

THE WISDOM IN THE PANDEMIC

Thriving on Change – Remote Working – The New Trend

In March 2020, when a state of emergency was declared in Mauritius due to the pandemic, many unprepared businesses faced the challenge to quickly re-adapt their Business Continuity model, if they were to remain on track. To keep the “business as usual” scenario amid this crisis, many companies had no choice than to spontaneously adopt remote working practices as their lifelines.

Controversies and myths around homebased work practices has existed for years and most likely up until the pandemic struck. It has often been alleged that people who are out of their managers sightlines are unlikely to be working and efficient. The belief that productivity, efficiency and hard work could only happen within a “controlled” environment – The Office, was deeply rooted in our mind. **Has covid-19 shaken this belief?**

In all likelihood, it seems that this pandemic has forever changed our perception on remote working and the need to prove its viability. Inevitably, survival instincts urged for a radical shift in the mindset, going from micromanaging to empowering individuals to take ownership - an opportunity to re-create the Trust culture. We are now on the edge of a new frontier, it's time to let go of long held beliefs that we need to look over people's shoulders for them to be productive.

The challenge of attracting and retaining talents often seemed like a Jigsaw to companies trying to figure out the best suited strategy for on-going stability within the workforce. **Could telecommuting be the missing piece of the puzzle?** With hindsight, it now seems more lucid that companies featuring as “Employer of Choice” or “Great place to work” had figured out, long time back, the competitive edge that this work style would bring to their talent management strategy – better stability, increased morale, hence, reduced attrition costs. Besides, a mobile work force proves to be cost effective in terms of infrastructural investments. Now that it seems quite obvious that remote working, at least partly, is something that many employees look forward to and with that kind of morale at stake, it's worth exploring the benefits of this work style.

Whilst we acclimate to remote working and appreciate the numerous advantages that it offers, we should not be ignorant of its challenges and downsides, if managed poorly. Critical to its success is a fully supported work from home strategy including advanced technological support, where employees feel trusted, can communicate easily, access information promptly and effortlessly reach out for help to solve issues.

An essential aspect which should not be discounted in remote working is quality time for self and the family. To uphold the motivation and passion for work, the struggle to unplug from work should not be felt - The bonus is, happier employees voluntarily put in extra time, care and attention to deliver quality work.

“ ONE ASPECT WHICH HAS GAINED A LOT OF DEBATE IN REMOTE WORKING IS SOCIAL INTERACTION. CRITICS ASSERT THAT REMOTE WORKING POSE A SERIOUS THREAT FOR CORPORATE CULTURE THROUGH A LACK OF MOBILITY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION.

The challenge to keep the corporate culture dynamic in remote working is real but given the right framework, tools and support, it can be an opportunity to personify the brand, culture and values through our living beings – our people. No doubt, Technology is contributing a great deal in bridging the social gap in remote working. Chat apps, virtual reality platforms, hang out apps and real time video softwares amongst others, makes real time interaction viable. Social interactions should no longer be seen as a roadblock in this technological age, virtual interaction must now be part and parcel of our work community.

Let's not forget that the new generation has grown up immersed in technology and virtual social interactions for a big part of their life – **Isn't that a piece of cake to them?**

On the other hand, for the less younger generation who is constantly striving for flexibility to cater for personal commitments, a leap towards work-life Integration will undoubtedly resolve their struggle for a work-life balance, giving them more time for self and with their family. Technology might be a minor challenge here, but with a little training it should be fine.

Savvy leaders understand the need for strategic agility to sustain growth, be it on the business side or the human side. Covid-19 has taught us that it's now time to transcend our old beliefs and unfold a new chapter in our working life. Take it as an opportunity to look at re-defining the kind of work which can be done remotely and embrace it with an open mind. Remote working can beautifully co-exist with conventional work practices, allowing people to relish the luxury of homebased work while keeping their sense of identity within the workplace community.

If you are looking to embrace telecommuting, please reach out to AXIS for assistance in designing your own work from home practice manual. We will gladly share our experiences to accompany you on this project.



by **Yoshina Balloo**