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Will the 'work from home' culture outlast the Covid-19 phase?



With benefits for both companies and employees, some aspects of remote work may be here to stay

From March, everyone has settled comfortably into a work-from-home arrangement, that seems to be lasting much longer than anyone initially anticipated. A sizeable number of organisations have tasted its benefits and will likely persist with the system, even after the Covid-19 pandemic subsides.

Apart from the obvious advantages of cost savings on real estate and office administrative expenses, the work-from-home culture offers certain flexibility in work timings that is hard to resist. In homes where both husband and wife are working, this allows them to share the domestic load; resulting in a heightened sense of bonding between them. Employers are also getting to see the 'human' face of employees, and often their families, through the Zoom/Google / Teams calls.

Greater digitalisation

Of course, not all jobs can be done from home. Functions such as manufacturing require physical presence at the factory. Services offered at beauty salons and medical therapies cannot be done at home. Certain jobs that require supervision cannot be shifted to the home environment. However, many other jobs are compatible with the work-from-home culture due to the changing environment. Even sales functions that require client demos and client interactions have been virtualised. Now with AI and VR playing a larger role, experiential marketing can be (and has been) taken to the next level during this pandemic. Routine tasks that can be automated will find their way more and more into the current situation.

All this would not be possible without technology. With e-commerce players helping people procure their daily needs, the telecom companies providing faster Wi-Fi to stay connected, virtual social media platforms offering the much-needed respite of socialising, and streaming services offering entertainment at their fingertips, the general public have become used to a higher level of digitisation based on convenience. This is probably the most important part of the work-from-home culture that won't easily go away.

Problematic, as well

The work-from-home option has its share of problems as well, especially in terms of infrastructure and technology. Most urban homes in India have just two bedrooms, and many live in joint families as well. In a situation requiring two office spaces, two laptops, and sufficient Wi-Fi bandwidth, many households are struggling to cope. Added to this are children who may need their own computer and a desk and chair for online classes.

Physical space is a big constraint in a large part of the country. Also, the privacy of the home is invaded. For the employers, it has still not sunk in that they are intruding on the personal space of employees through this arrangement. Travelling outside of the home to work provides some personal time, and is a stress-buster for many working folks; now, this option is not available. All of these issues have led to that initial euphoria an employee felt about working from home slowly giving way to a sense of restriction of freedom, and that affects their overall mental and physical well-being.

To sum up, there are both positives and negatives to the work-from-home culture. Technology has made it a reality; however, too much of it may make the human interface limited to too narrow an interaction. Some aspects of the Work-From-Home culture will last, given the financial benefit, it offers for both employers and employees.

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