



Lock Down and I'm not just talking about companies but countries! During this period of turmoil and disruptions, many were caught off guard by how fast the spread of COVID-19, it seems that it went from 1<sup>st</sup> gear to 5<sup>th</sup> gear faster than a F1 race car.

As companies hunker down and employees get into the groove of working from homes as part of BCP plans, we hear very commonly used buzz words such as split teams, telecommuting, flexible work arrangements, staggered hours etc. taking center stage.

The question arises, will this become a norm in the global work place and if so, what will be the impact on work culture, will productivity suffer, how can I assess my employee performance etc.? Traditional issues raised but important no doubt!

Rummaging through all the interviews with HR experts and other thought leaders, it seems that all has agreed that this is the most opportune time to reinvent your workplace. Lots of predictions that indeed, there will be a shift in work culture as the traditional 8 to 9 hours work day with a 45mins commute (one-way), lunch break of 45mins might give way finally to a more 'unpressured' work-life balance? Replaced with a 45mins exercise in the morning instead of commuting from home to the workplace? A eat-when-you-are-hungry-only break instead of 'it's 1230 – let's go for lunch'? Better prioritisation of work as there are lesser interruptions in the workplace?

With telecommuting, it gives employees greater freedom over their work hours and even location. There's flexibility over their work hours and will definitely give true meaning to work-life balance as employees can better plan for the day's work output and see to their personal obligations such as caring for an ill family member, picking up kids from school etc. In 2010-2011, Professor Nicolas (Nick) Bloom, a Professor in the department of economics at the Graduate School of Business and who is also the Co-Director of the Productivity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship programme at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), and a fellow of the Centre for Economic Performance, and the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, conducted a research on telecommuting and the results:

1. Home working led to a 13% increase in productivity
2. Home workers reported higher work satisfaction
3. Attrition among the home workers dropped by 50% compared to the control group

(Source: <https://hbr.org/2014/01/to-raise-productivity-let-more-employees-work-from-home>)

Some of the possible reasons as to why I personally think the results were as such:

1. Lesser distractions as compared to an office space
2. Reduction of commuting time from home to office
3. Getting important things done first
4. Employee Empowerment
5. Greater access to a larger talent pool such as stay-home mums

However, prior to companies jumping onto the bandwagon of allowing telecommuting, it would also be good to know what you are getting into. Telecommuting requires employees to be self-motivated and it would be good to set up a 'home-office' – a comfortable location be it at home, in the library or even at your local coffee joint! Get into a routine with group meetings in the morning and set out the task at hand, build up momentum and muscle memory.

Secondly, investment in technology such as Zoom, Webex, Office 365 does not necessarily come cheap. Start small but dream Big – build your technology slowly. The free version of Zoom – comes with a 40mins free usage and I find this particularly useful as everyone seems to zoom into the task at hand. Having such technology as part of your telecommuting strategy also draws always the 'loneliness' of working alone.

Thirdly, develop a telecommuting policy that spells out the following:

1. Eligibility – Not all job functions and employees are eligible. Conduct an assessment on your employee's motivation to opt for telecommuting, the task at hand, employee's attitude.
2. Expectations – Set clear KPIs; Conduct during remote team meetings;
3. Equipment and Cybersecurity – Allow only company tested and approved platforms to be used with 2-factor access into your company's servers or files

I suppose that there are many pros and cons one could think of in the world of telecommuting, there will be subscribers and naysayers. Regardless, do keep safe and healthy during this period and I would like to give a special shout out to ALL HR Mangers, Directors, CHROs who have been taking on the additional role of being the company's enforcer, influencers, call-center operators etc as we battle COVID-19. A big Jia You from SHRI to all of you HR Warriors out there!

Yours Sincerely,

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**Latest update and advisory on COVID-19:**

<https://www.moh.gov.sg/covid-19>

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