

Restoring stability as organisations adapt to the new order

As we step into the next stage of understanding COVID-19, countries and economies are beginning to get back on their feet and accepting the new reality. The pace and ways at which companies are re-emerging from this crisis is non-linear and varying by geography and even industry. But unlike the first stage of COVID-19 which took all of us by utter surprise, this time around, leaders can prepare for the next stage of the world's fight against the pandemic.

While profitability and competition have been at the forefront of business, now, employee wellbeing and health has emerged as a significant theme. In this stage, it is important to return to regenerate human capital value and productivity as quickly as possible while continuing to ensure the wellbeing of the workforce. For the long-term success, it will be equally important for companies to plan for the new normal of doing business, as opposed to returning to pre COVID-19 ways of doing things.

Understanding and adjusting to the new way of working

For companies, the reality that employees would need to be resuming work and office in the "new normal" is sinking in. But a section of professionals are dreading to go back to office mode and deal with the new normal. Besides, with the coronavirus cases curve not seeing a decline even now, employees are anxious about the risk of exposure.

Companies are wary of this risk and are trying their best to create a work environment that is built on trust between employers and employees aided by tools to facilitate a safe working space. Companies are focused towards securing the infrastructure needed to run an office machinery efficiently.

While remote working will stay for a while as firms will consider implementing "back to work" in smaller measures, technology will be the binding component going forward. The lockdown saw emergence of accelerated adoption of collaboration software

leading to virtual interactions. Earlier, where maximum utilisation of office space was essential, with the social distancing norms, we will see this getting reversed.

This would require redesigning of key work policies such as introduction of policies on ensuring social distancing at work and identifying internal hot spots within the organisation. Additionally, queries on employee benefits would need to be settled. Ensuring physical, emotional, financial, social wellbeing of employees will be key.

From a business perspective, the need would be to look at individual tasks and how the same can be delivered in the new context and evaluating which tasks need to be done at workplace and which ones can be delivered from home. Also, cascading this redesigned work into clear performance expectations will be critical.

Aligning rewards and retention programmes for critical roles, salesforce and executives to the new normal

Now CHROs/ Rewards professionals around the world are trying to understand how 'future of work' is going to impact 'future of rewards'. With cost pressures being high and working models dynamic, it is going to be critical for organisations to retain their critical talent and re-energise their sales force and executives.

This pandemic has served as a catalyst for the concept of "Total Rewards Strategy", which encompasses benefits as well as key HR policies and practices apart from compensation. Companies are exploring various options around leave benefit (Modify/ review plan design, introduce new leave types, consider operational modifications, etc.); wellbeing programmes (addition of aspects around financial and emotional wellbeing, along with the usual physical wellbeing); health care benefits like insurance policies; retirement benefits, goals and

metrics review/ redesign for sales force and executives and special allowances for critical staff, among others. Each organisation is trying to balance investment and ROI to create a win-win situation for both the organisation and the employees.

Keeping the connect going to ensure work culture and work-life integration

While work from home is comforting to some and challenging for others, one thing that is common is the need for better communication for a seamless experience. Lack of regular communication can hamper cross-collaboration efforts, reduce morale, and lead to chaos and confusion. Transparent, empathetic, and timely internal communication is the need of the hour. Companies have been implementing measures such as - regular communication / emails to keep all employees updated and engaged; department / team meetings for work allocation and operations; organisation / department / team based virtual or social engagement initiative; and periodic all-hands calls for support required, and challenges being faced by employees. While emails have always been the primary mode of communication for organisations, they have been agile in adopting best-in-class communication technologies to streamline the new way of working and help employees come together and collaborate better.

However, restoring stability cannot be a no one-size-fit-all approach; each company would have to take necessary steps basis their own culture, context and requirements. What seems certain at this stage, is shift in focus from “Work-environment” to “Work culture” for organisations; and from “Work-Life balance” to “Work-life Integration” for employees.

This article was first published in [People Matters](#).

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