

COVID-19 PANDEMIC-FUTURE OF WORK AND WORKING FROM HOME PHILOSOPHY

Usung Isaac Akpan PhD*Senior Lecturer, Department of Human Resource Management, City University, African Campus***ABSTRACT**Article DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra3437>

Following the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-2019) pandemic, both public and private sectors have put in place a number of measures, including those affecting workplaces, to fight the spread of the disease. The world of work is severely affected during this crisis, therefore, all sections of society including businesses, employers and social partners must play a role in order to protect workers, their families and society at large. The nature and extent of the restrictions and lockdown milestones, such as on suspension of non-essential activities, differ between service providers and different sectors, but a substantial proportion of workers either have to work from home, or if their work cannot be performed at a distance, they stay at home often under an income replacement arrangement. Drawing from this experience, various organisations have decided to restructure their workforce work routine which necessitate my curiosity to ponder and its application in the Nigerian context as it affects working from home philosophy.

KEYWORDS: *pandemic, employees, social distance, working from home, corona virus, workforce.***INTRODUCTION**

Coronavirus disease 2019 nicknamed (COVID-19) emerged in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, China. While the outbreak in China is almost over, this highly contagious disease is currently spreading across the world, with a daily increase in the number of affected countries, confirmed cases and infection-related deaths. Updated data are published on a daily basis on the ECDC, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) websites. On 30th January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the outbreak of COVID-19 constituted a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). Based on the high levels of global spread and the severity of COVID-19, on 11 March 2020, the Director-General of the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. COVID-19 is an acute respiratory disease caused by a newly emerged zoonotic coronavirus.

The virus is transmitted from human to human via droplets coughed or exhaled by infected persons and by touching droplet-contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. The most commonly reported clinical symptom in laboratory-confirmed cases is fever (88%), followed by a dry cough (68%), fatigue (38%), sputum production (33%), dyspnoea (19%), sore throat (14%), headache (14%) and myalgia or arthralgia (15%). Less common symptoms are diarrhoea (4%) and vomiting (5%).

Around 80% of the reported cases in China had mild-to-moderate disease (including non-pneumonia and pneumonia cases), 13.8% had severe disease and 6.1% were critical (respiratory failure, septic shock, and/or multiple organ dysfunction/failure).

The corona virus landed in Africa in the month of February 2020 with first contact experienced in Egypt. For Africans, it was like a death sentence but speculated symptoms gave them more consolation which seems to be prevalence among the people.

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was on 27th February 2020 through an Italian citizen in Lagos who was tested positive upon arrival at Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos.

The general belief was that coming to Africa will be more devastating with presumption of having the highest death rate according to WHO predictions. This view came as a result of not having good medical facilities and other needed equipment to contain with the spread of the virus. Current pictures show, Africans might escape the worst of the pandemic, but will have to be cautious about it.

We live and work in a time of exponential change where entire industries have been reshaped and hundreds of new ones created. But what are the key trends and how can businesses ensure a responsible future of work?

When we talk about the future of work, it's easy to paint a dystopian picture of the impact that automation,

artificial intelligence and “always on” connectivity could have – whether that’s robots coming to take your job, or the erosion of personal time and space.

There is no doubt that the modern workplace is being reshaped by profound economic, demographic and technological changes, which will have a marked effect on the skills and safety nets people need in the future. But there is plenty of space for optimism.

There are exciting opportunities to change what we do and how we do it, and to make space for purpose-led and responsible approaches to the challenges that will face us as we start a new decade.

For instance, there are fascinating opportunities emerging from two very different demographic trends. In the developed world, people are living longer and having fewer children. That means a rapidly ageing population is holding on to jobs for longer, and there is an increased demand for emerging roles in sectors such as caregiving. There are also transformative implications for areas such as savings and pensions, and in rethinking how we reskill our workforces. Meanwhile, developing economies are skewed in the opposite direction – 60 per cent of Africa’s 1.25bn people are under the age of 25, for instance. A new wave of energetic entrepreneurs is emerging from this continent, with fresh and unconstrained thinking.

At the same time, economic and political changes are tearing up the trade map that has dominated the globe for decades, with the world’s economic centre of balance shifting eastwards. And, perhaps most importantly, new technologies and the sharing economy are changing what work means: labour has become a more liquid asset, with the gig economy swinging into full force.

These shifts have created both challenges and opportunities for businesses, from appealing to younger employees with a different social and environmental outlook, to managing a workforce that could span several different generations. In this context, responsible automation means placing people into jobs better suited to what we are good at doing. “We may not know the jobs of the future, but we know they will require skills that are uniquely human,” “That means developing emotional intelligence, empathy, collaboration, on top of the technological skills which will be in greater demand.”

Following the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-2019) pandemic, both public and private sectors have put in place a number of measures, including those affecting workplaces, to fight the spread of the disease. The world of work is severely affected during this crisis, therefore, all sections of society – including businesses, employers and social partners – must play a role in order to protect workers, their families and society at large.

According to Flexible Work Arrangements,” CQPress, (1998), the concept of flexible work schedules was introduced in Munich, Germany, 1967 to alleviate commuting problems. The term telecommute was coined by physicist Jack Nilles who worked remotely on a NASA communication system Jack Niles Profile,” JALA International,(2011).Congress recognized the benefits of telecommuting and “telework” makes its way into public policy with the flexible work arrangement.

The nature and extent of the restrictions and lockdown milestones, such as on suspension of non-essential activities, differ between service providers and different sectors , but a substantial proportion of workers either have to work from

home, or if their work cannot be performed at a distance, they stay at home often under an income replacement arrangement.

The COVID-19 crisis is putting pressure on employers and workers, whether they had to implement new procedures and practices in a very short time, or to suspend their work and business activities. Occupational safety and health offers practical support for returning to the workplace: appropriate preventive measures will help to achieve a safe and healthy return to work following relaxation of physical distancing measures, and also contribute to suppressing transmission of COVID-19 if not total elimination of the virus transmission among humans.

MINIMISING EXPOSURE AND TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19 AT WORKPLACE

The implementation of safe work practices to limit exposure to COVID-19 at work requires first assessing the risks, and then implementing the hierarchy of controls. This means putting in place control measures to first eliminate the risk and if this is not possible, minimise worker exposure. Start first with collective measures and if necessary supplement them with individual measures, such as personal protective equipment (PPE). Below are some examples of control measures, however, not all of them will be applicable to all workplaces or jobs due to their nature. Carry out only essential work for the time being; it may be possible to postpone some work to when the risk is lower. If possible, deliver services remotely (phone or video) instead of in person. Ensure that only workers who are essential to the job are present at the workplace and minimise the presence of third parties.

Reduce, as far as possible, physical contact between workers (e.g. during meetings or during breaks). Isolate workers who can carry out their tasks alone safely and who do not require specialised equipment or machinery that cannot be moved. For example, whenever possible, arrange for them to work alone in a spare office, staff room, canteen, or meeting room. If possible, ask vulnerable workers to work from home (older people and those with chronic conditions (including hypertension, lung or heart problems, diabetes, or who are undergoing cancer treatment or some other immunosuppression) and pregnant workers. Workers with close family members who are at high risk may also need to telework.

Eliminate, and if not possible limit, physical interaction with and between customers. For example, through online or phone orders, contactless delivery or managed entry (while also avoiding crowding outside), and physical distancing both inside and outside the premises. When delivering goods, do so through pick-up or delivery outside the premises. Advise drivers on good hygiene in the cab and provide them with appropriate sanitation gel and wipes. Delivery workers must be allowed to use facilities such as toilets, cafeterias, changing rooms and showers, albeit with the appropriate precautions (such as allowing only one user at a time and regular cleaning).

Place an impervious barrier between workers, especially if they are not able to keep a two-metre distance from each other. Barriers can be purpose-made or improvised using items such as plastic sheeting, partitions, mobile drawers, or storage units. Things that are not solid or that have gaps, like pot plants or trolleys, or that create a new risk, such as from tripping or falling objects are to be avoided. If a barrier cannot be used, additional space between workers should be created

by, for example, ensuring they have at least two empty desks either side of them.

If close contact is unavoidable, keep it to less than 15 minutes. Reduce contact between different parts of your business at the start and end of shifts. Arrange the timing of meal breaks to reduce the number of people sharing a cafeteria, staff room, or kitchen. Ensure there is only one worker at a time in bathrooms and changing rooms. Place a sign on the main door indicating when one of the toilets is in use to ensure that only one person at a time enters. Organise shifts to take account of cleaning and sanitation tasks.

Supply soap and water or appropriate hand sanitiser at convenient places and advise workers to wash their hands frequently. Clean your premises frequently, especially counters, door handles, tools and other surfaces that people touch often and provide good ventilation if possible.

Avoid excessive workload on cleaning staff by taking appropriate measures, such as assigning additional staff to the tasks and asking workers to leave their workspace tidy. Provide workers with tissues and waste bins lined with a plastic bag so that they can be emptied without contacting the contents.

If you have identified a risk of infection despite having applied all feasible safety measures, then provide all necessary PPE. It is important to train workers in correct use of PPE, ensuring that they follow the guidance available on use of facemasks and gloves.

Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and hand hygiene at the entrance to the workplace and in other areas where they will be seen.

Facilitate workers' use of individual rather than collective transport, for example by making available car parking or a place for storing bicycles securely, and encouraging workers to walk to work, if possible.

Put in place policies on flexible leave and remote working to limit presence at the workplace, when needed.

Provide teleworkers with guidance on setting up a workstation at home that applies good ergonomics, such as good posture and frequent movement, as far as possible. Encourage workers to take regular breaks (around every 30 minutes) to stand up, move and stretch.

Give teleworkers support in the use of IT equipment and software. Tele and video conferencing tools may become essential for work, but may be problematic for workers not used to them.

Ensure that there is good communication at all levels that include those working from home. This ranges from the strategic information provided by top-level management to line managers' duties, without forgetting the importance of routine social interaction among colleagues. While the former can be addressed in scheduled online meetings, the latter can be encouraged through online chats or 'virtual coffee' meetings.

Do not underestimate the risk of workers feeling isolated and under pressure, which in the absence of support can lead to mental health problems. Effective communication and support from the manager and colleagues and being able to maintain informal contact with colleagues is important. Consider having regular staff or team meetings held online or rotate which employees can be present at the workplace, if a gradual return to work has been initiated.

Be aware that your employee may have a partner who is also teleworking or children who may need care as they are not at school, or who need to connect remotely to continue

their schoolwork. Others may need to care for elderly or chronically ill people and those that are in confinement. In these circumstances, managers will need to be flexible in terms of working hours and productivity of their staff and will need to make the workers aware of their understanding and flexibility.

Assist workers in setting healthy boundaries between work and free time by communicating clearly when they are expected to be working and available. It is important that you consult your workers and/or their representatives and the health and safety representatives early on about planned changes and how temporary processes will work in practice. Engaging with your workers in assessing risks and developing responses is an important part of good health and safety practice. Health and safety representatives and health and safety committees are in a unique position to help design preventive measures and to ensure that they are implemented successfully. Consider also how to ensure that agency workers and contractors have access to the same information as direct employees.

MANAGING WORKERS WORKING FROM HOME

As part of the physical distancing measures taken in most African countries, workers are encouraged or obliged to work from home if the nature of their job allows it. For most of these workers, it is their first time of working from home and their working environment is likely to be deficient in many aspects compared to their workplace. The extent to which the home environment can be adapted will vary according to the situation of the worker and the time and resources available for adaptations.

Advice on staying safe and healthy while working from home is available here, but is largely directed at those who telework regularly or long-term. Below are some suggestions to minimise the risks to workers who have not been able to prepare their home workplace properly.

Carry out a risk assessment involving workers who work remotely and their representatives.

Allow workers to take equipment that they use at work home on a temporary basis (if they cannot fetch it themselves, consider arranging its delivery). This could include items such as computer, monitor, keyboard, mouse, printer, chair, footrest, or lamp. Keep a record of who takes what items to avoid confusion when normal work resumes.

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WAYS TO HELP STEER WORKING REMOTELY DURING AND AFTER COVID-19

1. Create an office space. If you work from home or even a shared space, developing some physical boundaries for work will help you maintain life-work balance. When it's time to work you do it from the work space and when work is over you leave it in the physical work space. It creates a mental and physical boundary so that home life is not disrupted by work life. For example, only answer work emails from the office space. It will require practice to keep work done at home from infiltrating other parts of your house and life.
2. Find opportunities for simulated communication platform. Working while physically separated from colleagues takes effort to maintain healthy connection. Connect in person with teammates or like-minded workers whenever it's safe and possible. When practicing physical distancing use platforms things like: WhatsApp, Zoom, Webinar. Use these virtual means to connect with work and non-work people. You may have to initiate the contact but it is well worth the effort.
3. Maintaining Margin or Work/Life Balance. Even the most structured among us may have difficulty keeping all of our daily tasks in the right category. Margin means keeping time in the week that isn't scheduled but remains open. That way when things come up you can use "work time" in the "office" and not disrupt the rest of your life. It may be worth recording how many actual hours are required to work in a week (remember, any time answering emails is work time). Schedule in breaks from work, especially if your family is at home. Play a game, do family exercise time, read a book or place a call to someone.
4. Time on Computers. This is more of a warning. Since computers are crucial to working remotely and our opportunities for outside engagement are limited, it is easy to be on them most of our waking hours, especially if you have unlimited data.
5. Fast/Retreat. Take intentional time away from technology and work. This means a complete break from all technology use for a certain period of time.

You may use the time for just being quiet or for taking a personal or silent retreat. Replace that time with something that is good for you mentally, physically, spiritually or emotionally.

6. Take care of your health. One of the best ways to avoid illness or be prepared if you do get sick is to be as physically healthy as possible. Increase immune-boosting nutrient-dense foods. Use time at home to try new recipes or swap ideas with friends. Exercise by going outside if you're able or do an exercise routine in your home. And even though you don't have to show up at an office at a certain time, maintaining good patterns of sleep will shore up your body's defenses and help you stay in a more normal work-home routine.

HOW DO YOU SHIELD YOUR CAREER FOR THE FUTURE

Reskilling and Job Transition-According to Olufemi Ibitoye (2018), the truth is the workplace is dynamic and I will liken it to surfing, where you ride on a wave towards the shore and immediately catch on the next wave. You should be ready to re-invent yourself, learning new skills and open to new possibilities. A lot of smart people I know have re-invented themselves more than three times.

Be committed to lifelong learning-As an individual you have to be comfortable with continuous learning, you do not rely on your old skills to get the new jobs done. It is no longer about knowledge, and experience, what is far more valuable is to have the ability to learn, and apply those new, and unique scenario. It is no longer about what you know, it is about how you can learn new skills, and adapt.

Understand the Labour Dynamics-As a futurist, you should be able to have ample knowledge of your sector, and make solid predictions about where it will be in the years coming. Understanding these crescendos gives an edge, and makes you prepare yourself for both the certainties, and the uncertainties.

According to the experts, there is need for employers and the government to hold a roundtable to discuss on the fallout on employment as a result of COVID-19.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that as many as 25 million people could become unemployed, with a loss of workers' income of as much as USD 3.4 trillion. However, it is already becoming clear that these numbers may underestimate the magnitude of the impact.

Timothy Olawale (2020) emphasized that globally, job cuts, layoffs, wage cuts and employee redundancy have continued to exacerbate as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to disrupt social life, the economy and every other human activity. The areas that have been most negatively impacted are almost all the value chains including manufacturing, sales, and marketing, distribution, wholesale and retail, governance, aviation and tourism amongst others.

He believed that, in a bit to keep businesses afloat and also obey the directives of government, there was the need for some employees to work from home, aided by technological advancement. In short, the much emphasised Future of Work is here! However, not all business operations can be done online which has led to huge reduction operations and income while maintaining huge overhead costs. The result is the possibility of massive job cuts and losses, he said.

Another thing is that this time calls for creative thinking by management. In this regard, there should be a drive towards

business innovation via the adoption of e-commerce as part of business operations. Tens of jobs will also be created as they partner with operators in the restaurant hospitality, pharmaceutical, essential daily needs sectors as a result of increased demands for these essential needs during and post COVID: 19.

There is need to accelerate revenue through packages, incentives, discounts and/or prepayments. Also of critical importance is the need to manage accounts receivables, collect as much as possible from outstanding customers through strict collection policies and/or incentives and discounts. The management also needs to execute on cost-reduction strategies that allow the business to maintain productivity while matching the demand of product, audience and customers. Reducing operating costs in order to conserve cash is critical to the survival of businesses.

To the extent possible, negotiate the cost of inputs such as supplies, raw materials, labour, etc. and pre-buy materials at a discount when possible. The management also needs to postpone all hiring and when possible reduce staff this may be an opportunity for some staff to work part time as they care for children at home. Overall, there is need to discuss with staff to consider across-the-board temporary salary cuts as an alternative to cutting staff at this difficult time.

THE ROLES OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEPARTMENT DURING AND AFTER COVID- 19 PANDEMIC.

According to Rutaiwa Aristides (2020), among other duties and responsibilities of Human Resource department is the welfare of the workforce of any organisation. In the same vein, Human Resource departments in companies' world over are wakeful making sure the employees and their families have all it takes to prevent the spread of COVID - 19. The outbreak and spread have taken the department by surprise and its impact is seen in the departments of products and service delivery. Some companies and government parastatals have lost Human Capital to COVID 19; they have lost valuable financial resources and time to make sure that all is well.

Supporting Employees during Remote or Working From Home

- Individualization is key. Need to ask each team member to describe the conditions under which they perform best, their concerns about their workflow, and their emotional response to the situation.
- Set expectations early and clearly. Make expectations crystal clear: X is the work you should do, Y is the quality standard, Z is the deadline. Executives should provide higher-level expectations aligned with the company's purpose: We'll keep our customers engaged by doing X, we'll maintain our standards by doing Y, we'll fulfill our mission by doing Z. The more detail, the better.
- Communication. Employees who are accustomed to working in-house may feel cut off from the resources, information or relationships they need to do their jobs well, so plan for more conference calls. Managers will have to be diligent about communicating productively — coaching high performance requires frequent conversations, and there won't be chance conversations in the hall.

Challenges from remote work fall into two broad categories: task-oriented and social

- Task-oriented: How to communicate and share information when employees are no longer convened in the same office. How best to enable employees to collaborate in real time
- Social-Separating people from their coworkers can create a sense of isolation for some people.

Employee work environment considerations

1. Location is key.

- a. Find a dedicated and comfortable spot to work that you can associate with your job and leave when you're off the clock — that means get off the couch, and definitely out of bed.

2. Find a buddy.

- a. Social interactions can alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness. Consider finding a colleague you can reach out to when you're feeling the need to chat with someone.

3. Have a plan.

- a. When working alone, HR should provide a more structured daily schedule than usual. Time spent alone is better if it's structured. Examples include scheduling multiple breaks throughout the day to play with a pet, take a long walk, or grab the mail.

4. Think about how you're communicating.

- a. It's important to go beyond email and use other digital tools that can better replicate the in person office experience and provide for clear communication.

5. Remember everyone works differently.

- a. Not everyone employee actually wants to work from home, making this shift extra stressful for some. It's key to communicate as much as possible and help employees struggling with the change.

To reduce the impact of COVID 19 in any organization is still the biggest challenge HR will face in 2020. COVID 19 has taken the department with astonishment throating the organization productivity and service delivery.

Rutaiwa Aristides also emphasized that some of the responsibilities of Human Resource Department in this circumstance include:

1. Counseling Services

The pandemic is really a threat, a life threatening pandemic of our time. The HR has a role of counseling as part of the duty to the welfare of the employees. The HR department must strategize and be flexible enough to make sure the employees have enough counseling services. This is stemming from the fact that most of the employees have been affected in many angles of their lives by COVID 19. Some have lost dependents, relatives and friends, matters worst others have lost workmates whom they used to interact with daily. With such impact the counseling services is inevitable if the affected employees have to remain productive after a loss of their counterparts and yet resume work. Moreover, there is general fear of who is next and who has been infected. One health work was quoted 'it is not COVID killing people but fear and worry of contracting COVID 19 that is killing people'. Such a statement means that even when one is safe still he/she needs counselling to take away the fear. HR your role here is paramount so it is essential to make sure it is in

workplace. This can be provided on an interval to a group of staff or individuals who have been affected. The same counselling where possible should be extended to the family members of the employees

2. Provision of Safety Gears:

In most labor laws the provision of safety gears has remained the duty of the employer. So he has a role to play. HR has to swing into action without delay. It has been emphasized that washing of hands, wearing face masks and using sanitizers will keep the virus away. This means that HR has to make sure such gadgets are in place. It does not end at the provision but also training on the proper usage of all the protective gears including testing kits for emergency. As longer as the pandemic is here the HR must make sure all safety gears are in constant supply to Employees.

3. Change in Safety Policy

Since this pandemic is new and probably the safety policy has been there for sometimes which did not incorporate the use of certain safety gears and other guidelines, it is time HR departments to show relevance by proposing and spearhead the changes or amend the safety policy to fit the current situation especially in meeting directives from health experts and government.

4. Monitoring Of Safety Measures And Directives

Despite the training awareness and provision of the safety gadgets, HR has a role of monitoring the usage and follow up of implementation of the guidelines and rules and regulations in regard to the Prevention of the pandemic. It goes without say that humans are not equal so there can be deviation in implementing the said guidelines which in turn could endanger the organization.

5. Budget Changes

The COVID – 19 has taken the department by surprise. The department definitely has a yearly budget. In the budget there are many activities to be implemented. With the outbreak of COVID 19 the HR budget has definitely been affected. In many organizations there are health insurance which in human capital welfare is a discharge to straining the scarce financial resources. In this case, the outbreak of this pandemic may not have been covered. But the HR budget has to be changed because there is a need to provide emergency kits and protective gears which were not budgeted for. In most cases the budget for HR which could cover this cost is the contingency budget line. But experience has shown that this contingency budget has always been little which means when used for protective gears during this pandemic it is not enough to sustain the organization need for protective gears, funeral expenses (considering that the death rate has increased there is need to have more money to meet the burial occasions). Therefore, the HR has a role of going back to the drawing board to propose to management and spearhead budgetary changes to meet the demand for prevention of spread of and its effect such as paying for terminal benefits to dependents and burial expenses.

6. Flexibility in Daily Activity.

It goes without say that the daily activities of HR department have changed with the outbreak of the pandemic. The daily routines have been interrupted by constant check for stock of protective gears, frequent checks of employees' health, visits to relatives and friend of the deceased staff, more counselling sessions, more health awareness campaign, the list is endless. This means the HR department has to put in more extra effort in terms of time and manpower and even

finances to meet the changes in daily activities. So the role of HR here is being flexible enough to meet the demand for increased activities. It means there will be change in work life balance of HR.

7. Working from Home

At the epitome of the outbreak and spread of COVID 19 pandemic working from home is inevitable especially for tasks and service delivery that don't need one to be physically present in office. HR/Department has an important role in coordinating the working system that does not need the physical presence in office building. Together with ICT department they need to work together to make sure the organization continues in production and service delivery, also to make sure that the staff adhere to guidelines in regards to working from home. HR has a role in formulating guidelines, physical attendance, sensitize the employees and to make sure each staff who works from home performs the expected duties and responsibilities without hindering other persons or departments in the operations of the organization.

8. Visit to Infected And Affected Persons

With care and precaution, HR officially has a role of taking care of the affected persons of the pandemic. This include frequent visits to areas of quarantine, homes, and in hospitals. This is to show compassion and emphasis to the affected persons. Sometimes it involves frequent phone calls and log discussion as a form of comforts to the sick. In other case gifts and 'get well soon' cards can be presented to the sick in order to encourage and comfort them during this difficult time of life. This role is dependent on health guidelines.

9. Organizing and Attending To Funerals.

In many organizations as part of the welfare activities the HR department has a role in making sure that in case of loss of life for the employee, the deceased must be given a descent send off. In that case HR has to make sure that all is in place to make sure that the funeral and burials are descent enough to reflect the image of the organization and how the same organization values the staff. HR must swing into action and make sure all is prepared right from transport, meals, prayers and representation of the organization at the funeral of the staff. It is much challenging because the COVID victims world over are buried by the government or relevant authorities and there are no funeral gathering as the directives of the authorities have restricted to a small number of people. This means that fellow staff, and families may not even attend the funerals and burials of the deceased. But the role of HR still is irreplaceable as a representative of the organization and organizer of burial materials, other logistics.

10. Organizing and Processing Of Terminal Benefits.

The pandemic has claimed a lot of lives and still it is doing so. Upon death of an employee there are survivor benefits from, social security funds, and other insurances services depending on the nature and policy of the organization and the law of the given country. It is the role of HR department to liaise with the deceased family members and find the heir of the deceased for which they must cooperate and coordinate to process the terminal benefits of the deceased staff.

11. Planning For Replacement of the Deceased

Due to this deadly pandemic and its effect on the workforce it is definite that some Employees have lost their lives and other will lose their lives as long as this pandemic is here to stay. Losing an employee is throbbing especially in this time of scramble for talent. Upon any loss of staff, it is

imminent that the lost staff must be replaced by either new recruitment, lateral or horizontal move of staff within the department, or from one region to another. This role of HR requires to use more of planning because whatever means of replacements of the deceased staff, there is a cost implication to the organization. The role of HR here lies in the planning for manpower replacement without affecting the operations of the organization.

12. Downsizing

Due to the pandemic the operations of some organizations have dwindled down. It means many organizations will be operating at a loss. Matters worst there are countries that have closed borders. This means there is no import or export in some countries. Therefore, the production of various product from exporting countries have no market at present since there is no export due to closed boarders. In essence the organization involved in productions of export will have to close down or reduce the operations. Reduced operations will means reducing employees. HR has a role here in coordinating and spearheading the downsizing exercise. This should be guided by the given law to avoid lawsuits emanating from unlawful termination and lay off of employees. HR as a lawyers in HR issues has to guide the organization in determining the process and procedure of downsizing.

Human resources should be the expert on people—and we know what people like: working from home. Suddenly everyone who could work from home has been working from home. Some people were thrilled. Some were not. All the cats made secret plans to get their owners out of the house for some peace and quiet.

HR teams who had operated on a walking-around, get to know you, basis—especially crucial in HR—suddenly had to deal with the worst crisis of their lives from a distance.

We gained skills. We learned how to look out for people. We learned how to investigate issues out of the official context from a distance. We helped coach managers through the transition—many of us repeating the phrase, “no, the employees don’t need to keep their cameras on at all times” over and over again.

We will never go back to the same office-focused model again. Sure, most jobs can’t be done exclusively from home, but a whole lot of companies that claimed some working from home was impossible now have to change their minds.

HR will need to reinforce this more flexible lifestyle view throughout the coming years. Employees won’t believe it when a manager says, “this job just can’t be done remotely” because the person did the job successfully from home for four-six-eight-twelve weeks.

Managers will have a much harder time arguing about working from home. which should be a positive change for many qualified people.

Balancing compassion with the law and the company’s survival

The first job of any Human Resource person is to help the company succeed through recruiting, retaining and developing the best people. And now we have a global health crisis.

HR advises on the tough decisions companies must make—who get laid off, who gets called back first and how to balance company needs with employees’ concerns. You can’t run a business without the people, but some people have legitimate reasons not to want to return to the workforce.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF EMPLOYEES WORKING FROM HOME

The spread of home working is opening up a new range of possibilities for the way businesses can work and structure themselves. As well as opportunities and benefits, home working brings new responsibilities for the employer and employee.

Advantages

Wider Pool of Applicants - Employees having the chance to work from home means that you are offering a chance for others to apply for positions. For example, somebody with disabilities won’t have to worry about getting to the office. The chance to work for you is increased to a larger number of potential employees.

Increased Productivity & Motivation - There can be less interruptions at home, especially if the office space where you work is an open plan set up. The more peaceful atmosphere can mean that you manage to get more done without being distracted. Motivation can also be increased due to the cut in commuting and travelling time.

Financially Beneficial - There is less of a cost on office space. Less furniture is needed if the majority of staff can work at home. Less electricity is also used. It’s not only economical for the employer, the reduction in travelling time and a cost is also beneficial for employees.

Environmentally Friendly - The reduction in travelling and staff commuting means there is less air pollution, protecting the planet more.

Improved employee retention - home working can help retain employees with an otherwise long daily commute.

Access to a wider pool of applicants - for example, such as those from more geographically remote areas, or people who may prefer to work from home.

Possible productivity gains - due to fewer interruptions, allowing more focused work.

Increased staff motivation - with staff having a better work/life balance.

They will be more productive. One Stanford study found that employees who work from home are 13 percent more productive compared with their in-office counterparts.

They will be happier. Everyone seems to be talking about work-life balance these days, and there’s no better way to improve the work-life balance of your employees than to let them work from home.

It is easier than ever. You can be connected to the office every minute of every day if you want to, thanks to the Internet. The concept of working from home might have seemed outlandish 20 years ago, but this is the 21st century. You can find access to wifi almost anywhere, and tools like GoToMeeting and Skype make remote communication a breeze.

You would not have to pay for office space. Working from home means either no office or at the very least, a lot less office space. If you don’t want to make the switch to a completely remote environment, try staggering your employees’ work-from-home days to save on office space. Automattic dedicates the money saved on office space to fund a huge travel budget.

You would not have to pay for office supplies. No one likes doing bulk orders for office supplies. By having employees work from home, you can cut out a lot of these useless expenditures.

No more wasting time on useless meetings. Remember the productivity thing? Well, a lot of that comes from cutting

all the useless meetings and other time wasters that are ubiquitous in an office environment.

You can hire the best, no matter where they are. No office means the ability to work with anyone in the world. Freelance networks like Toptal (with its notoriously tough location-independent screening process) have capitalized on this concept by connecting top companies with the very best software developers from all around the world.

Your employees will be less likely to quit. Working from home makes employees happier. Happy employees don't quit.

You can get increased insight into other markets. When you have employees working all over the country, or even all over the globe, you can get amazing insight into local markets.

It will increase employee loyalty. Almost anyone who has had the chance to work from home would never dream of giving it up. By giving your employees this chance, they will be extremely loyal to your company.

Employees will take fewer sick days. Colds and food poisoning make going into the office miserable, but working from home? Not so bad. Employees who are mildly sick can still get work done most of the time if it means not having to go into the office. Another bonus? No sharing illnesses.

Employees won't constantly feel the need for a vacation. Working from home can feel like a break from the office, even though your employees are still working. Employees will get to recharge and spend more time with their families, so they might not be as inclined to take a two-week vacation to the Bahamas. Americans work more than anyone, but offering a work-from-home option might keep your employees from getting too burned out.

Employees will work longer on a day-to-day basis. Remember commuting? If you work from home, you're at your office right when you wake up. The time that your employees would spend commuting can now be used for real work.

Disadvantages

Difficult to Monitor Performance - It is not easy for managers to monitor their staffs' progress and performance without them being in the same office space. This is especially escalated if the job role requires a lot of "background duties" that can't be monitored on a work's system.

Decrease in Staff Integration - Working from home will mean that you get involved with the rest of the team less. There is less communication between employees which in turn, may decrease an element of team work amongst yourselves. It can also mean that you miss out on "everyday matters" at work, such as daily updates and possible promotions, as you become less involved.

More Difficult to Problem Solve - Simple problems, such as software issues, become more difficult to fix when you're not in the office. It is more difficult and takes longer to try and help someone over the phone than it would be in person.

Increase in Telecommunication Costs - The amount that you are likely to use your own telephones increase when working from home. Not being around any of your colleagues will also mean that the phones are used more often.

There are more Distractions - There could be an increased amount of distractions faced at home. Factors such as noisy neighbours, family or friends will mean that your productivity and concentration levels may drop. You could be disrupted more than you may think!

You Never Leave Work - Staying at home will mean that you "never leave the office". This could mean that it becomes more difficult for you to "switch off" from the work that you produced that day. All this may increase your stress and worry levels.

Difficulty monitoring performance - there could be difficulty managing home workers and monitoring their performance. See effectively manage employees who work from home.

Cost of working from home - initial costs of training and providing suitable equipment, including adaptations to meet health and safety standards.

Problems with staff development - difficulty of maintaining staff development and upgrading skills.

Information security risk - information security problems could be more likely to occur.

Increased telecommunications costs - for example, increase in telephone or broadband bills or the requirement to supply your employee with a mobile phone for work purposes.

Communication problems - could increase feelings of isolation amongst home workers.

Decreased staff morale - it can be harder to maintain team spirit when employees are working at different locations.

Jay Mulki, Fleura Bardhi, Felicia Lassk And Jayne Nanavaty-Dahl (2019), were of the opinion that working remotely have negative impacts based on these observations:

Work-Life Balance for Employees

"Satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home."

- "People think that when you work at home, you must be able to prepare dinner on time, have your laundry done ... It is very hard to separate work from home, because they are physically together"
- There's no separation between your personal life and your work life. ... It's not compartmentalized like one would go to the office and leave work at the office and continue the next day.

Workplace Isolation

Employees' perceptions of the availability of co-workers, peers and supervisors for work-based social support.

- "It's all that informal communication that you missed. You are not hearing about what people did on the weekend. You also miss a lot of collaboration with different kind of brainstorming process."

Lack of Face-To-Face Communication-Lack of In-Person Contact

- "It's a little bit more challenging working remote than in the office, because you don't have the opportunity to see that your colleagues office door is open, and to go in."

Lack of visibility

A deficiency in "the possibility for supervisors and others to observe workers."

- "I still think people are a little nervous about wondering whether remote employees are actually doing their jobs."
- "I think that there's a lot of work that gets done in hallway conversations, and in side conversations that you're not having when you're virtual. I think that if the boss is in a traditional office and you're not ... the old adage out of sight, out of mind, it's somewhat true."

To sum it up, there are a lot of valid reasons managers and agencies shy away from remote workers. It's hard to blame them. However, for those who want to give a distributed team a shot, there are avenues and tools for you to try. I encourage anyone on the fence about remote work to try it out by starting small.

CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES OF WORKING FROM HOMES- POST COVID-19

For some months now, surveys after survey have shown that the majority of people want to work from home. While this world-wide shutdown did not happen to test out just how effective working from home is, it's been a nice side effect. And some people have discovered that they hate it.

Now, it's important to remember that corona-commuting is not the same as normal tele-commuting. When you work from home in regular times, your kids are at school, the cafés are open, and you're not concerned about you or your loved ones maybe. So, don't think this is how working from home has to be. It isn't. But, even working from home during normal times isn't something that works for everyone.

On the flip side, while some people are finding that they hate working from home, in their eyes, as the thoughts of giving up expensive leased office space dances before them. If everyone works from home, then overhead costs drop. It's not an insignificant expense.

But, before businesses decide to increase working from home, think through these things-If you live in a large house where you can easily have dedicated office space, working from home can be great. If you live in a small apartment with four roommates, working from home is not a practical long-term solution. Depending on what you do, sitting at the kitchen table for hours on end can wreak havoc on your back and your roommates' patience.

Working at home works better for higher paid people with more resources at home. While working at home can save commuting costs (which can be substantial in some areas for some people), if you don't have enough space to have a dedicated desk and appropriate office chair, it won't work well.

Teamwork can be harder at home- I am not going to argue that you can not build a strong team remotely. I have worked from home for a month plus now and have built strong relationships with people who I've never actually met in person. It's possible. But it's harder. It can seem awkward and like a huge time waster to ask at the beg- video conference if everyone is caught up doing something else. But, when you walk into the office in the morning and say, "Oh my word, please tell me you are watching this!" it is a casual conversation. Those kinds of conversations do help for team building. When you get to know your coworkers as individuals, you're more willing to listen to their ideas and ignore their flaws.

People need people in Africa context -Even though we like to say people are either extroverts or introverts, it is not that black and white. Human contact is an essential aspect of mental health. Some people need more contact than others. When working from home during normal times, you can go to a café, meet friends for lunch, or fulfill your people-needs with your healthy social life. That's enough for a lot of people! But, for some people, it's not enough. They need more contact, and working in an office

Work never ends-When you work from home, boundaries can become confusing on all sides. Your neighbors see you at

home and (if you are female) think you are available for free babysitting. Your boss knows your computer and all your materials are right there, so surely you can knock out this one project at 9:30 p.m at night via African time! It is easier to set boundaries with other people, though, then it is with yourself. It can be challenging to make yourself step away from the "office" when it's next to your bed. Days blur into nights, and there are no bright lines for off-and-on the clock.

All of this does not mean I am not a champion for working at home. I am! I love it. Or at least, I did love it, and I'll love it again when children go back to school, and my favorite cafés re-open. But, if you have found that you hate working from home, there's not something wrong with you.

If you're a business owner that is tempted to go to a 100 percent remote model, think about how that moves will impact your business and your employees. It may be fantastic. It may not be. Talk with people before you make final decisions. And no matter what, everyone keep safe out there.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Henry Ford once said 'When everything seems to be against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it.' There are few disruptions that have the ability to catalyze a monumental transformation. The COVID-19 pandemic probably is that big disruption of our times that has challenged the status quo, turning lives and livelihoods upside down and to a distinct contraction in the economy. Over the past months, as countries world-over adopt different degrees of lockdown, traditional workforce structures and styles have undergone significant changes. This new reality has put organizations in a tight spot, compelling them to make a choice of either here or there! So, we can either use this storm to deter us or use its headwind to leap forward.

The 'work from home' approach became a natural transition to perform day-to-day tasks and ensure business continuity. Client servicing, collaboration, brainstorming, accounting, there is a long list of roles that have been successfully and seamlessly executed remotely during this time. Technology has truly emerged as a saviour and hero.

Seen skeptically in the past, work from home has compelled companies to trust and depend on its workforce to perform the same tasks with diligence and accountability. A key concern for most employers has been monitoring and recording productivity which can now be supervised by digital Human Resource tools. The results, surprising to leaders from the old school of thought, have been positive. Most employees have stretched themselves beyond business as usual and risen to the task. Witnessing the disruption to business from close quarters, they have extended collaboration tools to customers and other value chain partners and gone beyond their roles to stand-by their fellow colleagues, leaders, and company.

Crisis is the best time to test the strength of a company's culture. Are people-centric policies, inclusion and diversity initiatives and values done as a tick in the box, or do organizations genuinely take care of their workforce? Here again, technology has paved the way for the Human Resource functions to adapt and respond in real time to the professional and personal needs. In many ways, it has presented a demonstration of how an organization can truly give back and stand-by its people that help protect its culture. It has enabled transparent communication at a time where pressure and anxiety of losing jobs is at an all-time high. Social media engagements, regular team catch-ups and online mental health workshops, enabled by technology, are proving to be very helpful.

Technological advances have transformed our ability to not only recruit, hire and train remote employees, but also to keep those foundational initiatives not lose momentum. Onboarding new employees, familiarizing them with the structure, and helping them engage with their team members despite no physical contact, has been made possible through digital platforms. Even during mergers and acquisitions, seamless transitions to new processes and initiatives have been made possible due to a strong foundation of technology aided by digital tools.

With the help of webinars and zoom, team meetings, mentoring sessions and internship programs have continued with the same vigour, representing a company's commitment to its employee's growth and future.

To me, this signifies that the reluctance to accept modernisation was pushed out of the window much like traditional Human Resource methods and overdue digital adoption took precedence. What we are going through now can not refer to as 'business as usual' but rather it is 'business as unusual'. Social distancing and contact-less measure will be a norm for some time and companies can no longer depend on conservative measures but instead will need to take bold decisions and bold investments. Both organizations and people need to question what needs to be preserved, created, accepted, or eliminated. As we can see possibilities powered by technology are enormous. At the same time, we must not forget the lessons from COVID-19. The resultant impact on the economy has necessitated growth-oriented organizations to rethink their actions and commitment to their people with the same focus as they concentrate on re-aligning their business offerings, processes, and business models.

I am also putting forward arguments in favor of remote working (where this is possible)

The environment is better off when we work from home, let us do it for future generations. , , , Our families are better off too, let us do it for loved ones. , , Office politics is harder when you cannot grovel, let us try it. The extra time from giving up our daily commute is good for our health, that's a good reason to. Our wardrobe is much cheaper too, none of those ties & suits, I vote yes in support of working from home. , , We eat healthier when we eat at home, that is certainly an excellent reason. We spend less when we do not have to commute, that should feel like a salary increase. Office bullying is harder when you work remotely, and when it occurs, easier to prove. Operating cost is lower when staff work remotely, and that should help businesses in these difficult times.

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