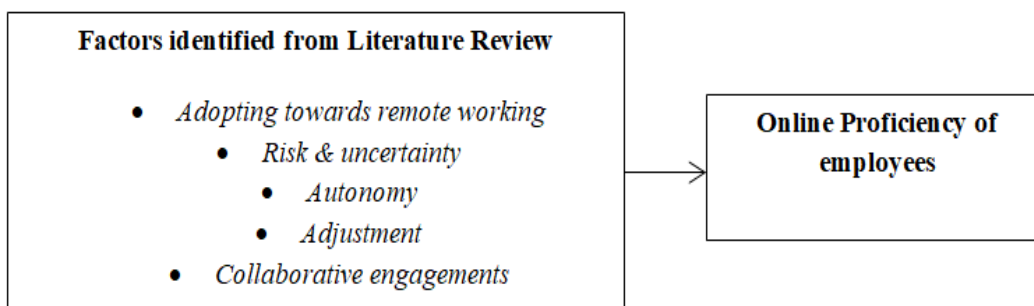
Source: Authors.

FIGURE 1
INITIAL CONCEPTUAL MODEL

RESEARCH METHODS

The research used a sequential mixed research method design whereby the initial phase involved the exploration of the factors (initially identified from the review of literature) influencing Online Working Proficiency of employees by interacting with and collecting narrative transcripts from nine industry experts belonging senior leadership positions working in the Consultancy firms in and around the NCR of Delhi. This phase also was conducted in order to explore a thorough understanding of what was meant by Online Working Proficiency. The narrative transcripts were fed into N-Vivo 10 application where using grounded theory method the qualitative data (narrative) was explored and simultaneously analyzed until and unless a pragmatic, thorough, detailed and saturated data representing the social phenomenon studied was presented. This further helped the coding of the qualitative data into sub-themes which were subsequently grouped into broad-themes. The new emerging broad themes and sub-themes were used to develop the research questionnaire using a five point Likert scale and inclusion of control variables like gender, age, academic profile and work experience of the respondents.

In the next phase of the study which was quantitative in nature, the research instrument emerging from the first (qualitative) phase was used to collect the data from 230 employees belonging to operational positions working in Consultancy firms located in the NCR of Delhi.

The quantitative data was collected using random sampling method by digitally contacting (using Google Forms) the respondents from a list containing coded information on employee emails and Whatsapp numbers sourced from personal contacts. The quantitative data collected from Google forms in the form of MS Excel spreadsheet were subsequently fed into SPSS ver 20 and AMOS 20 applications for data analysis and empirical model development.

Phase One (Qualitative)

The research gaps and research questions (Table 3) emerging from the review of literature were used to develop trigger and probing questions that were used to collect narratives from nine senior industry experts working in reputed Consultancy Firms located in the NCR of Delhi.

		Table 3		
	RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF TRIGGER & PROBING QUESTIONS FOR QUALITATIVE PHASE OF THE STUDY			
Sl.No.	Research Gap	Research Question(s)	Trigger Questions	Probing Questions
1	There is lack of understanding on what it meant by Online Working Proficiency of employees using work from home mode of operations	RQ1.What was meant by Online Working Proficiency of employees using work from home mode of operations?	What do you understand or mean by Online Working Proficiency while you are working from home for your organization?	1. Is it essential for having an understanding of all operational know-hows for Online Working Proficiency? 2. How are you adjusting with your organization's digital environment
2	There is lack of understanding of the factors influencing the Online Working Proficiency of employees using Work from Home	RQ2. What are the factors influencing Online Working Proficiency of employees using Work from Home?	Elaborate the factors which are important for Online Working Proficiency when you are using work from home mode of operations?	Explain your understanding on how these factors are helping your Online Working Proficiency?

Source: Authors.

The narratives from the nine industry experts were recorded by using smart phone recording applications and converted into typed transcripts using grounded theory approach where by the researchers kept on a rigorous and continued interactions with the industry experts until and unless and unless a pragmatic, thorough, detailed and saturated qualitative data representing the social phenomenon studied was developed (Smallbone et al., 2000; Stewart, 2021). The content of the narratives were then fed into N-Vivo 10 application whereby the qualitative data was analyzed and coded into sub-themes and broad themes as illustrated by the following Table (Table 4).

Table 4			
NARRATIVE ANALYSIS USING N-VIVO 10 APPLICATION			
Sub-themes identified from Narrative transcripts	**% Coverage from Narrative Transcripts**	**Broad Theme Category**	**Broad Theme Category % Coverage of Source****
Easily adjustable	11%	**Accommodation (A)**	72%
Adaptability to new situations	19%		
New ideas for adjustment	15%		
Support for adjustment	8%		
Work in new situations	19%		
Work on unknown areas	15%	**Ambiguity Tolerance (AT)**	88%
Work under uncertain situations	19%		
Uncertainty challenges	21%		
Tolerate ambiguities	17%		
Risk Taking	16%		
Working in teams	24%	**Team Work (TW)**	91%
Collaborative skills	18%		
Collaborate with one another	18%		
Enhance Team Work	20%		
Complementing one another	11%		
Exhibit leadership abilities	18%	**Leadership Acumen (LA)**	93%
Providing direction	19%		
mentor one another	17%		
Team-spirit in endeavors	24%		
Ability to lead	15%		
Digital know-hows	23%	**Online Working Proficiency (OWP)**	80%
Procedural digital knowledge	14%		
Knowledge of digital strategies	11%		
Digital team set ups	10%		
Developing Digital expertise	22%		

NB: **The percentage figures represented cumulative % values of the sub-themes that were found to be relevant to each broad-theme identified by using N-Vivo

Identification of Constructs and Measures-Research Instrument Development

The sub-themes and the broad themes identified from the Phase One (Qualitative) of the study were subsequently used to develop the constructs and their corresponding measures as illustrated by the Table 5.

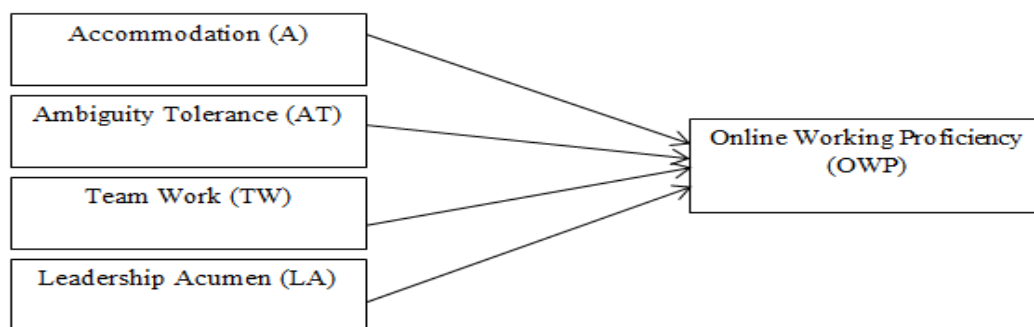| Table 5	
IDENTIFICATION OF CONSTRUCTS AND MEASURES – RESEARCH INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT	
Constructs	**Measures**
Accommodation (A)	We are easily adjustable to the digital way of doing things
	People in our company are adaptable to new situations in their digital work life
	We use new ideas for better adjustment
	We get enough support to get adjusted with Digital Work-life challenges
	We feel fine to work in new situations pertaining to Digital Work-life
	People in our company have developed capabilities to work on unknown areas

Ambiguity Tolerance (AT)	People in our company can work under uncertain situations
	We can take any challenges pertaining to uncertainty
	We are good at tolerating ambiguities pertaining to digital work-life
	We are good at taking risks related to digital work-life
Team Work (TW)	We need to work in teams for our digital work assignments
	People in our organization are good at collaborative skills for working on digital assignments
	We frequently collaborate with one another while working on our digital projects
	People are needed to enhance Team Work on their digital assignments
	People in this organization complement one another during digital projects
Leadership Acumen (LA)	We need to exhibit leadership abilities to succeed on our digital assignments
	We are good at providing direction to our teammates during our digital assignments
	People in our organization mentor one another in our digital assignments
	We enjoy team-spirit in our endeavors towards digital assignments
	People in this organization have abilities to lead from the front in digital projects
Online Working Proficiency (OWP)	We are required to have the necessary digital know-hows pertaining to digital operations
	We emphasize on the procedural knowledge for our routine digital operations
	We have an understanding of our organization's digital strategies
	We are required to work on digital team set ups
	People in this organization are trained to enhance their digital expertise

Source: Authors.

The above constructs and their corresponding measures were used to develop the research questionnaire using a five point Likert Scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly Agree). Control variables like gender, age, academic profile and work experience were also included in the questionnaire for collecting personal data of the respondents.

Revised Conceptual Model & Hypothesis Development

Based on the emerging variables and their corresponding measures from the Phase One (Qualitative Phase) the conceptual model presented after the review of literature was presented as in Figure 2.
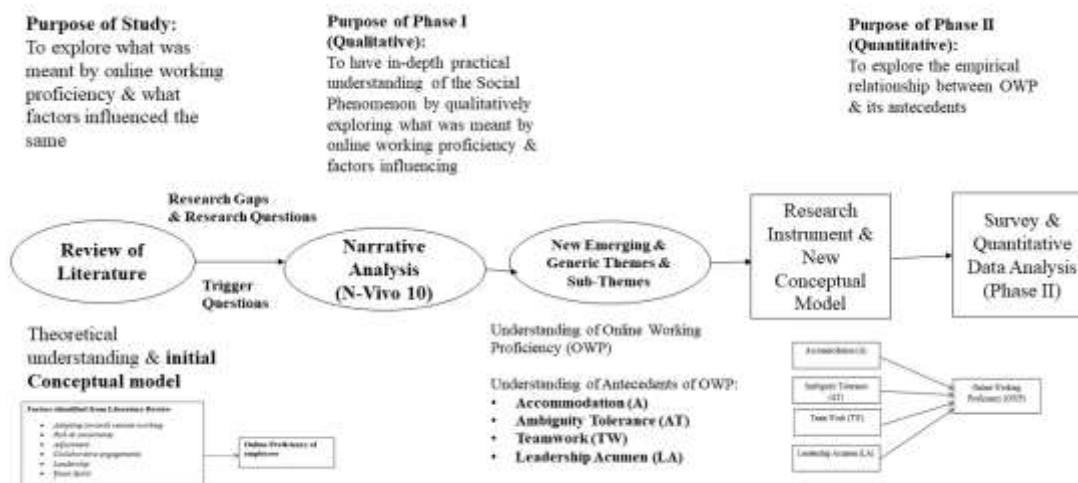

Source: Authors.

FIGURE 2
REVISED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Based on the research gaps and research questions identified from the review of literature (Table 6) and the revised conceptual model emerging after the Phase One (Qualitative Phase), the following hypothesis were presented (Kozanoglu & Abedin 2020).

Table 6 PROPOSED HYPOTHESIS		
Sl No.	Research Question	Proposed Hypothesis
1	RQ3. What is the impact of the factors influencing Online Working Proficiency of employees using Work from Home mode of operations?	H_{a1} : Accommodation (A) has a role for influencing Online Working Proficiency (OWP) of employees using Work from Home mode of operations
		H_{a2} : Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) has a role for influencing Online Working Proficiency (OWP) of employees using Work from Home mode of operations
		H_{a3} : Team Work (TW) has a role for influencing Online Working Proficiency (OWP) of employees using Work from Home mode of operations
		H_{a4} : Leadership Acumen (LA) has a role for influencing Online Working Proficiency (OWP) of employees using Work from Home mode of operations

Source: Author.

The flow of the events pertaining to the study during Phase I (Qualitative Phase) leading to the Phase II (Quantitative Phase) could be summarized by the following Figure 3, namely:

Source: Authors.

FIGURE 3
FLOW OF EVENTS DURING THE PHASE I AND PHASE II OF THE STUDY

Phase Two Quantitative Data Collection

The research questionnaire evolved from the Phase One (Qualitative Phase) of the research was used for data collection by Digital Survey method using Google Forms. The data was collected using random sampling method from a list containing coded information on

employee emails and whatsapp numbers sourced from personal contacts. A sample size of 230 responses collected from employees belonging to operational positions in Consultancy firms located in the NCR of Delhi was used for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected by using Google forms were first downloaded in MS Excel spreadsheets and were subjected to rigorous checks using data cleaning techniques. The same were fed into SPSS Ver 20 and AMOS Ver 20 for data analysis and empirical model development respectively.

Respondent Profile

Data analysis (Table 7) showed that out of the 230 respondents 82% were males and 18% were females. 90% of the males were in the age group of 21-25 years and 10% were in the age group of 26-30 years. Regarding the females, all the respondents were belonging to the age group of 21-25 years. Regarding the academic profile, all the male respondents were Graduates and out of the females 95% were graduates and 5% were Post Graduates. 90% of the male respondents were having work experiences of 6-10 years, whereas 10% were having experiences of 0-5 Years. Considering the females all were having 6-10 years' experience.

		Age Profile				Acad. Profile		Experience Profile		
Gender	**Composition**	20 yrs & below	21-25yrs	26-30 yrs	>30 Yrs	Grad	Post Grad	0-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	>10 yrs
Male	82%	0%	90%	10%	0%	100%	0%	10%	90%	0%
Female	18%	0%	100%	0%	0%	95%	5%	0%	100%	0%

Table 7
RESPONDENT PROFILE

Source: Author.

Descriptive Statistics & Reliability Estimates for the Scale

Cronbach's Alpha scores for the respective constructs were computed to assess the reliability estimates of the scale. The following table (Table 8) indicates that all the constructs were having adequate Cronbach's Alpha scores well above 0.8 depicting adequate reliability estimates. Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) had the highest mean score of 4.01, followed by Accommodation (A) and Leadership Acumen (LA) having mean scores of 3.87 and 3.79 respectively. Online Working Proficiency (OWP) had the least mean score of 3.52 (Table 8).

Table 8
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS & RELIABILITY ESTIMATES FOR THE SCALE

Construct	Measures	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Accommodation (A)	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5	3.87	0.821	0.878
Team Work (TW)	TW1, TW2, TW3, TW4, TW5	3.54	0.756	0.872
Leadership Acumen (LA)	LA1, LA2, LA3, LA4, LA5	3.79	0.552	0.813
Ambiguity Tolerance (AT)	AT1, AT2, AT3, AT4, AT5	4.01	0.607	0.881

Online Working Proficiency (OWP)	OWP1, OWP2, OWP3, OWP4, OWP5	3.52	0.815	0.861

Test of Collinearity							
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**	**Collinearity Statistics**	
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**			**Tolerance**	**VIF**
1	(Constant)	0.263	0.354		0.743	0.458		
	AT	0.004	0.086	0.003	0.043	0.966	0.694	1.440
	A	0.112	0.062	0.113	1.806	0.072	0.738	1.355
	TW	0.418	0.072	0.388	5.778	0.000	0.636	1.572
	LA	0.351	0.096	0.238	3.652	0.000	0.675	1.481

Further in order to evaluate the suitability of the data set for confirmatory factor analysis, the same was subjected for collinearity analysis. Table 7 indicated that as the tolerance values were above 0.2 and the Variation Inflation Factor (VIF) score was less than 5.0, it can be interpreted that the collinearity statistics were within the acceptable limits (Hair et al, 1995; Kline, 2011). This indicated that the data did not suffer from issues pertaining to multi-collinearity.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In order to analyze the impact of the factors influencing the Online Working Proficiency (dependent variable) of the employees using work from home mode of operations (RQ3), the data were fed into AMOS Ver 20 and a measurement model was developed for analyzing the quantitative data.

In order to evaluate the internal validity of the data, the standardized regression estimates and the correlation estimates were entered into Gaskin's Statistical Tool Package (Gaskin & Lim, 2016; Gaskin, 2016) spreadsheet in order to compute the scores of average variance extracted (AVE) and maximum shared variance (MSV) (Table 9) depicting the estimates of convergent and discriminant validity estimates.

Table 9 COMPUTATION OF CONVERGENT & DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY ESTIMATES									
	CR	**AVE**	**MSV**	**MaxR(H)**	**LA**	**AT**	**A**	**TW**	**OWP**
LA	0.815	0.525	0.287	0.818	0.724				
AT	0.873	0.632	0.287	0.878	0.536	0.795			
A	0.886	0.612	0.207	0.900	0.360	0.379	0.782		
TW	0.874	0.587	0.310	0.917	0.493	0.380	0.455	0.766	
OWP	0.860	0.563	0.310	0.906	0.415	0.284	0.364	0.557	0.750

Source: Author.

Model fit analysis (Table 10) was conducted in order to estimate the indices of model fit. Table indicated that the scores for RMR (0.056), GFI (.80), CFI (.867), RMSEA (.079) were well within the acceptable ranges as indicated by prior authors like Byrne (1994), Byrne (2001) & Hair et al. (1998).

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Table 10					
MODEL FIT ESTIMATES DURING CFA					
Fit Indices	**RMR**	**GFI**	**CFI**	**RMSEA**	**Normed λ^2 (CMIN/df)**
Default model	0.056	0.80	0.867	0.079	2.272

Source: AMOS Output.

Test of Normality of Data: Authors like Kline (2011); Curran et al. (1996) claimed that kurtosis scores of 8-20 could be considered as extreme scores for kurtosis. Kline (2011) also pointed out that skewness score above 3 could be considered to be extreme levels of skewness. Based on the above justifications, it can be interpreted from the below mentioned table (Table 11) that, the respective measures for the constructs showed acceptable scores of skewness (acceptable range for skewness <3) and kurtosis (acceptable range of kurtosis <7) in the data used for SEM. The scores for multivariate kurtosis depicted in the below mentioned table (Table 11) was indicative of the fact that the data set was not departing from the acceptable ranges of multivariate normality.

Table 11						
TEST OF NORMALITY OF DATA						
Variable	**Min**	**Max**	**Skew**	**CR**	**Kurtosis**	**CR**
OWP1	1	5	-0.394	-2.414	-0.635	-1.945
OWP2	1	5	-0.463	-2.834	-0.61	-1.868
OWP3	1	5	-0.503	-3.078	-0.343	-1.049
OWP4	1	5	-0.689	-4.218	0.579	1.773
OWP5	1	5	-0.669	-4.099	0.947	2.9
LA1	2	5	-0.347	-2.124	-0.132	-0.405
LA2	1	5	-0.78	-4.777	1.348	4.128
LA3	2	5	-0.46	-2.82	0.116	0.355
LA4	1	5	-0.728	-4.458	0.985	3.016
LA5	2	5	-0.233	-1.427	0.185	0.568
TW1	1	5	-0.681	-4.169	0.131	0.402
TW2	1	5	-0.563	-3.448	-0.13	-0.399
TW3	1	5	-0.771	-4.719	0.651	1.992
TW4	1	5	-0.672	-4.117	-0.035	-0.107
TW5	1	5	-0.808	-4.95	1.595	4.883
A1	1	5	-1.025	-6.275	0.711	2.178
A2	1	5	-1.018	-6.234	0.992	3.038
A3	1	5	-1	-6.122	1.224	3.747
A4	1	5	-0.859	-5.26	-0.059	-0.181
A5	1	5	-0.925	-5.663	0.659	2.017
AT1	1	5	-1.07	-6.55	2.981	9.128
AT2	1	5	-0.882	-5.399	1.717	5.257
AT3	1	5	-0.891	-5.459	2.447	7.493
AT4	2	5	-0.375	-2.296	-0.127	-0.389
AT5	1	5	-0.679	-4.156	0.759	2.323

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

In order to establish the relationships between the factors (independent variables, namely, accommodation, uncertainty management, Team Work, Leadership Acumen) and the

dependent variable, namely Online Working Proficiency (DA), the measurement model was developed.

Hypothesis Testing: The regression estimates derived from AMOS outputs were used for hypothesis testing. Table 12 indicates that out of the independent variables, only Team Work (TW) (Std β=0.412; P<0.05; H_{a3} is accepted) and Leadership Acumen (LA) (Std β=0.212; P<0.05; H_{a4} is accepted) had significant influences on Online Working Proficiency (OWP) of employees using work from home mode of operations. This led to the acceptance of the hypotheses, namely H_{a3} & H_{a4}.

Table 12 REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF MEASUREMENT MODEL (SEM)						
	Estimate	Std β.	S.E.	C.R.	P	Inference
OWP <--- AT	-0.024	-0.035	0.056	-0.428	0.669	P>0.05; H_{a2} is rejected
OWP <--- A	0.060	0.117	0.039	1.514	0.130	P>0.05; H_{a1} is rejected
OWP <--- TW	0.329	0.412	0.079	4.168	***	P<0.05; H_{a3} is accepted
OWP <--- LA	0.188	0.212	0.083	2.274	0.023	P<0.05; H_{a4} is accepted

Source: AMOS Output.

The hypotheses, namely H_{a1} and H_{a2} were rejected as the independent variables Accommodation (A) (Std β=0.117; P>0.05; H_{a1} is rejected) and Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) (Std β=-0.035; P>0.05; H_{a2} is rejected) had no significant relationships with Online Working Proficiency (OWP).

Co-variance Estimates: In order to understand the interrelationship between the independent variables, co-variance estimates were computed (Table 13), which were subsequently used for developing first order measurement model.

Table 13 CO-VARIANCE ESTIMATES					
	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Inference
AT <--> A	0.199	0.041	4.903	***	Significant Relation observed
AT <--> TW	0.114	0.026	4.361	***	Significant Relation observed
AT <-->LA	0.142	0.026	5.375	***	Significant Relation observed
A <--> TW	0.180	0.036	5.047	***	Significant Relation observed
TW <-->LA	0.114	0.022	5.098	***	Significant Relation observed
A <--> LA	0.124	0.030	4.081	***	Significant Relation observed

Source: AMOS Output.

Development of First Order Measurement Model

Based on the inputs pertaining to the first stage of structural equation modelling (SEM), the first order measurement model was developed.

			Table 14 REGRESSION ESTIMATES FOR THE FIRST ORDER MODEL					
			Estimate	Std β.	S.E.	C.R.	P	Inference
A	<---	AT	0.568	0.429	0.103	5.525	***	P<0.05, Significant Relation established
LA	<---	A	0.090	0.156	0.045	2.005	0.055	P>0.05, No Significant Relation established

LA	<---	AT	0.354	0.465	0.068	5.235	***	P<0.05, Significant Relation established
TW	<---	LA	0.406	0.363	0.101	4.022	***	P<0.05, Significant Relation established
TW	<---	A	0.198	0.308	0.050	3.988	***	P<0.05, Significant Relation established
TW	<---	AT	0.048	0.056	0.070	0.684	0.494	P>0.05, No Significant Relation established
OWP	<---	LA	0.192	0.215	0.074	2.584	0.010	P<0.05, Significant Relation established
OWP	<---	TW	0.364	0.456	0.079	4.606	***	P<0.05, Significant Relation established

The regression estimates of the first order measurement model (Table 14) indicated that,

The independent variable accommodation (A) had no significant relationship (Std β=0.156; P>0.05) with Leadership Acumen (LA). Similarly Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) had no significant implications (Std β=0.056; P>0.05) on Team Work (TW).

As the factor Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) had significant relations (Std β=0.429; P<0.05) with accommodation (A) and the later also had a significant influence (Std β=0.308; P<0.05) on Team Work (TW) – this indicated that (Table 14) the factor accommodation (A) could have a mediating role between Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) and Team Work (TW). Table 12 also indicated that Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) had significant influence (Std β=0.465; P<0.05) on Leadership Acumen (LA) and the later had a significant influence (Std β=0.363; P<0.05) on Team Work (TW).

Development of Modified First Order Measurement Model

The relationships established in the first order measurement model subsequently led to the development and presentation of the revised first order measurement model. The modified first order measurement model was further evaluated for regression estimates (Table 15) which confirmed the mediating influences of Accommodation (A) and Leadership Acumen (LA).

Table 15 **REGRESSION ESTIMATES FOR THE MODIFIED FIRST ORDER MEASUREMENT MODEL**								
			Estimate	**Std β**	**S.E.**	**C.R.**	**P**	**Inference**
A	<---	AT	0.584	0.440	0.103	5.663	***	Significant relation established
LA	<---	AT	0.412	0.542	0.065	6.335	***	Significant relation established
TW	<---	LA	0.438	0.396	0.088	4.968	***	Significant relation established
TW	<---	A	0.214	0.338	0.046	4.654	***	Significant relation established
OWP	<---	LA	0.188	0.211	0.073	2.580	0.010	Significant relation established
OWP	<---	TW	0.367	0.457	0.079	4.641	***	Significant relation established

Source: AMOS Output.

Table 15 indicated that the relationships established in the preceding stage of path analysis of structural equation modelling (SEM) was acceptable which led to the stage of conducting data imputation in the modified measurement model and developing the empirically tested model.

Data Imputation and Presentation of the Empirically Tested Model

Based on data imputation, the measurement model was presented by the following Figure 4.
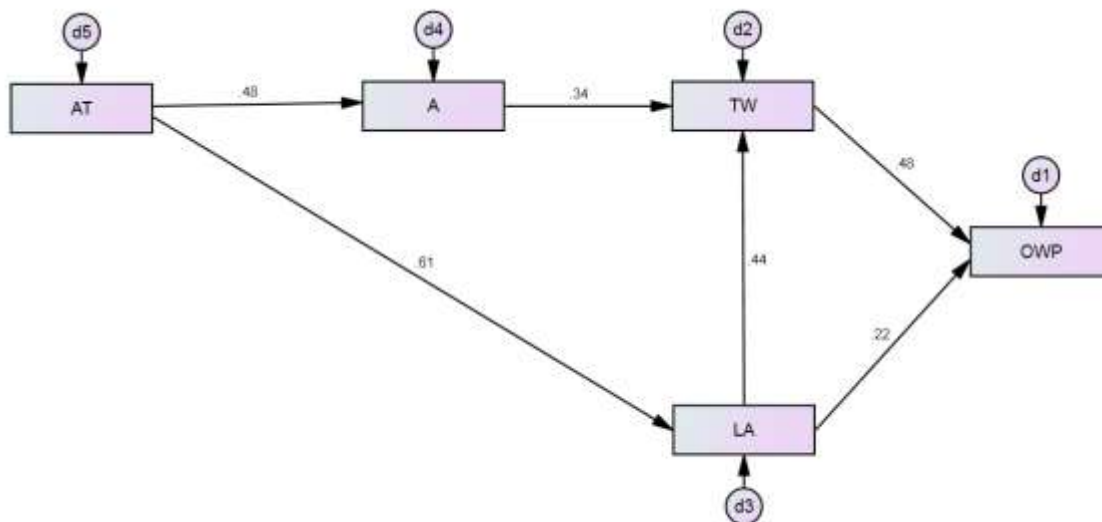
FIGURE 4
EMPIRICALLY TESTED MODEL

Source: AMOS Output.

Model Fit Analysis for the Empirically Tested Model

Model fit analysis (Table 16) was conducted in order to estimate the indices of model fit For the empirically tested research model developed after data imputation. Table indicated that the scores for RMR (0.009), GFI (.992), CFI (.999), and RMSEA (.021) were well within the acceptable ranges (Byrne, 1994; Byrne, 2001; Hair et al., 1998).

Table 16					
MODEL FIT ANALYSIS FOR THE EMPIRICALLY TESTED MODEL					
Fit Indices	**RMR**	**GFI**	**CFI**	**RMSEA**	**Normed λ^2 (CMIN/df)**
Default model	0.009	0.992	0.999	0.021	1.122

Source: AMOS Output.

Regression Estimates for the Empirically Tested Model

Regression estimates (Table 17) for the indicated that accommodation (A) was an important mediator between Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) (Std β=0.482; P<0.05) and Team Work (TW) (Std β=0.345; P<0.05) which further had a significant influence (Std β=0.483; P<0.05) on the Online Working Proficiency (OWP) of employees.

On the other hand, Leadership Acumen (LA) emerged as the mediating factor between Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) (Std β=0.609; P<0.05) and Online Working Proficiency (OWP) (Std β=0.225; P<0.05). The above empirical model was also justified by the significant relationship (Std β=0.438; P<0.05) between Leadership Acumen (LA) and Team Work (TW). The above empirically tested model also revealed that Team Work (TW) and Leadership Acumen (LA) were the two most important predictors influencing the Online Working Proficiency (OWP) of the respondents.

			Estimate	Std β.	S.E.	C.R.	P
Table 17							
REGRESSION ESTIMATES FOR THE EMPIRICALLY TESTED MODEL							
LA	<---	AT	0.450	0.609	0.039	11.477	***
A	<---	AT	0.643	0.482	0.078	8.243	***
TW	<---	LA	0.505	0.438	0.063	8.081	***
TW	<---	A	0.220	0.345	0.035	6.358	***
OWP	<---	CL	0.207	0.225	0.057	3.661	***
OWP	<---	TWC	0.386	0.483	0.049	7.868	***

Source: AMOS Output.

DISCUSSION

Exploration of Research Questions RQ1 & RQ2

The sequential mixed methodology used in the present study helped the authors to fill up the gaps existing in the present literature with both qualitative as well as quantitative data. The phase I which was mainly qualitative in nature helped to validate the variables (factors) which were initially identified after the review of literature. The two research questions (RQ1.What was meant by Online Working Proficiency of employees using work from home mode of operations? & RQ2. What are the factors influencing Online Working Proficiency of employees using Work from Home?) Were explored (Figure 5) in this phase whereby a meaningful understanding of the variables along with their corresponding measures were developed into a research instrument.

Factors initially identified from Review of Literature	Factors explored from Phase I (Qualitative Study)
Adopting towards remote working, risk & uncertainty, autonomy, adjustment, collaborative engagements, teamwork, leadership	Accommodation (A) Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) Team Work (TW) Leadership Acumen (LA)
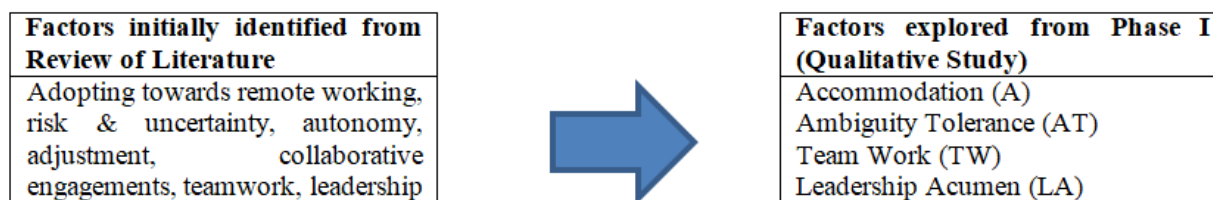
FIGURE 5
FACTORS INFLUENCING ONLINE WORKING PROFICIENCY OF EMPLOYEES EXPLORED IN THE STUDY

Exploration of Research Questions RQ3

The Phase II of the study which was quantitative in nature explored the research question RQ 3 (What are the factors that influence Online Working Proficiency of employees during Work from Home mode of operations?)

Role of Team Work on Online Working Proficiency

The empirical model (Figure 4) developed in the study clearly indicated that Team Work had significant impact on (Std β=0.483, P<0.05) Online Working Proficiency. The factor Team Work emerged as one of the most important mediating factors mediating the impacts of Leadership Acumen (Std β=0.438, P<0.05) and accommodation (Std β=0.345, P<0.05) on the Online Working Proficiency of employees. Authors like Wainewright (2020) have indicated the importance of digital teamwork for facilitating remote working in organizations. The empirical finding in this research to some extent had justified the theoretical claim made by Wainewright (2020). Earlier DeRosa et al. (2004) had discussed the implications of trust and leadership in a virtual team operations perspective. According to a recent study by Yang et al. (2022), it was found that remote work caused the collaboration network of workers to become 'static and siloed'. Furthermore, the remote working reduces trust which could impact the employee sharing information across the team members lowering the employee productivity even more. Thus, an effective team can impact employee proficiency through effective communication, trust in relationships which is evident from the strong relationship between team and employee productivity (Abarca et al. 2020).

Role of Leadership Acumen on Online Working Proficiency

The present study had also indicated that Leadership Acumen had significant relationship (Std β=0.225, P<0.05) with Online Working Proficiency. Authors like Underwood (2019) discussed the importance of leadership roles for implementing digitalization strategies in organizations. However, the author had not presented these justifications in the light of the COVID-19 scenario which had been the guiding agenda of the present study. A recently conducted research by Bartsch et al. (2020) had indicated that both task and relationship oriented leadership perspectives were important for managing employee performance during virtual work environments as posed by the Global pandemic scenario. In this regard, other authors like Stoker et al. (2019) had also highlighted the relevance of task-oriented leadership perspectives in crisis situations. Similarly, other authors like Liao (2017) had strongly contended the importance of leadership perspectives for performing effectively in a virtual work environment. In an interesting research conducted on virtual teams, leadership perspectives being leadership behavior and traits (Gilson et al., 2015). Three kinds of leadership traits were identified inspirational aspects (Joshi et al., 2009) as well as transformational and transactional leaders (Huang et al., 2010). In virtual teams, as per the variable studied transformational leadership which is based on individuals proclaiming leadership roles as per the requirement of situation could impact employee proficiency to a great extent (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). The findings of the present study were unique as leadership traits seem to be an emergent behavior reflective in individuals in a virtual mode of work influencing the Online Working Proficiency of employees.

Role of Accommodation as a Mediating Factor

The study had revealed that the variable accommodation acted as an important mediating factor. In one hand, where Ambiguity Tolerance had significant relationship (Std β=0.482, P<0.05) with accommodation, the later further influenced (Std β=0.345, P<0.05) Team

Work thereby establishing the influence on Online Working Proficiency. In the current study accommodation has been defined as the phenomenon of human interactions which intends to achieve higher levels of interpersonal process effectiveness by accommodating views and ideas (Presbitero, 2021). In the current study the results are evident of the fact that in the pursuit of Ambiguity Tolerance while working virtually during the COVID-19 scenario, the respondents perceived that it was important for them to accommodate with the uncertainty around themselves which led them into collaborative approaches for facilitating Online Working Proficiency. It would be interesting to explore the forms of accommodation like cultural, communication accommodation that influences employee proficiency (Lockwood & Song, 2020).

The study conducted by Grove et al. (2018) had highlighted the importance of adjustment as a part of developing collaborative perspectives and facilitating intra-organizational dynamics. In this context Wang et al. (2017) had indicated similar understandings in the context of IT-enabled Team Works in organizations. On the other hand, Koçak & Puranam (2018) had contended the importance of collaborative cultures however how adjustment or accommodation could contribute towards the same were not highlighted in the research. Another research conducted by Bayraktar (2019) highlighted the importance of adjustment in expatriate employees which led into collaborative mechanisms of social support. As most of the available literature had not related the implications of accommodation or adjustment on collaborative perspectives particularly while working in a virtual work set up-the findings of the present study could be considered to be important in terms of contributing towards the existing literature.

Role of Ambiguity Tolerance

Ambiguity Tolerance had also emerged as an important factor influencing Online Working Proficiency of employees by triggering accommodation (Std β=0.482, P<0.05) and Leadership Acumen (Std β=0.609, P<0.05) perspectives among people. The empirically tested model presented in this study indicated that Ambiguity Tolerance (AT) acted like a trigger to facilitate people championing their leadership abilities and also enable them to accommodate or adjust with the virtual work perspectives leading to collaborative approaches which contributed towards the development and execution of employee Online Working Proficiency in their performances. Facing ambiguity is ubiquitous and perhaps more apparent in covid crisis. Ambiguity tolerance (AT) as reflective from the definition as one's ability to manage insoluble situations which impacts the intrapersonal behavior, and decision-making abilities which makes an employee feel responsible in a team thus increasing the employee productivity (Spinelli et al, 2022).

In this context, it could be mentioned that authors like Rayner (2018), DeGhetto et al. (2017) discussed that in a climate of uncertainty, leadership perspectives were important for bringing about changes in the organization. Earlier researchers like Lewis et al. (2010) and Brendel et al. (2016) indicated the importance of leadership perspectives in the context of ambiguity tolerance, anxiety and stress. However, the context and the landscape of these prior studies were different as compared to the present study which further justifies the unique contribution of the research undertaken in this paper.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has highlighted immense theoretical, methodological and practical implications (Figure 6) in terms of the overall research design and findings which would help future researchers academically and be a guiding reference for industry practitioners who are adopting work from home as a "*new normal"* to work.

From the academic perspective, the study has helped to bridge the gap between existing literatures on online working proficiency of employees and had explored the factors influencing the same. The empirical model presented in the study had established a relationship between online working proficiency of employees using work from home (WFH) mode of operations and the antecedent factors.

From the methodological perspective, the sequential mixed method used in the present research and the standardized research instrument that evolved would help future researchers to engage in more in-depth and comprehensive studies in similar domains which is novel so far.
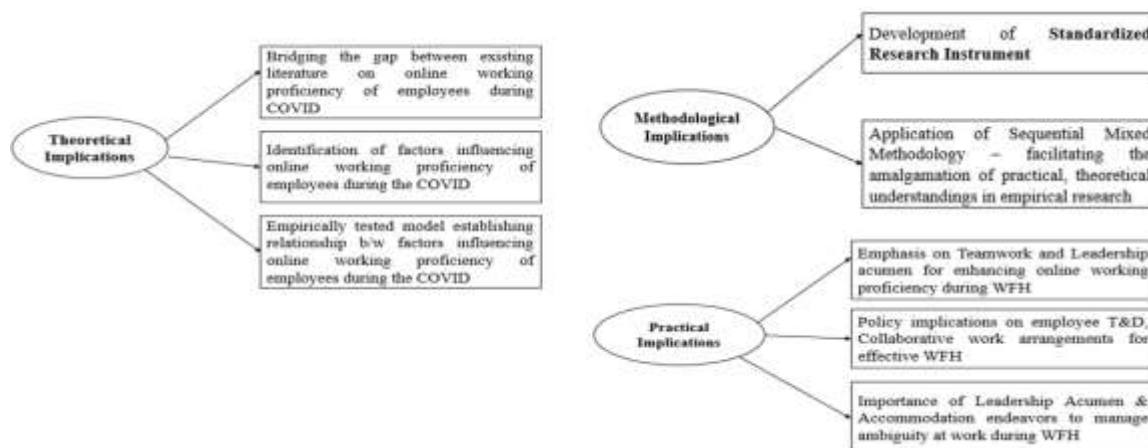
FIGURE 6
IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY
Source: Authors.

From the practical perspectives, the findings of the study highlight the essential need to re-conceptualize working proficiency of employees in a digital (online) space so as to be able to develop realistic and relevant ways of harnessing efficiency of employees and understanding the factors that impact their efficacy. The study reinforces the fact that organizations yardsticks have to be re-evaluated post pandemic era so that business transformations can accommodate new and modern ways of employee efficiency parameters of measurement (Patanjali & Bhatta, 2022).

Particularly, in terms of the proposed research model, it poses Human Resources department to rethink about certain practices like innovative leadership trainings which can particularly be focused towards handling remote workers and distanced teams for facilitating development of Online Working Proficiency in employees during the post COVID-19 period, as Leadership Acumen (AC) has been found to have a prominent role to play in impacting OWP. The empirical model would help supervisors, industry leaders to sensitize teamwork as an important and salient contributor towards employee efficiency, thus the need for creating

innovative solutions that keep team-members connected irrespective of physical distances (Jaiswal & Arun, 2020).

From the social perspective, the study could be a guiding force for employees to co-adopt collaborative work practices and enhance their personal leadership potential so as to face the challenges of digitalization and uncertainty or turbulence in the business landscape more proactively in the future.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study could be extended on a Pan-India perspective to have a wider insight on the issues explored in the present research. The research instrument developed in the study could encourage other researchers to use the constructs and their corresponding measures for conducting similar studies across the industry domains. The sequential mixed research design used in this study to explore and have insights on unknown variables and using the inputs of the qualitative phase to design and develop research instrument could be further used for other researches. A longitudinal design to address the impact of changes pre and post covid would further help understand hidden insights of work from home format of employee performance.

CONCLUSION

The study has highlighted the importance of Team Work and Leadership Acumen as the two most important predictors of Online Working Proficiency of employees using work from home mode of operations in Consultancy firms in and around the NCR of Delhi during the COVID-19 scenario. The empirical model established in the study indicates that uncertainty management which was the need of the hour for organizations during the COVID-19 scenario influenced the ways in which employees accommodated and exhibited Team Work for executing their Online Working Proficiency. However, this factor had only a moderating role to play and was not found to have a direct impact on OWP. This can be further attributed to the fact that uncertainty management was measured mostly in context to Covid 19, which is bound to dilute post the pandemic crisis as now the situation is more controlled and settled.

The empirical model presented in this study would help industry leaders to firstly rethink the old ways of measuring employee efficiency in digital workplaces. Also, it would provide a guiding light to practitioners to devise realistic ways of helping employee efficiency to be enhanced.

The current study has tried to explore Online Working Proficiency (OWP), through work from home scenario of remote working, however, it would be interesting to study whether the factors that impact OWP remain similar or change unlike work from home scenario of working, like distant remote offices in the form of client stations, shared working offices and abroad onsite locations, which could be the continuum for the current research for future.

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