



# Post COVID-19 time to reconfigure the work front

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**Abstract:** The beginning of the year 2020 saw a wide spread outbreak of the deadly virus COVID-19 across more than 187 countries. Till the date of writing this paper more than 40 lac people across the world were the casualties of this deadly virus with more than 600,000 people still infected.

Nations were under lockdown for a long period of time. Industries of all size and nature and the entire infrastructure of nations was in a standstill. People were made to work from home and made to sit at home to avoid risking the virus. The workforce was adjusting to the new configurations. Post the lifting of the lockdown, there will be further uncertainties at the workplace and shift in ways the workforce will work. It will be a new dawn of uncertainty and fear.

**Keywords:** -COVID-19, Work place, future of business, Indian workforce

**Introduction:** The world welcomed the year 2020 with the usual fervour, joy and vigour with the additional joy of going into a year that is an Angel number. All of us expected good times in the new year with the problems, issues and challenges of the previous year to be forgotten.

But back in the Industrial town of Wuhan, China an unknown enemy-Corona Virus- had started effecting people since mid- December 2019. It was supposed to have originated and spread from animals to humans. The wet markets of Wuhan were the culprits of this deadly virus. Initially the virus outbreak was restricted to the Wuhan city of Hubei Province only. But as the localities' started travelling outside of Wuhan post the Chinese New year to different parts of the world, they took the virus with them and started infecting people from different parts of the world. In February 2020 the WHO declared it a pandemic with the number of deaths being more and being more deadly than the SARS infection of 2008.

With the virus spreading like wild fire across economies, different countries started imposing lockdowns and putting the local economic engine to a complete standstill. Small to major industrial hubs came to a sudden halt and people were hit majorly. Social distancing was the only way of fighting the deadly virus. Organizations went in to virtual work or work from home environment. Staying home and staying safe become the only remedy to the virus. Staying indoors for the entire lockdown period was the only weapon in fighting the unknown virus.

For the population across generations, lockdown across the country was never heard of or never experienced scenario. In fact the population was never ready to face such a situation of staying indoors.

Once the lockdown is lifted and the economy starts picking its threads from where it left pre COVID-19 outbreak, it will face a unique case of uncertainty and fear among workers and employees at work place. Will social distancing be maintained and will companies maintain the hygiene safety measures which were followed during lockdown to fight the virus. The workforce will be under constant fear of resurgence of the virus anytime. And with a sure shot drug to fight the virus not available in the market for the next six months or so, this fear in the workforce will be hard to desist. In doing so, are we putting the economy on a rolling path. Lot of questions arise as to the future of business work environment and the ways of doing business-be it remotely, or rethinking the supply chain or for that matter reconfiguring the work place in terms of maintain new hygiene conditions and safety measures. Is this an opportunity to further develop or change the company culture towards trust, engagement, empowerment and more delegation?

With these important points in consideration we set out to elicit views and suggestion from the workforce-the majority stakeholders-as to what they think will change post COVID-19 or what they expect at workplace in the future. We carried out a survey of more than 100 employees across all strata of management and tried to assess their expectations from the new work place which would help management to reconfigure the work place.

### **Remote work will be the new strategy**

Majority of those surveyed viewed this as the new norm and the future in offices and industries. Some of the sectors were not used to it. But as crises teaches you to adjust to adversities, remote working or working from home will be the requirement of the future workforce. Physical distancing and remote meetings, webinars and videoconference meeting will be strictly followed. New remote tech tools will be used to talk to or be in touch with each other or in groups. Already Skype, Webex and Zoom have been extensively used. Hopefully the virus and its fear will go away, but these tech tools will stay forever and will be the new tools of connecting with each other. Any new tool in the market will have to be user-friendly and free to use. The workforce will have to learn and adjust using these tools. Tools like Google Docs or Microsoft Teams will also be used to communicate with a large number of workforces simultaneously and effectively. Certain researches have showed that remote working increases productivity.

### **Be transparent always with stakeholders**

China hid the news of the spread and intensity of the virus not only from its own population, but also from the entire world. The effects are there to be seen.

Similarly, the workforce expects the top leadership to be more transparent and not hide internal news from them. The employees would demand more of trust based, honest conversation with the management or the employers. This would even entail listening to the views/suggestions of the lower rung of employees and make them more of a bigger family than have an employer-employee relationship. This will make the workforce more committed, to the organization and to the management and leadership. In the future we will see a marked shift away from static organizational structures towards dynamic team forms. This should work well in creating conditions of psychological safety among the employees and for their families also.

Leadership or top management will realize the importance of human touch and be more humane and strengthen their 'spiritual quotient' (SQ). SQ is not being religious or have spiritual beliefs. They should be more humane in approach, respect moral values, ethics, integrity, etc. Money is not everything. The most wealthiest nation or the so-called developed nations have suffered the most in this pandemic. Wealth alone could not save the lives of human being.

### **The workforce and the Infrastructure be hygienic**

The threat of the CORONA virus will reduce in the next 6-8 months, but the threats of more such virus attacks will remain in future. Considering this, workplace infrastructure in buildings, office, schools, etc would need drastic changes. Stress would be more on hygienic work environment with increased spending on ducts, filters, chillers, heat exchanges, etc. This would ensure quality air, less pollution and proper hygienic environment in the factories and offices and reduce the future spread of virus at workplace.

Health screening at the workplace, specifically where there are more footfalls, will increase and more tech tools to supplement these would be in place to detect abnormalities in the population and measure components of public health.

Those surveyed have suggested to have fumigation gates at the entry of Organization/Institute, Marriage halls, Restaurants, Hospitals, Markets, Transportation Hubs-Bus stands, Airport and Railway stations and places where there are more footfalls. This way people will get sanitised and will segregate those infected from non-infected. If possible, to supplement this by put thermal scanners at high footfall areas like Malls, Movie Theatres, Airports, Schools, Companies with more workers.

### **Face-to-face meetings will reduce drastically**

In the lockdown period all the industries relied on tech tools like Skype, Zoom or Webex to have the compulsory daily, weekly or monthly meetings. Social distancing was to be maintained and everyone was remotely working.

The workforce travelled places for meetings be it vendor or customers or top management or review meetings. They stayed at hotels and attended these meetings. But now with the meeting happening online through various tools, sectors like travels and hotels will be affected to a great extent.

For meetings which can happen remotely, the workforce will push for such meetings that will reduce travel time, cost and also reduce the risk of contacting any virus in future.

### **Employees will rethink on workplace priorities**

Before the virus outbreak, the workforce was burdened with a lot of work pressure, many face-to face meetings and breakneck speed in maintaining the deadlines. Vendors, Management and the Customers would add to those pressures, sometimes compromising on the health and safety. But with the virus outbreak, the workforce will take stock of their priorities at work and realign them with their health and mental peace. They will value more of their health and family health and then realign the work priorities.

They will negotiate their commitments to teams and colleagues, customers and vendors and the management and would be intentional and selective in the meetings to be attended and function invitations to accept.

They would also take decisions on collaborative activities in office and realign them with their individual priorities and family and personal activities.

### **Rewrite supply chain strategies**

Over the years, Industries were over dependant on specific supply chains to meet their production. But with the outbreak, they will rethink their supply chain strategies and revisit them to be ready for such eventualities. They would try and be less dependant on a single market for the supplies and try and build and maintain alternate supply chains and be risk proof and diversify their risk. In house would be the best that they will think off. Mergers and acquisitions of related supply chain companies will happen.

The biggest losers in this outbreak and disconnect in the supply chain have been the auto industry, the pharma sector and the consumer durable sector.

They would rather learn a lesson from the outbreak and try and build more capacities in house and try and develop supply chain across many countries and not be dependant on a single source.

### **People will value nature more**

The population had taken nature for granted and had destroyed it to the extent that it was becoming impossible to bring it back to its original flare of rich flora and fauna. Felling trees and even cutting hills and mountains in the name of development was becoming more prominent. Pollution levels in all major metro cities across the globe had risen to extreme levels. In certain cities like New Delhi, it was unliveable at certain times because of higher levels of pollution.

But nature, has dealt a heavy blow to its humankind by way of this virus outbreak. During the lockdown, trees and nature breathed freely and animals were freely roaming on empty roads. Wild animals, who otherwise could not venture out of the forests or jungles, on to the roads or nearby areas, were seen freely moving around without fear.

This outbreak has made the population alert and rethink on matters of pollution, recycling, renewable energy resources.

As per the Water Resources Ministry, the Ganga water in Haridwar and Hrishikesh is drinkable now in the lockdown period. Before the lockdown it was highly polluted by human excreta, Industry pollutants and animal carcasses. The ozone layer has reappeared and the nature, after suffering for long, has rebooted and breathing fresh now.

### **Collaborative sustenance with customers**

In future companies will see prudence in collaborative sustenance with the customers. They will think of measures of creating condition that allow customers to be more helpful.

When service provision is a true partnership, customers give you genuine feedback and are more involved in your business, employees are more productive and services are enhanced. If you involve and educate the customers in your service provisioning, they will be more receptive and has more productive engaging.

Conclusion: The focus of this study was to understand the workforce perception of the various parameters effecting the workplace post COVID-19 outbreak. The workforce was working from home. They were staying home and staying safe which was the only precaution against the spread of this virus. It investigates as to the workforce perception of what they expect from the new workplace once the lockdown is lifted and industries start production. Supply chain of all industries will be taken seriously and at depth. Hygiene and health safety on the shop floors or in offices will be of prime importance. Humans beings matter more than anything else, even more than the supply chains. Nature is larger than we think. Individuals matter, especially our own equanimity and life balance. Unless these are factored into the business processes and environment we work in, we will not bring in sustainability to our business models and the lessons of Corona virus would have been wasted.

Humanity and the business community specifically would have learnt its lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and hopefully would try and implement them once out of lockdown and the effects of the virus have subsided. Companies would go for more thorough application of the systems view in managing business organizations and national economies. They would go for more contingency planning and flexibility in the execution of plans. They need to improve functional knowledge and skills in the use of technology in business operations. They need to diversify as a means to enjoy optimal return-risk combinations. Also need to validate and contextualize Management theory in virtual work settings. Companies need to build and maintain more healthful work environments and arrangements. Finally, they also need to re-examine the role of spirituality in the workplace.

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