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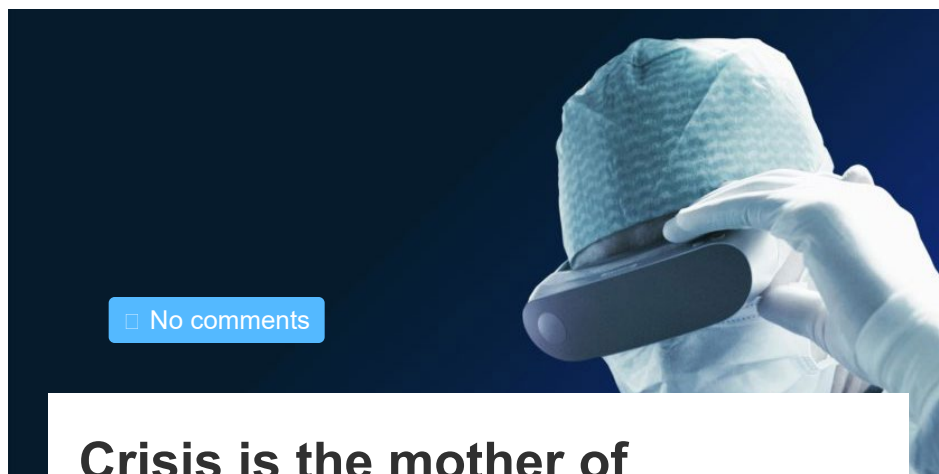
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Crisis is the mother of invention: Bosch

“ Imagine , if COVID-19 had struck 10 years back! Our global response would have been far less capable. However, with the rapid adoption of technology in every phase of our lives, we now see a fundamental rethink of where and how we work.”

Robert Bosch Engineering and Business Solutions Pvt. Ltd. (RBEI) is a strategic partner for consulting and

implementation services for CPQ. Their global delivery capabilities and expertise on CPQ increase customers' business efficiency and help drive revenue growth.

Here, Sriram TV, Head of HR, RBEI, tells us his expectations regarding future of work. Excerpts:

DQ: How are you dealing with the COVID-19 situation? What plans have you put in place?

Sriram TV: Our first thought was employee safety and wellness. This was followed by ensuring productivity and business continuity stays on top. We formed a task force, both at the working and leadership levels. This comprised of key people from Business, HR, IT, Facilities and Logistics. Sanitization, social distancing and work from home soon became the key words.

When WFH took over, ensuring infrastructure – laptops, desktops and hardware equipment reached employees' homes was the priority. Working from home for engineers using hardware was a big success. Enabling VPN in desktops and own devices was well executed. We learnt that we had grossly underestimated the power of connectivity and the will power of people to make it happen.

An important aspect throughout this exercise was frequent communication on critical information. Frequent memos on the latest happenings were shared with employees to keep everyone updated. Employee health and well-being being paramount in this situation, our in-house counsellors and doctors were on stand-by for any emergency.

Our Bosch social counsellor/psychologist was just a call away to help employees deal with any anxiety or mental

stress. Frequent health surveys were sent to all associates to ascertain their families' well-being. Our HR partners and managers were on the front line to ensure employees were indeed safe in these tough times.

DQ: Are you giving employees more control over their schedules?

Sriram TV: While the notion of work from home signifies a certain amount of flexibility – given the dynamics of the current situation, it does call for an additional dose of empathy and understanding of employees' schedules.

The question is not just about more control over their timings, but, being more accommodative to their sphere of work – which has transcended into their personal lives too. A colleague might have to run some errands for the family, being the only one to take care of aged parents – you give that flexibility trusting him/her that productivity would not take a hit. There might be families where kids need to be attended to, pets running around and without house help around, it is a task to juggle house and work. So, I would say, it is not about control, but, the flexibility and understanding of one's teams that would ensure a win-win situation.

DQ: How are you assessing on learnings from enforced experiments around WFH?

Sriram TV: I think we all have played a role in the 'World's largest Work from Home experiment', and have a few takeaways from this experience. Though the initial premise of a WFH was one of apprehension, this situation has taught us that we can still continue to work, owing to technology and commitment.

A few thoughts come to my mind as I think of this situation in our work sphere – should we be moving to a floating vs. fixed seating arrangement, given that a certain percentage of employees will permanently be in WFH mode? Can I think of having a seasonal workforce – only certain teams coming in as per their workload?

As a benefit, we would not need invest so much in commercial real estate too! As seen from this experience, it has also taught us to emphasize on our leadership skills – managers will have to get better judgment of ascertaining productivity by setting specific goals, rather than just physical presence on the laptop / screen time. Increased sensitivity and cognizance are required to handle these different situations.

An added mention is that of a Digital Employee experience. While Employee Experience has always been thought of as a very personalized, in-person touch point in HR functions across, this situation taught us otherwise. Experimenting a Virtual Employee Experience is on the cards for organizations now, as we did too. A pilot of Virtual On boarding was taken up and this resulted in a successful batch. Our employee relieving processes too went digital, albeit with the human touch.

DQ: This is a challenging time for managers. What advice would you give them?

Sriram TV: Covid-19 has been a tipping point for all of us; none of us anticipated such a sudden shift in working styles. While remote working has certainly been around in our organization for specific / need-based cases, the entire organization has never been on a work from home mode.

Managers play a very crucial role here. They need to orient themselves to lead remote teams. Some of the most important attributes towards this – communication, and more important – frequency of communication. In a physical work space, one still has the benefit of walking up to the person and getting things done more effectively, but virtually – it may take slightly longer. Here is where that extra bit of patience is required. Empowerment and trust play a major role too.

In such a scenario, where employees are donning multiple roles at work and home, it would also help to be a little more empathetic – understanding that your team members might log in slightly late after finishing the household chores is ok, but, of course, not at the cost of productivity. Ensuring timely delivery of work and effectiveness should be of prime importance.

DQ: How does work/life balance work in a crisis like this?

Sriram TV: Well, the lines of office and home has blurred. While earlier, we did have a certain log in and log off time (at least most of us!), that digital 'log off' time now is extended way into the evening. There is no one to blame really, when one has nothing else to do, going out and commute time is non-existent, we do tend to continue working.

Hence, it is even more imperative to consciously set a schedule for the day and try your best to stick to it. Log in and log off at the time one usually is in office. Try not to extend the work hours, unless in case of an emergency. While there is already anxiety and stress associated with this situation, the need to stay relaxed and balanced is all the more important. Set clear

guidelines amongst your team that you would be available within the stipulated schedule alone and anything beyond that time can be discussed the next day.

DQ: What are the policy responses you would give to the MSMEs and SMEs?

Sriram TV: To the industries similar to our operating nature, I would recommend a few things:

Disaster recovery plan in place: I am sure all of us jumped into this situation and got the best out of it; it would be advisable to document these learnings so there is a ready reckoner to refer to

Conduct regular WFH / disaster drills: To check how well-equipped we are to handle such calamities in the future.

Curtail costs: This is a good time to re-look at our costing and decide if we really want to invest in that extravagant canteen menu or probably cut it down slightly, considering employees are WFH.

Rethink HR policies: Can we look at a broadband reimbursement, a formalized WFH guideline, liaising with IT for virtual desktops – BYoD (Bring Your Own Device) perhaps? Can we relook at our security policies to allow this?

Revisit employee wellness strategies: Increased focus and awareness around holistic health, wellness and hygiene aspects.

DQ: How are you now facilitating digital work?

Sriram TV: Being a young company, where, the average age of the employees is 28 years, majority of

our talent are digital natives. Being an IT organization, exploring newer ways of remote working came naturally to us!

A typical day of work in the COVID-19 scenario for me was to log on to VPN network and get my day started. As the day progressed, calls and meetings would happen over Skype – at times via video too. Few external partners have also connected via Zoom / other online collaboration platforms. When I get bogged down and want some slack time, I log on to the company intranet remote engagement platform for my teams to share their WFH chronicles and get relaxed. This has pretty much been the same for any employee at RBEI for the last couple of days.

We did face a slight impediment initially, when we had to transport desktops and hardware equipment to associates' homes. Barring this, I think as an organization we were well equipped to handle this situation. Enabling personal devices with tools to enable safe working within our firewall was another means.

DQ: How are the latest technologies going to redefine the workplace? How do you plan for a future of 'decent digiwork'?

Sriram TV: Imagine, if COVID-19 had struck 10 years back! Our global response would have been far less capable. However, with the rapid adoption of technology in every phase of our lives, we now see a fundamental rethink of where and how we work.

For starters, as we all have experienced it, online social collaboration platforms are here to stay – Zoom, WhatsApp and a host of others. While, this is not just for meeting and calls, online learning has also seen a shift

– almost every week I get invites for 4-5 webinars, if not more. There is a definite shift in the way we work and learn. To augment online training sessions, next-gen remote working technologies like AR / VR would come into play to aid contactless training / maintain social distancing.

We ourselves, here, at RBEI, have made the best use of our internal collaboration platform, Bosch Connect, to remotely engage with our teams – be it the fun moments of WFH or the leadership connects.

While going all digital has its advantages, being home alone from colleagues and work does take its toll too – the idea is to balance technology adoption with creative engagement approaches to maintain a sense of community and shared culture. They say ‘Necessity is the Mother of Invention’. I think this pandemic has framed a new adage ‘Crisis is the Mother of Invention’.



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Sriram TV, Head of HR, RBEI



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156 Votes)

Can't Say.. Situation is Like a Double

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Total Voters: 514

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