# REMOTE WORKING AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY OF TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

# <sup>1</sup>AMACHREE, IBIM TARIBO and <sup>1</sup>PROF. P. N. NWINYOKPUGI

Department of Office and Management, Rivers State University <a href="mailto:Ibimtaribo@gmail.com">Ibimtaribo@gmail.com</a>

## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the relationship between remote working and organizational sustainability in telecommunication firms in Rivers State. Innovation, profitability and competitive advantage are used as measures of the study. Cross-sectional research design was adopted while Technology Acceptance Model was adopted as the theoretical foundation of the study using the primary source of data collection and the null hypothesis method. The population of the study comprised of seventy (70) respondents drawn from the seven operational and registered companies. Questionnaires are used as instrument for data collection using the 4 point rating scale and administered by the researcher with the aid of two research assistants within two to three weeks. The validity of the instruments was determined by the issuance of questionnaires to research supervisor and two Professors for content and construct validation while the reliability of the study was anchored on the Cronbach Alpha reliability test. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between Remote working and organizational sustainability. The study concluded that there is a significant relationship between remote working and organizational sustainability in telecommunication firms in Rivers State with one of the recommendations that organizations must adopt remote working or any virtual office practices so as to remain relevant in business.

Keyword: Remote work, Sustainability, Telecommunication, Innovation and Profitability

# **INTRODUCTION**

As organizations continue to pursue strategies for sustainability, the need for environmental awareness has become a necessity for long-term survival and sustainability. Sustainability initiative is a driving force for success to move forward in the 21st-century business environment. With increased global competition and management, decision makers are focusing on a more efficient innovative strategy while cutting back on research budget for competitiveness (Estrin, 2009). Businesses encompassing entrepreneurs and venture capitalist benefit from this trend by becoming a driving force for innovation (Estrin, 2009). The willingness of an entrepreneur to take a calculated risk plays a significant role in innovative creativity.

Changes in technological innovations through information technology (IT) and the World Wide Web have created challenges for the business society (Bayer & Servan, 2011). For firms to gain sustainability in a competitive environment, those at the helm of affairs must be decision makers who generally capitalize on opportunities for innovation (Olson, 1986). Businesses like the telecommunication firms rely on networking opportunities created by the Internet and IT for agility in distribution, design for growth, and adapting to challenges and threats posed by environmental, cultural, and political factors (Lacity, 2011). The use of technologies such as computer programming for data warehousing has become an organizational initiative for strategic planning for departmental networking and communication processes (Castro, Montoro-Sanchez, & Ortiz-De-Urbina-Criado, 2011). In other words, Technological advances in information and communication contribute to this change in the nature of work and are fundamental to new forms of work. Different combinations of locations and times for certain modes of work depend on technology and are identified in the scientific literature, as are different names for the same definition.

However, working in a virtual environment is not as smooth as it looks. Several studies have highlighted the disadvantages and challenges of virtual workplaces. For instance, a recent study conducted by Euro found and the International Labour Office (2017) defines the many obstacles and challenges available with the remote working environment such as overworking, isolation, stress, trust, and other challenges that if not treated correctly could affect the overall organizational sustainability and reputation. Moreover, over the last decade, several researchers have studied and evaluated the various factors affecting work efficiency in a Remote working environment. Scholars (Lockwood, 2015) and (Kurtzberg, 2014) argue that the lack of physical interaction is causing communication breakdowns which is negatively affecting the productivity and collaboration in virtual workplaces. While other researchers such as (Owen, 2014) considered that the lack of human contact could be the reason that decreases team spirit, trust, and productivity. All these result in the curiosity of whether or not remote working can affect the sustainability of telecommunication firms.

Nigeria as an emerging economy looks to the telecommunication sector for the required quantum lead of development. No matter the hassles and hindrances in performing their task like the ravaging COVID – 19 pandemic that obstructed most companies in 2020 hence need for Remote working. Though the concept of remote working is not new to many businesses in Nigeria however, it is only of recent that it came to limelight in 2020 in Nigeria during the COVID 19 Pandemic. According to (Hatch, 2016), remote working applications is a process where the employee works in a location other than the traditional "go from house to office" and vice versa. Remote working applications rather involve telecommuting, virtual or cloud technology where the physical presents in the work may not be necessary. For instance, during the COVID – 19 pandemic, many industries were shut – down in other not to contract the virus, and this made some companies to stop operations and the greatly affected them significantly in their modules operandi.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This study adopted the Technology Acceptance Model as its theoretical foundation

# **Technology Acceptance Model by Davis (2013)**

Technology Acceptance Model is the most influential, empirically tested, widely used model of technology acceptance. It was developed by Davis in the year 2013 and its concept is derived from the Theory of Reasoned Behaviour (TRA). The basic concept of TRA is that, individual behaviours are determined by their intentions to execute those behaviours. These intentions are in turn influenced by two factors, their attitudes and beliefs about the consequences of their behaviour; that is, what the important people in the life of these individuals will think about their behaviours. TRA has been successfully used to predict the choices made by people in diverse situations.

The purpose of TAM is to predict user acceptance of technology by using two technology related factors, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness (U) in TAM is the extent to which a user believes that the use of a system will enhance his or her performance. Perceived ease of use (EOU) is the extent to which a user believes that using the system will be effortless. According to TAM, both U and EOU significantly influence a person's attitude towards using the system (A). Behavioural intentions (BI) to use the system is determined by A and U. One of the main differences between TAM and TRA is that perceived usefulness directly influences the intention to use a technology. Beliefs do not play any role in the intention to use a system. Davis (2013) explained that in a job situation, an

employee's intention to use a system will be strictly based on the impact of the system on his or her work performance, irrespective of his or her attitude towards the system. In other words, an employee may dislike a system but may use it based on perceived increase in his or her job performance.

This study adopts TAM as a theoretical framework because it focuses on characteristics that influence individual decisions in adopting a technology, such as compatibility and perceived complexity and the strategies used to market the technology to specific groups and organizations. The technology acceptance model has been successfully tested on a wide variety of technologies including information systems computer applications. The technology acceptance model theory is therefore appropriate for investigating the relationship between remote working and organizational sustainability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This involves a flexible working arrangement that allows employees to work from remote locations aside of cooperate offices and such locations could include an employee's home, co - working or other shared spaces or any other place outside of the traditional corporate office building (Kelly & Kaley, 2020). Remote work is also called distance working, telecommuting, working from home (WFH), mobile work and work from anywhere (WFA) is an employment arrangement whereby employees do not commute to a central place of work, such as an office building, warehouse, or retail store. It is facilitated by technology such as collaborative software, virtual private networks, internet access, cloud computing, voice over IP (VoIP), Wi-Fi-equipped computer systems and smart phones (Autor & Dorn, 2013). It can be efficient and useful for companies since it allows workers to communicate over long distances, saving significant amounts of travel time and cost of operations in terms of renting office space, running operational cost. Common software used for remote work includes Zoom, Cisco Webex, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Slack, and WhatsApp. Remote working has been adopted by many businesses, governments and not-for-profit organizations. Organizations may use remote working to reduce costs. Remote working employees do not require an office or cubicle, a space which needs to be rented or purchased, and incurs additional costs such as lighting and climate control. Some organizations adopt remote working to improve workers' quality of life, as remote working typically reduces commuting time and time stuck in traffic congestion. Remote working may make it easier for workers to balance their work responsibilities with their personal life and family roles (e.g., caring for children or elderly parents). The scholarly postulations (Nna-Emmanuel and Obara, 2019) posited that internet technologies have brought about high level of flexibility in work timing and location as workers can be completely away from the office and still maintain contact with their home lives even during a busy working day. Their study went further to suggest that internet technology would increase the morale of workers which would most likely result in job satisfaction, efficiency and productivity, all of which will sustain any organization.

Remote workplaces are where employees work remotely which has become a reality for many employers nowadays. Forbes (2018) conducted a study in the United States describing how the number of employees working remotely has increased 15% between 2005 and 2015 due to the digital revolution of information and communications technologies (ICT) such as smart phones and cloud-based computing. Another study conducted by Global Workplace Analytics (2017) in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau's America Community Survey (ACS) shows that 40% more U.S. employers offered flexible workplace options than they did in 2010. Moreover, more than nine million Americans work from home at least half

of the time and approximately 56% of U.S. workers hold jobs that could easily be transitioned to a remote based system.

Some organizations adopt remote working for environmental reasons, as remote working can reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, with fewer cars on the roads. Remote working can be defined as a work completed in an environment other than the employer workplace. This can include working from home (WFH) for employees and contractors and or working from any other imaginable environment.

According to Hatch (2016), remote working is a process where the employees work in a location other than the traditional go from house to office and vice versa. Remote working rather involves telecommuting, virtual or cloud working where the physical presence in the work may not be necessary. This is in contrast with the used to be working inside offices. Remote working has become the hottest discussion in the 21st century considering that the advances in technology and globalization has urged companies to employ individuals where communication can be done through Wi-Fi thus, possibilities for instance maybe hiring workers in Lagos while the business operates in Rivers State. Accordingly, many assumptions had been made indicating that, remote workers perform better than those workers that are visibly seen in the office daily, however when promotion comes, they were not given due importance and consideration. According to current study, people who work remotely were found to be happier and more productive than those traditional workers (Nield, 2016). This trend has been growing and has become an alarming issue that many employers have come to think of it. Consequently, many ideas have been solicited regarding working at home to be practical as it saves your time, money and effort of travelling on daily basis (Peeters, 2014).

# **Organizational Sustainability**

Organizational sustainability has become a popular theme over the last few years, which has led organizations to come under great pressure from markets and legislations, and have thus sought to align themselves with sustainability, originating the term organizational sustainability. By reaching in the direction of sustainability, organizations seek legitimacy before markets, increasing their scope and securing greater financial returns. In the context of organizational sustainability, the Triple Bottom Line comes to light, which advocates that the traditional business model, that considers only economic factors in the appraisal of a company, should be expanded to a new model by also contemplating the organization's environmental and social performance, as well as the financial.

Organizational sustainability refers to the ability to meet the needs of present customers while taking into account the needs of future generations (Ford, 2012). In other words, sustainability could be viewed as non-failure. An organization fails when it cannot withstand the challenges or threat posed by its competitions or its environments. According to Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2012), organizational sustainability can be defined as the principles of enhancing the societal, environmental and economic systems within which a business operates that creates value consistent with the long term preservation and enhancement of financial, environmental and social capital. Organizational sustainability has many connotations-both subjective and objective. The most objective way to measure sustainability in organizations is to observe their continuing existence. This is problematic given the nature of mergers and acquisitions hence, the need to measure sustainability as innovation and profitability.

#### **Innovation**

The importance of innovation to an organizations survival cannot be overemphasized as innovation is extremely vital to the success of businesses organizations and this argument is supported by the European Institute of Technology Management (EITM, 2004) where the term innovation management' is defined as: the actions taken to efficiently identify, acquire, develop, select, protect and exploit the technologies, products, business models, processes and infrastructure that is required to grow, maintain and achieve a strong market position and enhanced business performance in line with the organizations objectives. Innovation does not occur independently but is strongly reliant and thrives upon several types of knowledge such as technological knowledge. The point being that for innovation to be fostered in an organization or business environment, a knowledge requirement for innovation should have been provided. This argument is further buttressed by the inclusion of creativity in the innovation definition debate by authors such as Phillips (1993) that draw importance to the administration of creativity to the smooth flow of the innovation development and support the deep role creativity plays in the definitions of innovation and its organizational and business impact.

The term innovation tends to have a generic definition pattern because of its highly evolving definitive nature, however for the purpose of this study, the definition of Galanakis (2002) which states that innovation is defined "as the creation of new products, knowledge or services by using new or existing scientific or technological knowledge, which provide a degree of novelty either to the developer, the industrial sector, the nation or the world and succeed in the marketplace", will be applied to this study.

Innovation strategies involve the process of promoting new ideas, products and services, which allows the organization to increase the sales and profits with limited available resources. It may also be seen to be the conversion of new knowledge into products or services thereby, creating value, increasing efficiency, and therefore growing a business. Teleworking even though not very new can be classed as an innovation strategy for SMEs as it was formerly perceived to be just for large organizations. Without innovation, new products, new ways of carrying out business and new service delivery plans for employees and customers would never materialize, making organizations to remain stuck doing things the same way without positive change.

# **Profitability**

Every investor undertakes investment carefully with the motive of earning returns on his investment. One of the main objectives of a firm therefore is to make good profit. Profit backed up with cash will make it possible for management to distribute dividend to the investors. He further asserts that profitability can be best measured in terms of return on assets (ROA), return on earnings (ROE) and as well as return on capital employed (ROCE).

According to Kirton (2003), the term investment may refer to total assets or net assets. They say that the fund employed in net assets is known as capital employed. That the net assets equal net fixed assets plus current assets minus current liabilities excluding bank loan. They went further to say that investment refers to pool of funds supplied by shareholders and lenders. The conventional approach to calculating Return on Investment is to divide profit after tax by investment. For return on equity, Kirton (2003) hold that common and ordinary shareholders are entitled to the residual profits; nevertheless, the net profit after tax represents their own. It is held by them that a return on shareholder's equity is calculated to see the profitability of owners' investment. The shareholders equity or net worth will include paid up share capital, share premium and reserves and surplus less accumulated loss.

Return on Equity (ROE) is net profit after tax divided by shareholders' equity which is given as net worth. Return on Assets (ROA) expresses the net income earned by a company as percentage of the total assets available for use by that company. According to him, the companies with higher amounts of assets are expected to make more profits that those with little. Return on Assets measures management ability to earn a return on the firm's resources. According to Laudon (2007), profitability refers to the ability of a firm to earn returns on investment made in its assets that has a positive present value. A financial action that has a positive net present value will create wealth for shareholders and is therefore desirable. A financial action resulting in a negative net present value should be dropped because it will endanger share holders' wealth.

Hill, Kelly and Lockhart (2012) describe firm's profitability as the ability to generate revenue in excess of the cost of generating such revenue. It is a relative term measurable in terms of profit and its relation with other elements that can directly influence the profit. Profitability measures management efficiency in the use of organizational resources in adding value to the business.

Estrin (2009) held that profitability refers to the ability of an enterprise to generate profit from its investment. According to him, the management of cash, debtors, and stocks affects the level of profit made by organization. He further explains that the excessive holding of stocks leads to high stock handling costs, deterioration in the value of stocks due to damage and obsolescence, theft or pilferage by employees and wastage, and all these reduce a firm's profitability.

## **METHODS**

The research design used for the study was cross-sectional survey research design which examined a cross section of the telecommunication companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The population of this study consisted of four (4)mobile network companies (GSM) and three private telecommunication organizations (PTOs) which are MTN, Globacom, Airtel, 9mobile (formerly known as Etisalat Company), Smile, Ntel and Spectranet. These companies that constitute our study population are the ones which are functionally registered with the corporate affairs commission (CAC) and the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC).

Ten (10) respondents were drawn from each of thetelecommunication Companies. Therefore, the total respondents for the study were seventy (70). The respondents include: Operations Managers, Marketing Managers, Sales Managers, Customer Relation Managers, Brand Managers, Directors of Communications, Director of Technical Services may be applicable to the Companies.

In this study, the primary source of data collection was used. The primary sources data was used through the administration of questionnaire directly to the respondents to this studywith the assistance of two research assistants. The instrument for data collection for this study was the questionnaire. The instrument was titled 'Remote Working and Organizational Sustainability Questionnaire' (RWOSQ). This consisted of a list of questions relating to each variable of the study to which the respondents were required to answer. The questionnaires were divided into sections, elicited information on each sub variableswere used in the study. A 4-point rating scale was used to describe the opinions of the respondents and as such, 4-point numerical values was assigned to the rating scales which described a particular item being measured as shown in table 3.3.

Table 3.2. Interval rating scale for research instrument.

Response	Options	Ratings
Strongly Agree	(SA)	4
Agree	(A)	3
Disagree	(D)	2
Strongly Disagree	(SD)	1

Source: Researcher's desk (2023)

The Cronbach Alpha statistic was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of 0.88 was achieved. The copies of questionnaire were coded for analysis using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation was used to measure the strength of each variable and the extent of their manifestation. Inferential statistics of Spearman's Rank Order Correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The strength of the correlation is determined following the rule:

Coefficient Value	Strength of Association
0.1 <   <i>rho</i>   < .19	Very weak correlation
0.2 <   <i>rho</i>   < .39	Weak Correlation
0.4 <   <i>rho</i>   < .59	medium/moderate correlation
0.6 <   <i>rho</i>   < .79	Strong correlation
<i>rho</i>   > .79	Very strong correlation

70 copies of questionnaire were administered and 64 was successfully retrieved giving 91.4% retrieval rate.

#### **RESULT**

The strength of the correlation is determined following the rule:

<b>Coefficient Value</b>	Strength of Association
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0.4 <   <i>rho</i>   < .59	medium/moderate correlation
0.6 <   <i>rho</i>   < .79	Strong correlation
<i>rho</i>   > .79	Very strong correlation

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between remote working and innovation in telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

Table 4.26 Relationship between Remote Working and Innovation

	•		Telecommuting	Innovation
Spearman's rho	Telecommuting	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.386*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.029
		N	64	64
	Innovation	Correlation Coefficient	.386*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	
		N	64	64

<sup>\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

# Source: Field Survey, 2023 (Based on results from SPSS, v.26 Output)

The calculated value of correlation coefficient (rho) is 0.386; p=0.029 implied that there is a weakpositive correlation between remote working and innovation in telecommunication firms in Rivers State. The p-value of 0.029< 0.05 depicts a significant relationship, thus, the null hypothesis one is rejected for the alternative hypothesis which stated that There is a significant relationship between remote working and innovation in telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between telecommuting and profitability in telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

Table 4.27 Relationship between Remote Working and Profitability

			Telecommuting	
Spearman's rho	Remote working	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.615**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	64	64
	Profitability	Correlation Coefficient	.615**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	64	64

<sup>\*\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2023(Based on results from SPSS, v.26 Output)

The calculated value of correlation coefficient (rho) is 0.615; p=0.000 implied that there is a moderate correlation between remote working and profitability in telecommunication firms in Rivers State. The p-value of 0.000< 0.01 depicts a significant relationship, thus, the null hypothesis is rejected for the alternative hypothesis which stated that There is a significant relationship between remote working and profitability in telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

**Ho3:** There is no significant relationship between remote working and competitive advantage in telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

Table 4.28 Relationship between Remote working and Competitive advantage

			<u> </u>	
			Remote	Competitive
			working	advantage
Spearman's rho	Remote working	Correlation	1.000	.831**
		Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	•	.000
		N	64	64
	Competitive	Correlation	.831**	1.000
	advantage	Coefficient		
	-	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	64	64

<sup>\*\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2023 (Based on results from SPSS, v.26 Output)

The calculated value of correlation coefficient (rho) is 0.831; p=0.000 implied that there is a very strong correlation between remote working and competitive advantage in telecommunication firms in Rivers State. The p-value of 0.000<0.05 depicts a significant relationship, thus, the null hypothesis is rejected for the alternative hypothesis which stated that There is a significant relationship between remote working and competitive advantage in telecommunication firms in Rivers State.

# **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study examined the relationship between remote working and measures of organizational survival in the mobile network providing firms. The result from the three hypotheses tested all showed positive and significant relationship between remote working and innovation, profitability and competitive advantage. The result of the null hypotheses implied proportional and progressive relationship between remote working and the measures of organizational survival. This is an indication that the adoption of remote working by the mobile network providing firms has positively influenced organizational survival of the firms. This finding is in tandem with Pinsonneault and Boisvert (2001) who stated that an increase in employee performance is often cited as a reason for organizations to implement remote working. This is because employees are able to work without distraction (Bailey & Kurland, 2002) and because individuals have more control over their work environment so they can make it match their preferences (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). The positive crease in satisfaction could be explained by exchange theory and reciprocity where remote working provided more work life balance for employees (Caillier, 2016).

This finding can be lined along the conclusions of Peters et al. (2004) on a similar study on remote working adoption, where they asserted that the availability of electronic devices supported remote working practices. Existing literature on remote working also postulates

that the social richness of technologies for communication has an impact on the telecommuters' job satisfaction and productivity (Bosua et al., 2013; Turetken et al., 2011). A review of extant literature on remote working adoption also indicated that remote working is seen to be a human resource and an organizational innovation (Lee, Chu, & Tseng, 2009)

However, Caillier (2016) found contradictory findings which suggested that remote working increases turnover intentions although the study cautioned that turnover intentions are just intentions and not actual turnover. Using data collected from surveys over a multi-year period (2011 to 2014) from multiple federal agencies, results suggested that remote working frequency should be reduced, as this could be due to interference with work life balance (Caillier, 2016).

in another study by Caillier (2016b), remote working was not found to have any impact on turnover intentions as opposed to the previous study. In the seemingly same longitudinal batch of data, no evidence was found to support that an increase in remote working lead to an increase in organizational sustainability when the analysis was conducted again albeit with different study variables. The intensity of remote working frequency affects organizational sustainability (Suh & Lee, 2017).

However, the results were surprising as it reported lower technostress faced by high frequency telecommuters as compared to irregular telecommuters and thus call for more IT training for telecommuters to mitigate perceptions of IT complexity and IT presenteeism for fresh telecommuters (Suh & Lee, 2017). IT presenteeism is defined as the extent of reachability of telecommuters using technology (Suh & Lee, 2017). Remote working reduces role-stressor levels and increase organizational sustainability (Igbaria& Guimaraes, 1999). However, reduced interaction with peers and promotion opportunities are also common causes of lower satisfaction for telecommuters (Igbaria& Guimaraes, 1999).

# **CONCLUSION**

This thesis has reviewed the current literature in order to establish the foundation for the establishment of a relationship between remote working and organizational sustainability. Accordingly, remote working was reviewed in terms of virtual teams, telecommuting, personal leadership and adaptability as well as their influence on organizational sustainability. It was revealed that remote working, improve competitive advantage and profitability, and encourage the use of innovative and creative methods for solving problems in the modern workplace. Remote working variables are of great help in making the work more efficient, but this would never eliminate employees for being the leading central prayer in any organizations. The human workforce remains highly crucial in offices. They can never be replaced with virtual techniques. The success in the use of technology in modern office work environment depends on the sufficiency of money, time and technology expertise. Technology has rapidly advanced to the point of having most of the jobs done digitally that it threatens the employment of people who are not literate on technological advancements.

Based on the literatures reviewed and data analysis so far, it can be concluded that remote working, when effectively used in terms of teleworking, virtual office, personal leadership and adaptability increases organizational sustainability in the measures of innovativeness, profitability and competitive advantage. In this modern highly competitive time, the use of technology is inevitable. In line with the findings of this study and to the extent of its consistency with results of similar previous studies, we conclude that remote working applications have a positive significant relationship with organizational sustainability of telecommunication companies in Rivers State.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- 1. Managers of telecommunication companies should capitalize on the pivot role of telecommuting in their operations to maximize their profitability.
- 2. Managers of telecommunication companies should seek to build strong collaborative structure through the setting up of virtual teams in line with their company policies and practices aimed at achieving business sustainability.
- 3. Managers of telecommunication companies should apply objectivity in their workflow management processes as this has the potency to either ruin or enhance their business sustainability.
- 4. Business managers should train and retrain their employees in telecommuting practices so as to remain relevant in business

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