Wind of change brought by COVID-19: Exploring the response and the new normal from the perspectives of Indian flexpatriates

Santoshi Sengupta1 | Parth Patel2 | Syed Mohyuddin2 | Verma Prikshat3 | J. Irudhaya Rajesh4 | Vishal Rana5

1School of Management, Graphic Era Hill University, Bhimtal, Uttarakhand, India
2Discipline of Management & Human Resources, Australian Institute of Business, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia
3Cardiff School of Management, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Wales, UK
4College of Business, Government and Law, Flinders University, Bedford Park, South Australia, Australia
5Tasmanian School of Business and Economics, University of Tasmania, Newnham, Tasmania, Australia

Correspondence
Santoshi Sengupta, Professor of Organizational Behavior and HRM School of Management, Graphic Era Hill University, Bhimtal Saattal Road, Bhimtal 263136, Uttarakhand, India.
Email: santoshisengupta@gmail.com

Abstract
Drawing from the positive organizational change theory, this paper aims to explore how Indian flexpatriates responded to the change brought by the pandemic of COVID-19 and what is the new normal according to them. Thematic analysis of 19 in-depth interviews with flexpatriates from the IT industry revealed four explicit phases of change process – reflection, communication, collaboration, and transformation. Further, the analysis brought out four tenets of the new normal. First, it is time to blend physical and virtual work; second, the “personal” touch of Indians in international assignments is irreplaceable; third, working from home amidst the entire household being housebound is the new normal; and last, international travel will resume soon with some changed protocols. This is the first qualitative study combining the issue of global talent management with Indian flexpatriates vis-à-vis the impact of COVID-19, the findings of which expand the positive organizational change theory and have important implications.

KEYWORDS change process, COVID-19, Indian flexpatriates, IT industry, new normal, organizational change theory

1 | INTRODUCTION

“Change is a phenomenon of time. It is the way people talk about the event in which something appears to become, or turn into, something else, where the ‘something else’ is seen as a result or outcome”

(Ford & Ford, 1994:759).

With COVID-19 altering every person’s reality overnight, organizations all over the world took decisions to transfer work from physical space to digital space in a very short period of time. Battling the shock of lockdown and the fear of unknown, massive number of employees, especially those who used to frequently travel internationally for short-term work assignments, resorted to working from home. This sudden episodic change occurred during the period of divergence when organizations had to move away from their equilibrium conditions. Unexpected travel restrictions, worldwide lockdown, mandatory social distancing precipitated global talent management crisis, aggravating the challenges of collaborating with clients, colleagues, or stakeholders which was earlier done by physical meeting at various parts of the world (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020). While prior research in international HRM highlighting on the challenges of expatriate assignments, virtual international work, global project teams, and frequent international travels is useful for HR managers to manage the unprecedented shift (Shaffer, Kramier, Chen, & Bolino, 2012), there is still a dire need to delve deeper into the individual level to understand the experiences of the employees who used to travel frequently for short-term international assignments during the change and how they managed it. There is also a need to gain understanding of the new normal of...
using global teams and virtual forms of organizing work beyond boundaries from their individual perspectives (Mockaitis, Zander, & De Cieri, 2018).

Organizations in the last two decades have re-evaluated global staffing arrangements and embraced new forms of staffing options to deliver on the strategic intent of the firm (Collings & Isichei, 2018), of which flexpatriation is gaining momentum. In flexpatriation, an employee undertakes frequent international business trips usually up to 3 months but does not relocate (Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Riedl, & Kollinger, 2004b) thus giving the advantages of being flexible and cost-effective (Collings, 2014; Farndale, Pai, Sparrow, & Scullion, 2014; Harvey, Mayerhofer, Hartmann, & Moeller, 2010). Despite its importance, academic research has not focused on the micro-level issues such as tapping the experiences of flexpatriates who travel for brief assignments away from their home base while leaving their family and personal life behind (Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Riedl, & Kollinger, 2004b). The COVID-19 phenomenon brought about some first-time changes and forced such flexpatriates to remain home and perform their regular duties of knowledge transfer, acquiring client specification, giving, or receiving training on a virtual mode instead of the former physical mode of doing them.

Organizational changes brought by the pandemic challenged the existing state of affairs, as a result of which, individuals experienced high levels of uncertainty and had fears in coping with the new situation. The change management literature is abundant with prescriptive models directed at senior managers and executives, advising them how to best implement planned organizational change (Stouten, Rousseau, & De Cremer, 2018). Normally, these models specify a series of steps which are considered applicable across a variety of organizational change interventions. Since scholarly literature on organizational change is moving from traditional change methods, it is time to revisit positive organizational change approach that features appreciative inquiry by individuals wherein they discover and discover the positive core of organizational life and respond to change positively.

In the present times, employees do not experience the straightforward sequence of typical unfreezing-moving-refreezing model of change (Lewin, 1947), rather they tend to find themselves in a constant uncertain state and they usually never reach the refreezing state. Thus, it is important and interesting to explore how individuals, especially flexpatriates who were in the habit of traveling frequently for short-term international assignments, responded to the sudden change caused by the pandemic of COVID-19 and how they perceive the new normal to be. For this, we draw upon the positive organizational change theory (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2006) which involves three discernible stages of organizational change management—elevation of inquiry, fusion of strengths, and activation of energy. These stages are prompted by individuals’ inquiry into the visible world and their relatedness to others. Inquiry, which is omnipresent, is embedded in everything individuals do as employees as they perceive the organization (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2006). They talk to one another about past and present capacities; focus on assets, potentials, innovations, and strengths; explore opportunities, set benchmarks, and discuss memorable stories, all of which lead to positive organizational spirit and vision of a promising future. Positive emotions are ignited, expanded, and edified in organizations where appreciative inquiry elevates further discovery and extends relatedness to others.

Taking this as our theoretical base, we try to understand the process by which the flexpatriates positively managed the pandemic change and redefined the new normal. This qualifies as an interesting area for further study in the domain of international business (Farndale et al., 2014). We contextualize our study in India and study Indian flexpatriates for three reasons. First, emerging, and developed economies in South-East Asia such as India and China, which represent 60% of the world’s population, have grown significantly and contributed considerably to global economic growth, trade, and foreign direct investment in the last two decades (Budhwar, Varma, & Patel, 2016). Second, Indian workers represent a significant portion of the global workforce, highlighting the importance of Asian economies for research and practice (Le, Newman, Menzies, Zheng, & Fermelis, 2020). Third, owing to collectivist culture of India (with scores high on power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation) (Hofstede, 1985), Indians consider relationships with people (family, community) very important (Hofstede, 2007), which might affect their perspectives toward flexpatriation, the subsequent change, and the new normal. Precisely, we answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How did the Indian flexpatriates respond to the changes brought about by COVID-19?

RQ2. What is the new normal according to Indian flexpatriates?

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Positive organizational change theory

Positive organizational theory suggests three phases—elevation of inquiry, fusion of strengths, and activation of energy. Taking the positives into a gestalt, appreciative inquiry operates from the organizational system’s core, linking, and expanding the relatedness among its members. Organizational members draw on their combined strengths that connect them to their shared positive core and help them find a mutual access to a world of strengths, which is much greater than what was available before they began the change process. This brings us to the next stage of activation of energy, where there is an emergence of innovation, challenge, change, and breakthrough. As members experience the activation of group energy, they leave their perceptions of constraint behind and get ready to act and create. This eventually contributes to courage, pushing them forward against all odds (Cavanagh & Moberg, 1999; Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2006). During this stage, relatedness among the organizational members motivates them to give beyond themselves, immerse themselves in the process, and join in relation with the organization (Schneider & May, 1995). Often it leads to radical restructuring of the organization.
moving toward greater equilitarian relationships and self-organizing structures.

Taking the positive organizational change theory as our framework, we propose that when the pandemic struck, Indian flexpatriates of the IT industry enquired into the organizational changes through various sources, gathered information, processed it constructively, utilized all available resources, focused on their strengths, and embarked upon the journey of positive change.

2.2 Flexpatriation or short-term international assignments

There has been a growing trend of flexpatriation in global talent management in addition to expatriation and repatriation. Flexpatriates are frequent flyers who perform a wide range of duties by crossing cultural and national boundaries at a short notice and over short time spans while maintaining their family lives in their home country (Mayerhofer, Hartmann, & Herbert, 2004). Flexpatriation is catching momentum because of lower costs associated with it as there is no movement of the family, lower training costs, less time for preparation, and adjustment, and relatively simpler compensation packages (Collings & Ischei, 2018; Farndale et al., 2014; Okpara, Kabongo, & Lau, 2020). Secondly, with the rise in dual-career partnerships, employees are not comfortable relocating to foreign location because of spouse’s career (Harvey, Ronald Buckley, Novicevic, & Wiese, 1999). And thirdly, flexpatriation brings more flexibility in purpose, timing, skills, and location thus reaping long-term commitment from its employees. From the individual perspective also flexpatriation offers several intrinsic benefits such as short-term international assignments often provide extra levels of challenge that too in different cultural contexts. Not only does it boost self-esteem but also combines leisure with work allowing the employees to escape from the daily work routine (Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Ilies, Wilson, & Wagner, 2009). Nevertheless, it has its own challenges such as dilution of project importance, work-life imbalance, blurring of the boundaries between work and non-work domains, and physical and psychological demands (Demel & Mayrhofer, 2010).

The outbreak of the pandemic changed the entire lifestyle of flexpatriates who were international business travelers and globally mobile employees in multinational enterprises. As a unified response to travel restrictions, social distancing norms, and worldwide lockdown during the pandemic, many MNEs, especially the Indian IT industry asked its employees to work from home (Gartner, 2020). This grounded the flexpatriates in their homes making them feel a “sense of loss” (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Their frequent cross-border travels got restricted within the walls of their homes, hotel accommodations got transformed into stay-at-homes, and physical face-to-face business meetings with international counterparts got replaced by virtual meetings over platforms such as zoom, MS Teams, Google meet, etc. This led to augmented stress as many flexpatriates experienced long work hours to accommodate diverse time zones, while others went through the anxiety of performing in less than remote working conditions under the backdrop of perceptible work challenges, job insecurity, and economic uncertainty. When the flexpatriates, who were globally mobile, found themselves, restricted to their homes and yet performed and gave the same output while working from home and doing the same activities on a virtual mode, it must have been a special process involving the organization, top and middle management, individual employees, and the culture, which is worth knowing. Thus, we attempt to study how the flexpatriates responded to the sudden unprecedented change and gave a positive output.

2.3 Indian IT industry and its flexpatriates

Since HR practices are either developed locally or borrowed from the west and implemented locally (Budhwar et al., 2016), there is a need to gain a clear understanding of Indian context and its social structure in order to discern the individual experiences of Indian flexpatriates. India as an important emerging market economy has a steady supply of migrant workers (Bach 2011) along with an increasing number of expatriates, especially in IT/ITeS industry (Pereira, Malik, Howew-Walsh, Munjal, & Hirekhan, 2017). Global giants of IT/ITeS industry and major Indian players operate across the globe so extensively, that one in three IT/ITeS employees from these companies work abroad and one in five of the global giants employees work in India (Saraswati 2012). This is especially true in the case of the IT/ITeS industry (NASSCOM, 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Gottipatti 2012), as India has the largest share of about $US70 billions of expatriates’ remittances to India.

India as the worldwide offshore IT/ITeS market leader, has a share of 55% of the global industry, with aggregate revenue of USD 154 billion approximately in the financial year of 2017, and providing direct employment to 3.9 million and indirect employment to 10 million (NASSCOM 2017). Furthermore, the Indian IT industry has an overseas presence in over 78 countries with 670 offshore development centers and is being transformed into a digital hub for the world (NASSCOM, 2016). As a provider of offshore services, the IT giant companies need to maintain frontline teams in client countries for sales and customer liaisoning and various task performance related to software development and maintenance onsite, which requires Indian employees to travel for expatriate assignments across the globe. With India’s population reaching close to 1.2 billion, the largest generational workforce is constituted by the ones born between 1980 and 1995, also known Gen-Y, which also forms a massive portion of expatriates (Pereira et al., 2017). Gen-Y workforce favors geographical mobility (Brookfield 2013), flexible work systems (Forbes, 2015), and developmental expatriation assignments (Shaw and Fairhurst 2008) instead of the typical strategic disseminator or other traditional roles fulfilled by the conventional expatriates (Dowling et al. 2013). As a result, they prefer short-term expatriate assignments (up to 18 months) the most (Brookfield 2013).
3 | METHOD

The aim of this study is two-fold. First, we try to understand the change process adopted by the Indian flexpatriates under the lens of positive organizational change theory and second, we explore the new normal from their perspectives. In order to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the individual experiences of the Indian flexpatriates while responding to the changes brought about by COVID-19, we adopted a qualitative research method as it would help us yield information beyond numbers and statistics about the quality of the processes under examination (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). We adopted in-depth interview method and took notes throughout to enhance the value of information received from the participants and conduct systematic inquiry of the Indian flexpatriates. Due to the holistic nature of qualitative method, we were able to do inductive reasoning, and take into account personal views (Creswell, 1994).

3.1 | Sample

We used purposive sampling for our research, wherein we selected a sample based on our knowledge about the study and population. We set two criteria for fulfilling our purpose – first, participant must be working in the Indian IT industry for more than 2 years. Second, the participant must be a frequent short-term traveler for international work assignments, with at least two trips in a year. As such, our sample consisted of 19 flexpatriates who averaged 33.6 years in age and had an average of 10.21 years of experience. Most of them belonged to the middle level and had extensive experience of flexpatriation who gave a comprehensive and detailed account of their experiences. In such cases, where the collected data is rich which can be used for exhaustive analysis, a smaller sample size is considered adequate (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

We conducted in-depth interviews between August 15, 2020, and December 15, 2020, with 19 Indian professionals who frequently went on short-term international assignments before the pandemic of COVID-19. With some predefined questions about flexpatriation and the pandemic, we took semi-structured interviews to produce powerful data that provide insights into the participants’ experiences, perceptions, and opinions. We took telephonic interviews because of the seriousness of pandemic, the continued mandatory lockdown, and severity of following social distancing. This study qualifies for conducting telephonic interviews because all the participants were working from home as their offices were closed and had very limited and strict access (Opdenakker, 2006). To begin with, we asked them about their work profile, followed by their experiences of short-term international assignments before COVID-19, impact of COVID-19 on these assignments and then made way to our primary enquiry of how they responded to the change and what is the new normal according to them (Figure 1).

The profile of the participants is given in Table 1. The interviews were transcribed for analysis. In order to obtain methodological validity, the transcripts were sent to the participants and they were requested to read them before we started with the analysis. This step added rigor to the method (Osborne, 1990). The researchers have used data to support and explicate conceptual meanings and interpretations, and have preserved the data for reanalysis. These steps help the researchers to close the circle of inquiry and are completed in this research.

3.2 | Data analysis

We used the method described by Giorgi (Giorgi, 1989) to analyze the interviews. We read the descriptions numerous times to get a preliminary idea about their experiences of short-term international assignments before COVID-19. We then read it multiple times to understand the process of change they underwent during the pandemic. Emphasis was put on the action words as they helped them express different events in their professional lives during the pandemic and revealed the process of change. The descriptions were read in small portions, and a slash was put where the researchers experienced a shift in meaning. At the end of this step, the descriptions were further broken down into a series of meaning units. We
discerned and articulated the implied meanings in each unit, which were then grouped together, synthesized into themes of experiences, and analyzed in the light of positive organizational theory.

4 | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The detailed description of each of the themes followed by a discussion is presented in the following sections.

4.1 | RQ 1: How did the Indian IT flexpatriates respond to the change?

The thematic analysis of 19 in-depth interviews gave us four phases in which Indian IT flexpatriates responded to the change imposed by the pandemic—Reflection, Communication, Collaboration, and Transformation. The findings are shown in Figure 1.

4.1.1 | Reflection

Thematic analysis of the 19 interview transcripts helped us identify “reflection” as the first stage of change process, which occurred during the first 2 weeks following the lockdown in India. When the news of pandemic, global lockdown, and travel restrictions broke, the initial reaction was full of chaos and uncertainty. There were a few participants who were heavily relying on their foreign assignment as it was important for their career and promotion which was due in March–April. The news of travel restriction and suspension of the assignment pulled them down for a number of days. However, as days went by, they started reflecting on the highly volatile situation. According to Viraj, 39, “a compelling environment of chaos was formed in the organization during the last week of March which marked a chaotic and highly volatile situation. It literally seemed the project had crashed even before its take-off, I thought our team was in jeopardy and perhaps my company would be badly hit.” Many participants shared similar views that projected confusion, ambiguity, and insecurity in the first week. However, as time passed, the participants stated that they “started reflecting deeply on what was happening around.” As Seema, 34, recalls, “working from home whole day amidst all family responsibilities with news of COVID-19 cases trickling in every hour was a first-time. I started reading about how SARS had impacted businesses in China in 2004, and about the impact of other crisis events of the past on businesses, especially IT industry. Coming from a tech background, I was hopeful that we could sail through this by using the latest technology effectively. It was time to stretch all our technological capabilities and make the best use of virtual meetings.”

For Indian flexpatriates, international assignments are a great source of boosting the self-esteem as they often get to work on challenging projects and interacting with international clients. Sudden change of canceling all their travel plans was a bolt from the blue. What they valued doing face to face with the host office employees was difficult to handle virtually. The first few weeks of COVID-19,

| S. No. | Participant pseudonym | Age (in years) | Experience (in years) | Gender |
|--------|-----------------------|---------------|----------------------|--------|
| 1      | Viraj                 | 39            | 16                   | Male   |
| 2      | Seema                 | 34            | 10                   | Female |
| 3      | Sara                  | 31            | 6                    | Female |
| 4      | Amit                  | 31            | 7                    | Male   |
| 5      | Manisha               | 29            | 7                    | Female |
| 6      | Ritika                | 28            | 4                    | Female |
| 7      | Chirag                | 32            | 8                    | Male   |
| 8      | Sweta                 | 38            | 16                   | Female |
| 9      | Aashish               | 35            | 13                   | Male   |
| 10     | Hetal                 | 41            | 18                   | Female |
| 11     | Mandeep               | 27            | 3                    | Male   |
| 12     | Himanshu              | 30            | 6                    | Male   |
| 13     | Nitin                 | 42            | 18                   | Male   |
| 14     | Heena                 | 35            | 10                   | Female |
| 15     | Pankaj                | 39            | 15                   | Male   |
| 16     | Rama                  | 36            | 13                   | Male   |
| 17     | Garima                | 28            | 5                    | Female |
| 18     | Ishan                 | 38            | 15                   | Male   |
| 19     | Chahat                | 26            | 4                    | Female |
participants claimed to have engaged themselves in asking questions, finding out ways to do things differently, and evolving with the change. Sara, 31, “I was continuously connected with my Belgian team member, discussing work, sharing documents and brainstorming how we could minimize the delay in the work. A decent part of our project was already being handled online even before the pandemic. For us, as expatriates, we just had to adopt to the new virtual way.” While many enquired from office colleagues and their manager about the state of affairs, others would read a lot of corporate news and follow articles on the intranet to quench their curiosity about it. Chirag, 32 said, “There were numerous WhatsApp groups which became active in the month of April and May. People expressed their issues related to international assignments, sought help, provided suggestions, explored effective ways for conducting virtual meetings, etc. It seemed all of us together were fighting the big change. I too spent a lot of time posting questions and giving answers.”

According to positive organizational theory, reflections of positive events, lead to a variety of positive emotions, thus linking it with broader thinking (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). Reflection is the process through which an individual considers one's knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, and processes which consequently influences one's understanding and experiences (Blackman & Ritchie, 2008). Knowledge is constructed within organizations when employees make inquiries into situations of uncertainty such as the case of pandemic (Elkjaer, 2004) which often happens by reflecting upon the relationship between how the situation is defined and what should be the resolution. Reflecting into the positive, naturally occurring or deliberate events can help generate positive change as it has the potential to elevate and extend the best of what is present in the organizational system (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2006). Reflection is used in adjusting or developing new policies and strategies by improving structures and systems in order to increase the preparedness for crises and to deal with them in a more effective way (Blackman & Ritchie, 2008). In case of our participants, a common thing was that their reflections rendered a community feeling and made them feel together during the crisis situation. Reflecting on the changes and drawing positive notions out of it helped them discover the episodic event in a systematic way. For Indian flexpatriates, the phase of lockdown was a setback, especially for the ones who had planned visits during March and April. During that time, when they reflected upon the existing condition in the backdrop of their own beliefs and assumptions, they were able to deal with the crisis situation more effectively.

4.1.2 Communication

The next phase that emerged in the change process was “communication.” According to the participants, as time went by, processes were set, and concrete communication was received from their managers and other senior staff. This happened during April when their companies received more clarity and systems for virtual meetings were set across the globe. For flexpatriates, the suspended visits were taken care of by the virtual meet-ups. Though it added the challenge of finding a common time slot for people working across diverse time zones, everyone tried to extend their ways to accommodate for it. The participants mentioned how they would be on calls most of the time and talk to their counter parts to express and discuss their views, issues, apprehensions, suggestions, etc. The conversations would not just limit to work but would also encompass informal chit-chats about the pandemic and how other companies and industries were facing the challenge. As Sweta, 38, mentioned, “My husband and I work in two different IT giant companies. We shared our stories, our experiences and what our companies were adopting as the best practice. I had to visit the US in April which got cancelled due to the pandemic. The entire thing got shifted on MS Teams and there were incessant meetings in place of what was scheduled for the actual visit. There were also times when I spoke with my US counterpart and discussed how our countries were handling the situation. This helped me feel comfortable and less jittery about the thing.” An important finding of the analysis was that most of the participants resorted to informal communication during that phase to gather information or discuss issues. Since they were physically not present at the host location, they would ensure full participation over virtual mode and try their best to accomplish their production and social functions. The unprompted, interactive, and rich informal conversations with team members spread across the globe played an inevitable role in facing the pandemic challenge.

Aashish, 35, “In normal times also, I am always seeking information from people around me instead of opening up a mail or referring to the manual or handbook. It has always worked for me because I get the right information, without any hassle. During Covid-19, we used to receive a large number of emails about changes in the processes and do’s and don’ts, most of which would impact my international assignment. There was a lot of change that occurred especially in the templates of the reports and documents. What would seem muddled to me in the first go, would soon be clear as I would call up other people of my team, discuss matters with my colleagues, or simply Whatsapp my query to my team members. My conversations with my Dutch colleagues would be fluid and undesignated and would work clearly to accomplish my task.”

Crisis often brings stress in the lives of individuals, due to which they tend to seek out and find comfort among familiar people. It is the shared stress, anxiety, and frustrations that create ties binding the collegial global teams and offers-enhanced cohesion to move forward (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Individuals under stress often indulge in informal communication which helps them discover similar opinions and strike rapport with others often converting to friendship and bringing in solidarity. Thus, despite the initial backlash of the pandemic, lockdown, and travel cancelations, participants communicated with one another, discussed issues, expressed opinions which helped them deal with the situation in a constructive and collective way. Positive organizational change theory suggests that communicating positively at a micro-level leads to a dialog of understanding among individuals. Communications and conversations generate a process of sharing, and a reservoir of stories, narratives, and past experiences increases, giving individuals the opportunity to experience specific positive emotions such as interest, curiosity, admiration, etc. (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2006).
According to the participants, as the Indian IT flexpatriates communicated thoroughly within teams, they became increasingly aware of the positive core and took it as a challenge to perform against all odds. This escalated appreciation for the work and project, increased hope to fight the times, and expanded the community feeling. Prior literature suggests that informal communication is an excellent source to boost employees’ moral and solve problems (Guffy, Rhodes, & Rogen, 2005). They often fill the gap that formal communication fails to address Gilsdorf (1998) and Daniels, Speaker, and Papa (1997). Crampton, Hodge, and Mishra (1998) summarized that when employees feel threatened, insecure, under stress, and whenever a pending change exists, and ultimately, when communication from the management is limited, employees are found to be relying more on grapevine. Consequently, informal communication must logically affect on communication satisfaction since the most important role of informal communication is to fulfill the employees’ informational needs. There is evidence in prior literature also that when employees feel insecure, or when a pending change exists with limited communication from the management, employees tend to rely more on informal communication channels Crampton, Hodge, and Mishra (1998).

4.1.3 | Collaboration

The third phase of response during the pandemic was collaboration. After a few weeks, as things settled, revised processes were communicated, and clarity was achieved, participants stated that they started collaborating with each other, while focusing on their existing capacities, potential strengths, and as a whole, they sought to build union among themselves even if they were scattered across the globe. According to Hetal, 41, “One of my US team members shared her experience how 9/11 had impacted their work and how they dealt with it back then. She categorically mentioned that no matter what the crisis is, organizations with the help of technology are able to find out some way or the other to protect their businesses from any negative impact.” According to several other participants also being in the IT industry was a privilege as the advancements in technology provided a big support for responding to crisis positively. Participants mentioned terms such as “technology is our asset,” “innovation is the solution,” and “technology is our strategic competency.” In sharing these thoughts, the participants felt that it was unwise to accept failure of their international projects because of this pandemic. It was their duty to find ways out and have minimum loss.

The interview content led to insights into the community spirit and vision of values and possible future. All the participants had untapped inspiring narrative accounts of high hopes, optimism, and positivity (excitement, in a few cases) about the whole change. Manisha, 29, mentioned, “We created online teams for better communication and time to time discussion of the delivery. There were moments during the online meetings when the enthusiasm would be totally high and the collective energy of the team members would make us think something new and innovative... we did have many challenges too but none that could not be solved. It was thrilling to receive tech support through Anydesk which helped me a lot whenever I faced laptop issues.” The analysis of all 19 interviews brought out a common feature that there were connections of the Indian flexpatriates with their foreign counterparts, viewing both self and other in a collaborative light, which led to a shared and positive purpose to do the best. None of the participants used any self-limiting or deficit-based terms rather took pride in narrating how even after their trip got canceled, they managed to deliver their projects or perform their duties online. They worked amicably to seek out the best from the technological changes that were taking place. The analysis hinted that the collective energy of the members and the shared goals brought about acceptance of the changed situation and in spite of stalled international travels, the projects did not receive any significant negative impact.

According to the positive organizational change theory, this stage corresponds to the stage of “fusion of strengths” where the collaboration brought elevation and extension of what best was present in the organizational system. According to the theory, when employees share a vivid organizational dream, they tend to cooperate in designing a system that turns the dream into reality. Similar to what is stated in the theory, participants utilized their accessible strengths of technology, grabbed opportunities for paving way for online transfiguration, and brought team-wide developments expanding from the “local to the whole.” For example, Ritika, 45, stated, “I had to visit Amsterdam to deliver a training program which got cancelled due to the travel restrictions. I did not receive any communication about the updates for two weeks, then suddenly in the second week of April they told me take the training online on MS Teams. Now I was totally new to it and was quite nervous because my forte has always been physical connect. Anyway, while I was preparing for it, I happened to attend one such training and that gave me a huge idea of how I could conduct it online. I spoke with that trainer and cleared my doubts too.” As the theory indicates, participants came together in the respective teams and shared their concerns which eventually gave way to a natural development of cooperation with others. Small moments of success in a changed system led to series of positive moments for others thus giving way to joint collaboration.

4.1.4 | Transformation

After reflection, communication, and collaboration, the last stage that emerged in the change process during the pandemic of COVID-19 for Indian IT flexpatriates was “transformation.” This stage is essentially about transformation to new paradigms of work processes, changed mental state of employees who accepted and responded to the change positively, and in the emergence of innovative breakthroughs. The pandemic brought about unprecedented variations, restricted well-planned travel schedules, and changed the modus operandi of doing business. The analysis implied that once there was collaboration among the participants, they tried out all means to blend their ideas and make their projects a success, and
the end result was transformation of mindsets and the creation of new ways. The reflections of the participants, resulted in communication across boundaries, with colleagues and seniors and other stakeholders which led to joint efforts to take the change in their stride and ensure minimum risk to their respective projects. As Nitin, 42, mentioned, “I actively participated in all virtual meetings and found out how best we could operate while sitting at homes. I put up some discussion threads on our company blog and discovered that many of us were thinking on the same lines. While there was a major think tank group that was working on the transfiguration at an organizational level, three of us from our project team started planning and implementing a new process for our project. We self-organized our stuff and gave some training sessions to the people in our team, few of whom were from other continents, and collectively got the ball rolling. It took some two weeks but it was all smooth in the end.” During this stage, the idea was to empower each other and get the best from all to connect, cooperate, and co-create. Changes that were never thought possible got democratically mobilized when members of the teams made use of the power of the positive core. Participants mentioned that they felt a compulsive desire to be a part of the breakthrough and let the pandemic not empower them.

This stage resonated well with the “activation of energy” phase of positive organizational change, wherein members tend to experience activation of group energy after communicating with one another and blending their strengths. An important aspect of this phase, according to the theory, is that members leave their perceptions of constraint behind and shed off their resistance in order to achieve their goals. There is a feeling of synergy and members collectively aim to put forth ideas and implement the change process. Synergy often leads to a situation where members are no longer afraid of the change but instead experience courage and boldness to get hold of things that pushes them forward to initiate and implement new processes as a response to the change (Detert & Bruno, 2017) (Cavanagh & Moberg, 1999). Enthusiasm to make things work, experiencing a sense of comradeship to deal with the situation together, and joining hands to take charge of the situation let the members activate their plans into action. Heena, 35, mentioned, “After our first virtual meeting on a platform which was new to all of us, many of our team members explored the platform and found out ways how to best use it for team meetings. From scheduling meetings, to presenting online, sharing resources with our team members, everything got into a full-throttle action within few days. We started realizing how technology had made things so convenient for us that we could give our best to our projects even being in our own continents and own time zones.” This phase saw the extension and expansion of what was best in their respective organizations. For few participants, technology was their strength, for others it was communication and for rest positive mindset was their main forte. So, following the collaboration among team members, a common goal was shared which focused on the potential of their organization system which could be utilized for responding to such a first-time change. The participants agreed that in their individual teams, there was a stronger feeling of cooperation in designing a solution with accessible strengths, opportunities, and potentials than resisting the change.

4.2 | RQ2: What is the new normal according to Indian Flexpatriates?

Thematic analysis of the 19 interview transcripts gave us four major themes for the new normal according to Indian flexpatriates in the IT industry. The findings are shown in Figure 2.

4.2.1 | It’s time to have best of both worlds

The first theme of the new normal according to Indian flexpatriates in the IT industry was that it was time for organizations and international project teams to make the best use of both worlds that is, physical world and the virtual world. According to the participants, flexpatriate assignments saw transition from the physical meet-ups to the virtual meet-ups in a very short span of time. They agreed that while there was a negligible compromise with the work quality, the benefits derived from it were humungous. India had a complete lockdown in the months of April, May, and June in the year 2020. With the slight improvement of the COVID-19 situation in the tech cities and relaxation of movement, many participants stated that local team members of international project have started visiting the office once in a while for deliberations, discussions, and physical documentation. They conduct their online meetings from the office premise which gives them high internet connectivity, an exclusive undisturbed space, and sometimes easy access of reports. Viraj, 39, mentioned, “COVID-19 has made us realize that crisis can strike any time any day. Also, each one of us responds differently to different situations. Our project was successfully delivered during the pandemic because most of us were optimistic. Many of us had no restrictions of time zones and attended meetings at 11 in the night and 5 in the morning with no qualms whatsoever. When required, two of us visited the office and managed things from the physical premise. If I have to say what worked for us, it was combination of online and offline work, a team of like-minded people, and a promise to deliver.”

Participants claimed that in the present scenario they work majorly on online mode and visit their office once in a while which gives them a change, allows them to move out of the house, get dressed, and experience a break from their regular home environment. Also, participants from big tech cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Gurgaon found traveling to office once a week as a big respite from traffic horrors. They further mentioned that working on global cross-national teams and flying frequently had raised many health risks for them. Working from home gave them the time and scope to attend to their bodies and recover from the ailments. However, operating across time zones and expectation of availability around the clock was the challenge for them. For this, Nitin 42, mentioned, “As a trainer, I feel the best part about the present times is that I have flexibility of time, space, and mode. I have to take 3–4 trainings each month. During the lockdown, I took more than seventeen trainings for multiple global cross-national teams. The initial challenge became a practice and I found it quite convenient to take online trainings. However, since November, I have started visiting my office and take training sessions in a hybrid

4.2.2 | Keeping communication open

The second theme of the new normal according to Indian flexpatriates in the IT industry was that it was time to keep communication open. According to the participants, effective communication is key to make a virtual team work. While there was a major think tank group that was working on the th...
mode. The Indian participants attend it physically and the session is live-streamed for participants in Singapore.”

Literature on IHRM highlights the importance of flexible work arrangements that serve as a distinctive advantage for employees, especially who have to travel frequently across continents and time-zones. It helps them maintain their physical and mental well-being and facilitates them to cope with the demands of working across geographical and temporal boundaries (Adamovic, 2018). In order to have the best of both worlds in the best possible way, prior literature suggests that organizations should communicate clearly the work expectations and draw boundaries for work time to help employees maintain a work-life balance. The pandemic has indeed offered an opportunity to try and implement flexible work arrangements with the objective of enhancing the well-being of globally mobile employees (Caligiuri et al., 2020). While virtual working can reduce the impacts of cross-cultural, linguistic, and paralinguistic differences, increase electronic documentation, save on time, and even foster effective psychological collaborations (O’Leary, Wilson, & Metiu, 2014), physical working gives them the advantage of focused environment, dedicated work space and time, effective and efficient meetings, access to diverse community, etc. Past research supports that if global teams have to gather only information, asynchronous virtual communication can be preferred, however where they need to solve problems and decide unanimously, international visits and regular face-to-face meetings requiring synchronous interactions should be used (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000).

4.2.2 | Indian personal touch, matters quite much

The second new normal according to the participants is that they realized nothing can replace the “personal touch” of Indian flexpatriates. This is a unique contribution of this study which separates it from all western studies on international HRM as it portrays the Indian management style and the fact that Indians take pride in the way they deal with their international (mostly western) counterparts with feelings and emotions. According to Chirag, 32, “Personal touch can never be replaced with online meets...Virtual setup has made things happen during the lockdown but it can never replace the traditional face to face interaction completely.”

It is true that as per the new normal, virtual teams have helped members cross boundaries of time, space, and organization by the effective means of electronic technological means to communicate and collaborate. However, spatially dispersed communication lacks in physical proximity, frequency of interaction, and breadth and depth of physical cues through non-verbal communication, which are quite strong and effective in face to face team meetings. Indians have their own way of striking relationships with their counterparts, be it in any part of the world. Being a part of more collectivist culture, Indian flexpatriates have a natural tendency of working in groups while building on relationships before they talk business which implies that they value social relations with their peers and colleagues (Sarkar, 2009). Indian society, as a whole, is collectivistic and promotes social cohesion and interdependence which can be seen in the way Indian flexpatriates work. Interviews with the participants pointed at the practice of gelling with their global counterparts, going out for social dinners or drinks, and talking about families, thereby socializing beyond work. They also stated that multiple visits to the same place and meeting the same set of people facilitated the strengthening of the bond. That is the reason why their managers often preferred sending the same individuals over and over again.

It is a common thing to note among collectivists that they stress a lot of importance on relationships, and even if the costs of these relationships exceed the benefits, individuals tend to stay with the relationship (Singelis et al. 1995). A study by ABC shows that present generation flexpatriates value affiliation and personal enjoyment in their work and like to care for others while working in their workgroup. For instance, Pankaj, 39, takes pride in saying, “Indians are relationship-oriented workforce. Relationships are the key to work in India. When we used to go to Scandinavian countries for our assignments, we used to mingle well with the employees there and establish relations with them. It would not be limited to only that meeting but would extend to our subsequent meetings too. Most of our decisions are made based on long-standing emotional ties that we share with our European colleagues.” Heena, 35, who used to visit Australia regularly, says their business thrives because they go and meet Australian clients regularly. “The international travel is not just about collecting specifications from them or keeping it strictly business, they are much more than that. It is a good way of motivating the young employees and adds immensely to their experience and exposure.”

As stated by the participants, short-term international assignments are quite useful and effective in the Indian IT industry because people are more willing to go on short-term assignments rather than long-term ones. Because of the frequency of the trips, the Indian flexpatriates are able to have a better physical control of the project, and establish emotional relationships with international colleagues which help in achieving high-quality output. During the crisis of COVID-19, numerous global teams moved to the virtual platform for discussions, deliberations, and decision-making and it was seen that globally scattered teams that had strong working ties and emotional bonds were able to work better even at a physical distance as compared to the teams that lacked in the working relationships (Caligiuri, 2020). The latter faced difficulties in connecting, communicating, and maintaining work rapport on virtual mode. This is in congruence with some past literature which sheds light on the importance of working relationships in virtual collaborations which significantly impacts the social ties and network (Hansen & Lovas, 2004), expectations from the projects (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006), and team identity (Maznevski, Davison, & Jonsen, 2006). These factors tend to intensify when work teams are beyond country borders, cultures, contexts, and firms. Many organizations that have majority of generation Y as its expatriates have realized the importance of social ties and thus offer tailored activities such as social meetings, theater, adventure sports, trekking for their expatriates in different global locations to build upon the emotional bond among the members of the global teams (Pereira et al., 2017).
4.2.3 Integration of work and family life, sometimes fun, and sometimes strife

The third new normal for the Indian flexpatriates is working from home resulting in the integration of professional and personal life, a source of comfort and challenge at the same time. Talking about how they felt working from home had become the new normal, few participants expressed it as a boon while many, who were married and had children, expressed it as a band. According to them, their life had become a challenge in the initial phase after which it slowly began to sink in. Even after almost a year of the pandemic, the Indian flexpatriates believe that working from home has brought to them an unprecedented situation of managing all household chores and caring for their children, while attending their regular office, virtual meets, and meeting the usual targets. According to Rama, 36, “Work from home has given me the flexibility and independence of taking care of garden, and pets while working in my pyjamas... One day my pet came and sat on my lap, while my video was still on and my Japanese counterpart was happy to meet her... There have been some challenges too. For instance, earlier I never used to check my work emails after 5 pm but now if a meeting is scheduled at 5 pm, it usually stretches till 9, sometimes 10 and I have to be logged in and participate, no matter what. I usually miss taking out my pet for a walk due to this.”

In the past one year, boundaries between work and non-work or family life have become almost integrated into each other with the inevitable advent of work from home. It has been further aided by advances in technology and possession of laptops, smart phones, and other forms of mobile communication technology with high speed internet connection, which have changed the way people work. While work has become extremely flexible with regard to the space and time of doing it, employees too have become productive as they spend more work hours than before. The new normal of work from home has posed both comforts and challenges, especially to women flexpatriates who have gone back to delivering their dual role to the best of their ability. Many women participants believe looking after children and managing the household chores are their primary areas. For almost all the women participants in the sample, the first few months of the pandemic was like crazy. These participants used to look forward to their international travels as it was a source of taking a break from their mundane family life and gave them an opportunity for leisure and recreation. Also, many women stated that these assignments boosted their confidence and enhanced their professional growth, which stopped all of a sudden with the pandemic. In fact, the pandemic was a double-edged sword for them, one side restricted their foreign visits and the other side augmented their dual work pressure. Garima, 34, a mother 2 children said, “I had almost decided to resign from my job because I was just not able to do it all, make my children attend their classes, help them with their school work, cooking, laundry, overall upkeep of the house, and then attending virtual meetings at weird times. I put in my papers twice but my manager just did not accept saying I was an important resource from India for this significant banking project. I knew I had no way out and it was then I called my mother to come and stay with us and help me with the household chores so that I could concentrate well on my work.”

Forcing the flexpatriates, who were used to frequent international travel, staying in swanky hotels, and relishing business dinners, to work from home with and attend virtual meetings has been posed a new kind of stress on them. This stress of meeting company targets, and productivity goals along with managing the demands of virtual global work has caught up many flexpatriates in a vicious blanket of experiencing long work hours and working amidst the chaos of household environment. To add to this is the element of job insecurity and economic uncertainty. Working from home during the pandemic is different from the traditional or common work from home, because in the former case, the shift has been involuntary, stretches indefinitely, and forces one to work from home while the entire household is house-bound.

4.2.4 Virtual meetings may stay, but physical travel will surely make way...with a difference

The last new normal according to the participants was that no matter how long the virtual meetings stay, the physical travel is bound to return as it is irreplaceable. Most of the participants were certain that travel restrictions will be soon be over by the end of 2021 and business travels will become normal, however with some difference. According to Ishan, 38, “International travel will resume anytime soon. If you look at it from the perspective of the airlines, you can see that they get a huge chunk of business from us. Our in-house travel desk used to be always loaded with work as someone or the other would always be travelling on short-term or long-term visits. The pandemic is not going to stay forever. I am certain the vaccination will soon be out and travel restrictions will be relaxed. Business travels will resume, if not at the same level, at least the necessary travels.”

Interviews with the participants projected a very hopeful future in which physical travel will soon get its way. The pandemic of COVID-19 has resulted in closing of the boundaries, and extensive travel restrictions. Indian IT industry is fostered on the frequent travel made by the IT consultants, project managers, engineers, and sales people whose onsite visits impacted their businesses positively in pushing the sales and establishing the relationships. With the travel restrictions, flexpatriates have been forced to work from home bringing a pause to their travel plans, however, every participant in our study was hopeful of the future that physical travel will resume soon. According to them, the non-essential travels such as for training, or making a sales pitch, or just presenting one’s work may be stopped but essential ones such as product delivery or meeting new clients that require physical interaction, will not be compromised with. As Chirag, 32, puts it, “Fear of virus and quarantine rules, may keep the travelling to limited but I feel things should return to normal as there is no alternative to it. However, there might be some impact to non-essential travels which happens sometimes especially when the company is trying to push solution to some customer who is not very interested. So, may be it impact sales too. Also, travel may not be the same as new norms regarding health and safety, group travels, pandemic state of the country, and emergency planning will be incorporated.”

The increase in remote or online work implies that traveling for face-to-face meetings with team members and clients will become
more vital as soon as the travel scenario resumes. In fact, according to a report from McKinsey (2020), business travel will most likely return in phases with sales and client-related meetings to be among the first to return. Post pandemic, the flexpatriates expect a reduction in group travels and an increase in the length of stay, as organizations would want to have a greater return on investment. Another perspective on the return of travel is that with more time being spent on remote or work from home, flexpatriate employees will realize the value of personal and professional growth that they acquired from their short-term international assignments. Thus, the need and expectation for physical travel will only grow over time.

However, the return of flexpatriate travel will highly depend on the geographical factors, state of the pandemic in the destination country, government rules and regulations, quarantine guidelines, and overall health infrastructure. New dimensions will be added to flexpatriate travels. First, a focus on health and safety, minimizing risk through duty of care will become the new normal with increased responsibility of HR departments to ensure safety of their employees. Second, organizations will have to work on an emergency plan for their flexpatriates which will include 24X7 support, legal, and moral obligation to ensure employees stay safe while working and have a strong structure for evacuation, in case of any crisis. Third, there will be increased focus on trust – trust that the counterparts who the employees are meeting with are also taking appropriate precautions and following health protocols. Fourth, the requirement of vaccination certificates (which has already become a mandate) will be the new normal in traveling. And last of all, the leisure part of the flexpatriate travel may be diluted as the scope of exploring new places, cuisines, and cultures, which used to be a part and parcel of work assignments, may be redefined with respect to the destination country (Figure 2).

5 | CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explores how Indian flexpatriates responded to the pandemic of COVID-19 and what according to them, is the new normal now. Using the positive organizational change theory as our theoretical framework, we understand the process adopted by the flexpatriates in responding to the change posed by the pandemic. The findings reveal four explicit phases of change process, and four tenets of new normal, which have important theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretically and most importantly, this is the first study that utilizes the positive organizational change theory to explain a new and unprecedented phenomenon of responding to the changes brought by COVID-19. It confirms and expands upon the theory by providing evidence of how Indian IT flexpatriates responded to the change. While the theory states three discernible stages of change response – elevation of inquiry, fusion of strengths, and activation of energy, our
study revealed the detailed process in which the Indian IT flexpatriates responded positively to the change by undergoing phases of reflection, communication, collaboration, and transformation. The findings add to the theory by developing a logical sequence in which the change was responded to. Starting with reflecting deeply on what was happening around, the flexpatriates started communicating with their international counterparts, while relying on the concrete communication by the higher-ups. This was followed by a technology-aided collaboration with their team members who were spread across the globe, and finally moving into the transformative phase of breaking into new paradigms of work processes, and innovative breakthroughs.

The practical implications of the study encompass the changed behaviors and processes which eventually shape the new-normal. The first implication is that for Indian flexpatriates, international assignments are a great source of personal and professional growth, career development, and identity-building. With restrictions on travel, they experienced an overnight setback but as a whole utilized positive emotions to deal and adapt to the change. Organizations can utilize this for judiciously managing the careers of the flexpatriates who now do not have as much opportunity to travel as before. The second implication pertains to the new normal work practices, few of which are distinct to the Indian culture. For instance, the increased value attached to the physical interaction with the international counterparts is specific to our collectivist culture that believes in face-to-face interaction and building personal relationships even in professional setting. Also, in the Indian context, work life integration poses more challenges to the Indian women in flexpatriates as working from home exacerbates the dual-role workload, subtly forcing them to manage all household chores, and caregiving for the children and other adults at home. And last implication is that flexpatriates want their organizations to have a proper blend of physical and virtual meetings so as to make advantage of both. They expect travel to resume by the end of this year and also feel that remote working and virtual collaboration for more than a year now, will make traveling all the more necessary. As such, they expect their HR and top management to prioritize health and safety for the future international travel and to have a proper emergency plan in place.

While the study has important implications, it is not without its limitations. We have certain methodological and empirical limitations which bind the findings of the study. First, restriction caused due to the worldwide lockdown because of the pandemic, curbed us from having face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviews have their own importance as the researcher is able to extract meanings out of the nonverbal cues as well. Second, data were collected from a single group of participants and from a single country context. While this was mentioned in the scope of the study, it brings limitations to the generalizability of the findings. And last, only the qualitative method was used. We believe using mixed-method or multi-method study would have enhanced the richness of the data and rigor of the study.

To conclude, the wind of change brought by the pandemic of COVID-19 is a spectacle of the present time. As it brings some extraordinary vagaries in the way flexpatriates worked, organizations must give way to the innovative work practices while being thoughtful about the overall employee experience.

ORCID
Santoshi Sengupta https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8553-0294
Parth Patel https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3359-977X

REFERENCES
Adamovic, M. (2018). An employee-focused human resource management perspective for the management of global virtual teams. International Journal of Human Resource Management, 29(14), 2159–2187. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1323227
Blackman, D., & Ritchie, B. W. (2008). Tourism crisis management and organizational learning. Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 23(2–4), 45–57. https://doi.org/10.1300/J073v23n02_04
Budhwar, P. S., Varma, A., & Patel, C. (2016). Convergence-divergence of HRM in the Asia-Pacific: Context-specific analysis and future research agenda. Human Resource Management Review, 26(4), 311–326. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2016.04.004
Brookfield. (2013). Millennials and their impact on international mobility. Chicago: Brookfield Global Relocation Services.
Caligiuri, P., De Cieri, H., Minbaeva, D., Verbeke, A., & Zimmermann, A. (2020). International HRM insights for navigating the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications for future research and practice. In Journal of International Business Studies (Vol. 51, Issue 5, pp. 697–713). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00335-9
Collings, D. G. (2014). Toward mature talent management: Beyond shareholder value. Human Resource Development Quarterly, 25, 301–319. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21198
Collings, D. G., & Isichei, M. (2018). The shifting boundaries of global staffing: Integrating global talent management, alternative forms of international assignments and non-employees into the discussion. International Journal of Human Resource Management, 29(1), 165–187. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1380064
Cooperrider, D. L., & Sekerka, L. E. (2006). Toward a theory of positive organizational change. In: K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, and R. E. Quinn, Eds., Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline (pp. 223–238). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler. https://ezproxy.usherbrooke.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=2006-11027-009&site=ehost-live
Creswell, J. W. (1994). Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approach. London: Publications.
Caligiuri, P. (2020). Say Goodbye to Handshakes and Hugs. Entrepreneur and Innovation Exchange. https://doi.org/10.32617/512-5e977f543021
Cavanagh, G. F., & Moberg, D. J. (1999). The virtue of courage within the organization. Research in ethical issues in organizations, 1, 1-25.
Crampton, S. M., Hodge, J. W., & Mishra, J. M. (1998). The informal communication network: Factors influencing grapevine activity. Public Personnel Management, 27(4), 569-584.
Daniels, T. D., Speaker, B. K., & Papa, M. J. (1997). Perspectives of Organizational Communication. Dubuque: Brown and Benchmark
Dowling, P. J., Festing, M., & Engle, A. (2013). International Human Resource Management, Sixth Edition, South Melbourne: Thomson Learning.
Demel, B., & Mayrhofer, W. (2010). Frequent business travelers across Europe: Career aspirations and implications. Thunderbird International Business Review, 52(4), 301–311. https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.20352
Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling, 53, 160.
Detert, J. R., & Bruno, E. A. (2017). Workplace courage: Review, synthesis, and future agenda for a complex construct. In Academy of Management Annals (Vol. 11, Issue 2, pp. 593–639). https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2015.0155
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Santarshi Sengupta is Professor and Head of School of Management, Graphic Era Hill University, Bhimtal Campus, Uttarakhand, India. She is a passionate researcher and a devoted academician. She received the prestigious Allianza4U Fellowship from Spain and did her post-doctoral research at Universidad Pompeu Fabra, Spain. Her current research interests include investigating organizational success factors at a micro-level by exploring individuals, their attitudes, engagement levels, and well-being. She prefers making qualitative research inquiry by interviewing her participants and delving deep into their emotions and words. Over a span of 17 years, she has to her credit several research publications in international journals of repute; as chapters in books and has also published a book on her research on employee attrition and retention in the BPO industry of India.

Parth Patel is a Senior Lecturer in Management at the Australian Institute of Business. Parth was previously a Lecturer in International Management & HRM at Newcastle University Business School which is an elite, triple-accredited business school and part of a Russell Group university in the United Kingdom. Parth holds over 10 years of experience working in the Australian and British higher education sectors and holds a PhD in Management from the University of Newcastle, Australia and a Master of International Business from the University of Wollongong, Australia. He has also previously worked as a Recruitment Consultant with Chandler Macleod, one of Australia’s premier recruitment and HR consulting agency. Parth is a member of the Academy of Management, USA, the British Academy of Management and Academy of International Business, USA. He sits on the editorial board of the Review of International Business and Strategy journal and is the communications editor for Asian Business & Management journal. He is also a regular peer-reviewer for the Journal of International Management, International Business Review, and the International Journal of Emerging Markets.

Syed Mohyuddin is currently a lecturer at Australian Institute of Business. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Management from Curtin Business School, Curtin University, Perth (Western Australia). He has over 10 years’ experience teaching human resources and management courses in the Middle East and Australia. His experience has been both academic and managerial.

Syed was also a Community College Registrar in the Middle East. He worked as a full-time lecturer and Subject Coordinator of Business Communication as well as part-time tutor and Lecturer of various management subjects in Curtin Business School, School of Management. He has also taught as a tutor at La Trobe University, Mildura Campus (Victoria). His PhD research work was related to the challenges faced by skilled migrants to achieve professional recognition in Australian organizations. Syed’s research interests include, HR & Management, Skilled Migration, Management & Diversity, Leadership, Organisational Behaviour, Strategic HR Management.

Verma Prikshat is a senior lecturer in HRM at Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK. He has extensive experience in teaching management subjects in UK, Australia, and Indian Universities. He has published and presented his research in reputed journals and numerous international conferences. His major areas of research interest are AI-Augmented HRM, future of work and its implications for HRM, precarious employment, graduate work-readiness, leadership, and IHRM in developing and emerging markets.

J. Irudhaya Rajesh is a lecturer at Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia. Rajesh holds a PhD in Organisational Behaviour from Anna University. He has Masters Degree in Psychology and an MBA in Human Resource Management. He has completed specialized courses in Training & Development from American Management Association, Washington DC. Rajesh has over 10 years of teaching experience in Australia and overseas. His industry experience spans across 9 years as a Training & Development Consultant for corporates across various sectors. Rajesh regularly publishes in quality peer-reviewed journals in the areas of Leadership, OB, and Human Resource Management.

Vishal Rana is a Lecturer in Management and Entrepreneurship at the University of Tasmania, Australia. His research interests are in Entrepreneurship, Future of Work, and Ethics in Artificial Intelligence. He is also the Founder of WatchYourTalk, a mental health tech start-up in Australia.

How to cite this article: Sengupta, S., Patel, P., Mohyuddin, S., Prikshat, V., Rajesh, J. I., & Rana, V. (2022). Wind of change brought by COVID-19: Exploring the response and the new normal from the perspectives of Indian flexpatriates. Thunderbird International Business Review, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.22281