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Managing Productivity while Working From Home | Aparna Sharma | Senior HR Professional & Certified Corporate Director | Editor's Collection

As economies open up after the initial COVID-19 crisis that forced people to work from home, we see companies exploring the prospect of integrating the work-from-home model as a part of their operations at least for an extended future and probably permanently. But there is a fundamental question that they must resolve about this model: How can we ensure employees will operate at a high productivity level going forward?

It was a difficult, bumpy task moving people to work from home, and it was not without issues in security and privacy. Companies learned to use video collaboration tools such as GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams, Webex, and Zoom and integrated them into how they conduct work. Companies looking forward now realize that they are far more effective at working from home than they anticipated. In fact, some functions work very well from home.

It is not just an effective work model. It also has significant benefits. The work-from-home model strips away bureaucracy. It allows companies to reduce their real estate cost. It enables them to



expand their ability to attract and keep talent and tap talent sources in areas at a distance from core office locations. The model also has aspects that improve the work experience for employees such as eliminating difficult commute times.

As economies begin reopening, it is apparent this is a slow process and will be a multi-month journey, at best. We are in a work-from-home model for at least an extended period and now face the following issues:

- Is the work-from-home model sustainable?
- How can companies manage this model?
- How can companies improve productivity in this model?

As we move into this new world, companies must address these three issues.

The core issue for Improving Productivity

It is important to realize that many things affect and drive productivity. Productivity is a multi-dimensional issue, and all the issues interrelate to one another. For example, as a company evolves its technical stack, it changes the talent and training the company needs, which leads to other changes in the organization.

Historically, productivity was stubbornly resistant to improvement. That is because it is multi-dimensional, and all the dimensions are interrelated. Furthermore, it is highly situational and specific to an organization's operational context, and the context evolves.

Before a company can go on a journey to improve its productivity (even in the work-from-home model), it must first understand how to measure and monitor productivity on an ongoing basis. These measures must be simple, yet objective. Without measuring and monitoring productivity, a company will not be able to manage it. And managing productivity is fundamental to the new business world we face.

The Silver Lining

Companies that understand how to manage this model so they can improve productivity have a potentially big win. When organizations take a holistic approach, they have huge opportunities to do more than improve the productivity of a function by just a few percentage points a year. With a holistic approach, in some instances, they can double or triple their productivity over the course of a year.

The COVID-19 crisis has a silver lining. Because it forces companies to deal with the reality of an ongoing work-from-home model and make it sustainable, they gain an intriguing opportunity to unlock dramatic improvement in productivity. Improving productivity creates companies' competitiveness as well as wealth for the country. This is a fabulous opportunity.



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