



Dogs in the Workplace: Benefits and Potential Challenges

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Research Proposal

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Abstract

Pet dogs, therapy dogs, and service dogs can be seen with growing frequency in workplaces. While dogs can provide workers and employers with many advantages, their presence can bring additional threats and concerns to the work environment. Therefore, occupational dog adoption decisions should contain multiple factors, including employee fitness, safety and well-being, ethical and cultural sensitivities, and animal welfare. The aim of this paper is to introduce the problem of dogs in the workplace and to outline the possible benefits and difficulties of their presence. The legal accommodations given to some types of dogs in working environments are discussed, and the study results are outlined about the possible advantages of dogs for human wellbeing.

Introduction

It is necessary to know under which circumstances dogs are discretionary and under which circumstances dogs are lawful accommodation while considering the possibility of dogs in the workplace. Employers in select circumstances [1] are they obliged to accept dogs. There is usually no legal argument for an employee to carry a dog to work other than as an efficient housing option for a dog. A disability-related functional restriction. In accordance with Title I of the ADA [2], employers must provide "reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities in the workplace. An appropriate accommodation is characterized as a change or adjustment to a job or work environment that enables essential job functions to be performed by an employee with a disability [3]. Service dogs (and even emotional support animals, since under Title I there is no clear concept of service animal) may be called reasonable accommodation, but in this discussion the word reasonable is relevant. A service dog is not unconditionally allowed to enter a workplace. Employers may have the right to refuse access to the workplace to a service dog if the dog represents a 'undue burden,' described as an act

requiring substantial difficulty or cost or fundamentally altering the essence of the undertaking [3].

For employers, the wider question of access and the legislation is an important concern since the interests of the person with the service dog are always balanced against the possible adverse consequences of the dog's presence. For instance, consider a scenario in which an employee with a service dog takes the dog to an office environment as an appropriate disability accommodation, and a co-worker has a serious allergy to dogs in an adjacent cubicle. Since the dog is a service dog, the employer will consider appropriate accommodations that might involve, for example, changing the work atmosphere (e.g. transferring one worker to an alternative workplace) or rearranging work schedules, unless the accommodation constitutes an unnecessary burden for the organization (e.g., permitting the employees to work alternate shifts or telework).

It is important to remember that this only refers to a service dog or another animal that allows a person with a disability to remove or reduce obstacles to the performance of critical tasks. Employers are not allowed to make any accommodations whether the dog is a visitation service dog or a pet, and so the dog may be banned from the workplace. Knowledge and appreciation of the legal responsibilities of employers and the applicable laws are essential to ensuring that when accommodations are considered and enforced, all employees with a disability and co-workers are treated fairly [4]. For instance, according to Washington State's Revised Code Title 49 Section 60.180, it is unethical to refuse to employ someone because they have a service dog or to fire someone because they are having one. Other States shall define requirements concerning the use of leave for the acquisition or training of a service dog (e.g., Texas Government Code Title 6 Section 661.910).

Research Gap & Research Question

International researchers have studied the study of making a pet-friendly workplace with great emphasis, but there are only a few studies that highlight the importance and need of such possibilities in the Indian context. It is my intention to ask if businesses believe that employee performance can be enhanced by the process of providing a pet-friendly workplace, especially with the advent of western HR trends in the Indian workplace. Specifically, in those businesses/start-ups that already have pet-friendly policies in the workplace, I would ask if workers have had a positive effect on their productivity & participation by getting pets at work. If organizations believe in creating a pet-friendly environment that has a positive effect on their workers, I would ask them how they have introduced the transition & implementation of such policies and practices at all levels of their organization. Indian companies lack a systematic approach to their working community, unlike their western counterparts. I am determined to explain how these policies can lead to the overall creation of personality & attitude that can critically affect the interpersonal relationship management dynamic. This analysis would also include transdisciplinary aspects & viewpoints bordering on the field of psychology regarding getting a pet-friendly workplace. A few items that are also worth evaluating are how such policies and procedures lead to solving complex daily challenges in the workplace.

Research Design

A Survey form has been floated containing around 14 questions, divided in two parts. The first part is created to know about the respondents' basic details along with their opinions on the pros and cons of having such a workplace. This will enable us to better understand, via an employees' perspective, the various advantages and disadvantages an organization might consider before implementing such policies. The first part also enables us to know whether the respondents' respective organizations are pet-friendly or not. The two ways in which workplaces can be pet friendly are either allowing their employees to bring their own pets at the workplace or by adopting common office pets at the work premises. Both these questions are separately asked in the created survey. On responding 'Yes' on any of the above stated questions the second part of the survey is open for responses form the respondents.

The second part of the survey contains open ended questions that help us understand how pet-friendly organizations operating in India are implementing such policies, whether any legal work is required for implementing such policies, and how problems related to /caused by pets (if any) are dealt with, in such organizations.

The last question of the survey enables us to understand how important a pet-friendly environment is, for employees when it comes to choosing a suitable organization. The responses from the last question can enable organizations to realize the importance of having such a workplace.

Based on the responses gathered from the survey, a qualitative analysis is done, where the key words from the descriptive answers are picked and assigned under a given bracket of similar responses. The total of all the major keywords are assigned a score and those scores are then studied upon to drive results from the survey.

Analysis and Results

The data collection for the survey circulated received 21 responses, and is still collecting responses. On the basis of the responses received, the data revealed that most of the respondents, 14 respondents are aged between the ages 20-25 and 4 respondents from the ages of 26-30, while we received 1 and 2 responses ranging in the age groups from 31-35 and 40 and above respectively. The survey received responses from a diverse group of companies mostly including start-ups, media organizations, with the exception of two companies from govt. and IT sectors. On being asked about the organisations' pet friendly policy for the employees 3 (14.3%) respondents answered that they were not aware about such policy while 10 (47.6%) respondents and 8 (38.1%) respondents answered 'no' and 'yes' respectively. On being asked about the question of having office pets on campus 12 (57.1%) respondents said 'yes' and 9 (42.9%) respondents said 'no'.

The last two questions in part one of the survey were intended to identify the advantages and the disadvantages of having a pet-friendly policy. A frequency analysis was done for these questions. the frequently occurring words or different words with the same meaning were allotted frequency scores under the same bracket. The total of each score analysed and for the advantages the frequently occurring words were Stress Relief gathering a frequency score of 20, Ease in Work-life Balance/convenient for employees gathering a frequency score of 6, followed by engagement, socializing and team building with a score of 10, better organization image with a score of 3 and Security with the least frequency score of 2. For the disadvantages the scores according to the keywords, were 10 for Sanitary problems/health risks, 5 for Distraction for employees, 4 for Problematic for other employees, and 1 for added expenses for the organization. 3 was a frequency score grouped under another.

For the respondents who answered part two of the survey, which contained responses from only the employees who either have a pet friendly policy for employees or have campus pets. The first question of part two aimed at finding the various policy enablers which a company implements for having a pet-friendly workplace. Four major policy enablers were identified which are, Facilities for pets (like food, shelter, water bowls etc) gathering a frequency score of 6. need for documentation papers, and clean and healthy pets both gathering the maximum score of 9 each, required training for pets was the least frequented policy enabler with a score of 3.

The next 3 questions were designed to know what companies do when a pet at workplace might misbehave, who do employees report such issues to and what actions are taken to solve if an issue/ complaint has already been reported. The analysis identified three people the employees facing trouble could report to HR, with a frequency score of 5, pet owners and security staff each receiving the same frequency score of 2. For the measures taken to prevent such issues the organization the frequent key measures were re-locate the pet from the work area with a score of 3, Training and advance employee awareness with a score of 2, informing the pet owner in advance with a score of 1. For the actions taken to solve an already occurred conflict the frequency scores were 1 for talking to the pet owners and 2 for relocating the employees to no-go zones and awareness and training of employees about the office pets each. In both the above questions it was also found that most organisations have a fixed set of measures or actions due to lack of any such incidents. The frequency score in this keyword was 5 and 2 respectively for the questions.

The questionnaire also had questions related to the existence of any no-go zones for pets. No-go zones such as office buildings, meeting rooms, cafeteria/lunch rooms and factory/machinery were identified with frequency scores of 3,3,3, and 2 respectively. A question was also asked on knowing who was responsible for taking care of the office pets

during the current pandemic when the workplaces were shut due to the pandemic. The data collected shows that the frequency scores for the response ‘security/ in-office staff’ was 6 and ‘pet-owners /employees’ were 7.

The final question of the survey was knowing the respondents’ opinions of their employment choices and if they are likely to make decisions on the basis of having a pet friendly workplace. 58.3% respondents selected yes for an answer, while 25% responded by selecting ‘maybe’ and the remaining 16.7% saying no for an answer.

Conclusion

From the analysis and results above, the research study thus concludes that most organizations will be coming up with more pet-friendly policies at the workplace considering the rise of Start-ups in the country which are open to adapting such new age employee friendly policies. However, the need of a legal procedure in order for such policies to be properly implemented remains the biggest need in this case.

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