BEING RESILIENT

## WELCOME TO YOUR 'NEW OFFICE'

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Some of us may love the office and some of us may find it outdated. Regardless of our attitude, COVID-19 caused lockdown made us re-evaluate our attitude and work styles to make sure we have the work done from the relaxing convenience of our homes. Suddenly, being present became not only useless, but irrelevant. The only thing that counts in the era without watercooler chats and client outings is the end result and the quality of execution.

There are numerous concerns arising from remote work, starting with the perceived lack of control over situation from both employees and managers to the decreased interaction and thus slower decision making process. It is very hard to replicate the speed and efficiency of real life standups, agile work, brainstorming or negotiation. Remote work is a bit akin to taking Christie's action of heightened tensions, emotions and anticipation and throwing it into a faceless domain on online bidding. You take the soul out of the process. Will the result be the same as real life? Only time would show.

While we might have to wait for several years to be able to assess the efficiency of remote work arrangement, we can already argue in favor of this working style from several important perspectives. The fact that some companies such as Twitter announced employees were to working remote indefinitely, and Facebook and Google letting their employees work from home till end of year shows that the trend is clearly gaining momentum.

Benefits for employees
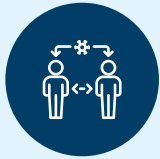
Health hazards and lack of hygiene in physical offices

How many times did you have to go to the office to sit next to a coughing or sneezing person, stocking up on Vitamin C and praying you don't get the flu? Offices are a great way to socialize, make friends and be connected. As current remote work experiment shows most socialization and client interactions are efficient through Internet.

Long commutes and work-related stress

On average people spend about a year of their life on commute. A British worker spends a whopping 492 days of their lives travelling to work costing them over 37000 pounds[1]. Chances are your eight hours of work actually look much more like 10 or even 15 hours in some countries[2], due to the time spent commuting, social interactions and so on. Some people might not mind the increased time at work. Others, however, have to go with a constantly stressed, under slept and drained routine just because the employment contract stipulates the need to be physically present at an arbitrary time. While unlikely to make offices completely obsolete, current situation will give people more leverage to decide on their preferred work location.

Work-life balance and choice of habitat

Sometimes working from home means blurring your work life and your personal one[3]. However, working from home you can pick the times you are most efficient for particular activities. Moreover, in the breaks employees can now squeeze some stretching, running or yoga, which both improves your health and makes you more alert.

Moreover, if we are moving to remote working conditions, the need to squeeze oneself into a tiny flat located next to the office will disappear. People will finally be able to move to bigger houses in more ecologically friendly neighborhoods.`

Benefits for companies

Job fitness

Some companies, such as Google, Facebook and the WeWork (obviously) are dependent on physical space for their operations as well as brand image. Oftentimes the perks of physical offices are the main reasons people are working in those firms. Giving up offices will give both employers and employees an opportunity to soberly evaluate their fitness and interest in the job, regardless of surrounding social bubble.

Cost Saving

Giving up physical spaces will be a much needed cost cutting measure in the time of a lurking economic recession. Apart from the clear financial advantages of going online, there are a number of reasons companies are likely to benefit from shedding physical offices. With the next recession looming in fall any banks in particular are looking to get rid of their super pricey downtown head quarters and move to remote work or cheaper locations[4].

Efficiency

According to numerous studies[5], work productivity in remote work scenarios does not fall. In fact, oftentimes, it is higher in comparison to pre-COVID levels. It is easy to see how staff might get more done in less time when working remotely. Fewer office distractions can lead to a more effective performance.

Getting rid of presentism

Some companies force their employees to clock-in and clock-out, as well as register their bathroom breaks. While this is an extreme case of work surveillance, oftentimes the need to be present for 8 or 9 hours makes employees do just that: be present. If you are employing white collar workers and not bouncers or security guards, chances are results count more than presence.

Truly equal opportunities for employees

As a company you are legally required to state that you are open to disabilities and happy to bring diversity into your hiring.

However, when it comes to evaluations and appraisals disabled, women, racial minorities and people with children often find themselves at a disadvantage. Remote work can chance that. The ability to work from the comfort of their homes allows each employee to work to the best of their abilities, even if they have issues walking or leaving their house for an extended period of time. Finally, companies have a chance to become truly equal and meritocratic.

Getting the best people and timely market feedback

Widening the hiring geography will allow companies to find truly the best person to do the job as opposed to someone who happens to live two stops away from the office. Also, in contrast to a concentrated hub, geographically scattered employees allow the company to always be on top of the developments in various corners of the world as well as get valuable regional feedback ahead of a product or feature launch. GitHub has been following this practice for years.

Conclusion

To ensure the success of your online worker's community, it is imperative to provide each employee with all necessary infrastructure to be efficient in the new environment, as well as repurpose applications and cybersecurity protections to new remote work conditions.

If the remote work experiment to prove successful, companies have to revisit the overall engagement model with their employees and customers, to make sure all parties feel heard, understood and appreciated. Companies would need to invest in their employees to make them more productive from home, give them the right tools and incentives to stay collaborative and efficient.

Equally, more than before, companies' management would have to provide a vision, purpose and clarity so that the remote work force is still aligned to organization's vision and priorities. Having strong agenda for weekly or monthly catch ups would be paramount to make sure employees stay motivated and engaged while working remotely. Occasional meet ups would prove key to maintaining teams' cohesion and providing a necessary social glue.

Obviously, new employees will need additional support and ideally "physical immersion" to fully integrate in organizations with extended period of remote working.

Overall, it is hard to say whether remote work will turn out to be a solution or an impediment, but there is no doubt that companies who put extra effort and thought behind this engagement will see much higher return on their bets.

About the Author

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