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EMPOWERING TIMES



THINKING ALOUD
The new workplace:
when office comes home!
Jay

PODIUM
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WE RECOMMEND
Facebook - The Inside Story
Steven Levy

Dear Reader,

The onset of the pandemic last year witnessed companies scramble to strategize on workflows and continuity. Over the last couple of months, many of us have been privileged to work from the comfort of our homes. Soon, mixed responses to the whole idea of working from home or remote working cropped up. From the employees' point of view, work life balance, overtime hours, stress & fatigue, among others, were challenges that had to be overcome. Some employers insist that the 'human' element has lost its essence, despite technology that kept everyone connected.

With the vaccine drive gaining traction in India, companies are gradually planning to bring more workers back to the office. Organisations are reimagining & reinventing the post COVID workplace model to ensure that their employees are safe and happy. Some companies (Read: Tata Sky Broadband, Colliers India and 3M) are already planning to shift to the "third place" or a hybrid workspace model for their employees' well-being. Organisations are also checking into flexible co-working spaces to cut costs.

With the new normal defining itself more prominently, companies will have to devise a model that will strike a balance between those willing to return to work and those who have embraced remote work as their new normal.

ET this month looks at the '**The new workplace in the pandemic world**'.

On the **Podium**, **Anagha Wankar - HR Director at Cosma International** shares her thoughts on how to overcome the challenges of managing the human element during the pandemic and balancing work life.



In the **Thinking Aloud** segment, **Jay** elaborates on the evolution of the workplace, highlighting that companies will have to strike a balance between their needs and that of the employees. With the pandemic, the world stayed socially connected through various social media platforms; in the **We Recommend** segment, we review author **Steven Levy's** detailed account of **Facebook - The Inside Story** and what goes behind the scenes that makes this platform so powerful today.

In **Figures of Speech**, **Vikram's** smart toon really did 'work from home'!

Please also [Click Here](#) to check out our Special issue of ET, which is a collation of selected themes that were featured over the years highlighting the changing landscape of the business world. This special edition has been well received and can be [Downloaded Here](#) for easy reading and is a collector's item.

As always, we value your opinion, so do let us know how you liked this issue. To read our previous issues, do visit the Resources section on the website or simply [Click Here](#). You can also follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) & [LinkedIn](#) - where you can join our community to continue the dialogue with us!

THINKING ALOUD

The new workplace: when office comes home!

Jay

One of the unforeseen positive impacts of the pandemic has been that the concept of office has been redefined forever.

Telecommuting is not a new idea per se but ever since the '70s when it was first touted, the idea has not found too many backers as large corporations have resisted the idea of their employees working from home. Work happened at the office and home was where you had a personal life. In the first flush of technological change when the Blackberry and the Palm (remember them?) became the weapon of choice of senior managers (they carried it in a holster) and whipped it out every now and then to shoot messages, it marked them as important individuals who could not stay away from their job. They were the rare individuals who carried the burden of the office constantly with them much like a cloak of importance around them.

This seems a prehistoric construct now as the smartphone is today a ubiquitous tool in almost every hand and life seems incomplete without it. Consequently, for corporate managers, work became second nature and in Asian societies in particular the concept of work and life being separate was not acceptable to business firms. If the company had given you a cell phone it was because you were expected to respond to work exigencies when called upon to do so. Even then, there was distinction between office and home as you commuted from one location to the other.

The pandemic has compelled a change. With lockdowns becoming the norm in most countries across the world (particularly in the first wave of panic when cases mounted in Europe and USA and the virus reached India), virtually

overnight companies scrambled to transfer the workplace and asked employees not to travel to office. Instead, the most adaptable firms swiftly shifted work to employee residences. Those without business continuity plans were caught like a deer in a headlight and lurched into a major crisis. With every passing day, with the pandemic showing no signs of abatement, the need to be operating from homes became a necessity. Thus, we created a 'WFH' (work from home) world.

What was perhaps unexpected was the success of the WFH model – after the usual glitches initially. The success of WFH is a tribute to the technological advances at the workplace today and the rise of the non-manufacturing economy or service economy, as it is popularly called. After nearly 18 months the verdict is clear, WFH has been a successful change in corporations. Of course, WFH is not practical in every field. Manufacturing, for instance, is clearly not a feasible proposition as many hands with different skills are needed to collaborate and bring to life a product. Likewise in some service businesses requiring physical interface with customers.

With COVID in recession (though the threat of another wave cannot be written off), companies have begun calling employees back to the office. Only to find that a new challenge has come up: some employees are not excited about the idea of returning to the old world of physical office. The reluctance is palpable in technology firms where productivity has not dipped (in some cases it has improved) and the demand for talent has made employees picky as more job options are on the table.

Hence, the hybrid option has emerged. The contours of this option are still being worked out in many firms. Does this mean a few days at home and a few at office? Or, rotational time between team members so that some can work continuously from home for extended periods? Or, can the office be made optional for those who are not keen on the daily commute? Or, can the office hours be reduced and compensated from home? Well, the list is long as innovative experiments unfold.

Which also begs the question, are we seeing the end of the 'old office', a world familiar to those who joined the workforce in the last century before technology usurped many of the routine activities and enhanced productivity? Perhaps, the demise is over-hyped as we have not found all the answers to managerial challenges. Besides, the psychological challenges that many employees are facing with the never-ending workday in many cases, and the impossible constraints of working from small apartments in large cities which is the reality of many Indian homes,

there is an organizational dilemma of how to sustain productivity and spark innovation on a continuous basis when a manager must work with virtual teams. This is a live challenge for many managers schooled in an era where physical camaraderie and informality was the watchword for keeping a team juiced up.

It is interesting to note also that global firms like JP Morgan and others have also mandated a return to the workplace. Jamie Dimon (CEO of JP Morgan) faced criticism for his statement that WFH 'does not work for young people', while Google, Facebook & Twitter have spoken of reduction in compensation packages for those reluctant to come back to work into an office environment. Microsoft Chairman Satya Nadella has spoken of the long-term damage of WFH as it would counter the culture that has been carefully nurtured in the firm for a long time. Clearly, there is a strong narrative that seeks a return to the office after the initial excitement of getting things done in the world of Zoom, Teams, Webex and other tools of the virtual world.

Suffice it to say that the jury is still out on what the best solution is for the 21st century workplace. If there is one aspect that is clear, it is that we cannot look at the world only from a binary lens and have to be accommodative to the voice of the employee which is louder in corporations than ever before.

The pandemic has let the work genie out of the bottle, and it will not be going in try as we may. Let's get used to this and adapt our world of work to the new reality.

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Podium

Anagha Wankar

HR Director, India and Thailand at Cosma International



A consummate HR professional with more than 25 years of experience in the entire gamut of HR, Anagha Wankar has been associated with managing the human element at Fujitsu Consulting India Private Limited, KPIT Cummins Infosystems Limited & Tata Motors earlier in her career.

She has handled the HR generalist profile and her expertise lies in creating growth strategies for the organisations she works with. She has to her success formulating and implementing an innovative role based model, giving high potential employees a chance to move faster in their careers. It also helped the organisation be flexible in assigning roles to professionals without being bogged down by "designations".

A forthright individual who is always up for challenges, she is a trainer and has global certifications from renowned training academies in her portfolio. Her passion lies in helping create an organisation that ensures the continuous employability of its members by providing implementable strategies and tools to help create a professional motivated work environment.

ET: What are the challenges of managing the human element in organisations during the pandemic and how does one approach these challenges?

AW: The basic human challenges remain largely unchanged; what changed was the way we had to face these challenges. Employees want to know that we care for them as an organisation; that their well-being is a priority. The pandemic brought home this even more.

One big challenge has been changing the way work has been viewed. It has forced organisations to relook and rethink the traditional ways of working. The pandemic allowed for newer practices to be tried. Focus on safety was always a priority, especially in the manufacturing industry. However, the definition of safety has broadened to include personal safety beyond work.

Another big challenge was ensuring that the human connect remained intact during the pandemic. So far, the human connect was face to face, in person...the pandemic forced organisations to connect with employees in a virtual manner - without losing any of the warmth that was an integral part of the in person connect in pre-pandemic days.

ET: What are the various workplace models that have come up due to the pandemic?

AW: Till early last year, most organisations believed that having offices was mandatory. Work from home was a "foreign" concept; largely used by people who were in consulting jobs. But as the pandemic continued, we have realised that not only is work from home feasible for most roles, but also that people often work just as productively from home.

Now that vaccines are becoming available and social distancing restrictions are being relaxed, organisations need to go back to the drawing board to decide how they are going to structure themselves in a changed work reality. Do we bring all employees back to office, allow some employees to continue working from home or look at the present day reality to adopt new workplace models.

These decisions will have a significant impact. These implications touch not only on workplace designs, but also on how and where capital needs to be employed. It also requires organisations to decide how and what to factor in when designing employee benefit schemes as well as staffing decisions. Newer models of compensation will need to be designed to reflect the hybrid work practices.

Today there are diametrically opposing viewpoints on the workplace of the future. One school of thought is that since work from home is so successful, remote working is the new order of things. The other thought is that employees miss the face-to-face interactions that are so inherent in office working; so the pre-pandemic work structure will come roaring back. I personally think that pandemic has made organisations realise that a hybrid solution is workable.

ET: There is a lot of talk about the hybrid workplace. As a manufacturing firm with factories in different geographies, what are the challenges that need to be dealt with while choosing the right workplace model?

AW: One major mindset change that still needs to strengthen is that manufacturing industry cannot change in the way it works. That is the biggest fallacy. We will have to look at the factory differently. Look at each function in the manufacturing industry and question whether it needs to continue in the same way it always has.

While it is true that the manufacturing processes cannot have a work from home/remote working approach, the manufacturing industry does need to look at peripheral functions in the factory to ascertain how hybrid working can be designed. It is not feasible to have all office functions in a factory like Finance, HR, engineering, IT, etc. to work from home. It can, however, look for options where rotational work from home can be offered.

In a war for talent across functions, this element is going to be a determining factor. Talent will get more attracted to workplaces which offer greater flexibility. At the same time, one cannot forget that there is a fundamental difference in the working of a factory and an office/service industry. One set of norms cannot fit all. Organisations will have to relook at their way of working before deciding which model works best for them. For example, in Magna Cosma India, each factory must determine the roles that can avail a remote working benefit. As an organisation, Cosma has laid certain guidelines for each factory to determine these roles; once again ensuring that we do not fall into the trap of one size fits all.

ET: What is your advice to HR leaders in dealing with the blurring boundaries of work and home?

AW: HR leaders have their work cut out for them. While basics remain the same, the changed workplace means that we need to relook at all our systems and processes touching the employees. Leaders would need to design parameters of assessing performance, especially assessing it in a virtual workplace. They would need to define

what is performance and how will it be measured. Leaders will need to answer questions like how will success be seen in a virtual workplace?

Leaders would need to move away from assessments and evaluations that are based on interactions and will need to look at what has been delivered and what are the results.

Another aspect that HR leaders will need to consider is the work life balance. With employees expected to be "available" at all times for work, it is putting additional pressure on employees. Leaders will need to ensure that work timings are as defined as they used to be in pre-pandemic times.

The biggest shift will be to not allow the HR function to be de-humanised or remain at a transactional level because employees are now working remotely. Employee interactions would need to be intensified, irrespective of the platform being available. Focus on deliverables, focus on connect and focus on results would need to be stronger given that some of your workforce will always be physically absent from the workplace.

ET: Please tell us more about your firm and how you envisage the post-pandemic period for managing human resources.

AW: Magna started in Canada in the late 1950s when Frank Stronach, the Founder of Magna, won the first order from General Motors. Today, we make everything from seats to powertrains and are the only auto supplier to build complete vehicles. We are at the forefront of a new technological revolution in the automotive industry, and we are leading the way in all areas of future mobility, with a keen focus on electrification and autonomy.

Magna's unique Fair Enterprise culture, based on fairness and concern for people, recognizes that employee engagement and commitment is fundamental to our business success. The Magna Employee's Charter, Operational Principles and our Code of Conduct and Ethics are the building blocks for a work environment that encourages innovation, involvement, and teamwork. We all work as partners in the business to achieve world-class manufacturing and deliver the highest quality products and the latest innovations to our customers.

Cosma produces a complete range of lightweight steel & aluminium body-in-white solutions from small stampings up to fully assembled body-in-white modules. Cosma started in India in 2008 and operations commenced in 2013.

The flagship plant for Cosma India is in Pune. We have three other plants - one in Chennai, one in Sanand and the third in Thailand. Today, Cosma India boasts for more than 2,000 employees and supports all major Indian OEMs with products like SUV frames, Rear Twist Axles and sub frames, IP Beams, Bumpers and Body Stampings and Assemblies.

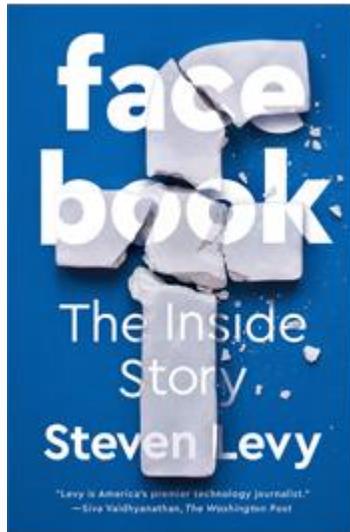
Cosma India has been a traditional manufacturing workplace till the pandemic set in. The pandemic made us to look at working in a different way – it made us aware that safety did not restrain itself to helmets, goggles and safety shoes. It forced us to be creative in the way we used the canteen facilities, and the transport facilities. It also made us realise that not every decision is based on pure cost or ROI. It allowed us to look at employee benefits in a new way, where we did need to take decisions that were employee focussed and not cost focussed.

The way Cosma is designed to run today is more flexible. As an organisation, we are aware of operational challenges that can crop up and we are in a ready-for-action mode.

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We Recommend

Facebook – The Inside Story Steven Levy



The year 2020 saw the world socially distancing from their loved ones, family & friends. But it was social media platforms like Facebook & Instagram that kept the world connected. The COVID imposed lockdown drove a record number of users to Facebook's products; statistics released by the company indicated that voice and video calling usage, views on Facebook and Instagram Live videos doubled and the amount of time on group video calling surged 1000%!

In recent news, Founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg spoke of the fact that he wants to reinvent the platform. Quoting the Founder, "In the coming years, I expect people will transition from seeing us primarily as a social media company to seeing us as a metaverse company...In many ways, the metaverse is the ultimate expression of social technology." If you are wondering what the term metaverse meant, it is actually a system where people move between virtual reality, augmented reality and even 2D devices, using realistic avatars!

If that left you awe struck or questioning as to how the future of social media will look like, then Steven Levy, author of Facebook – The Inside Story, might have the answer to your thoughts. In his in-depth, well-researched book, Levy has captured the very process & thoughts behind Zuckerberg's ambitions.

Right from Zuckerberg's college days (filled with endless pages of coding stemming from an "engineering mind-set") to inside meetings at the HQ, Steven Levy leaves no stone unturned. Initially, Mark Zuckerberg comes across

as an inexperienced leader, steering his business through unknown waters. But then what is business without risks? In his drive to connect the entire world, Levy highlights Zuckerberg's unfortunate decisions of delegating key policy issues to subordinates and pushing too quickly for explosive growth, which came at a cost.

Zuckerberg's foresight which led to the acquisition of virtual reality company Oculus, and messaging platform WhatsApp to name a few, has made the platform arguably a monopoly. By focusing on a metric called monthly active users, improving search engine optimization for Facebook results on Google and adding a new feature called "People You May Know", Facebook joined the billion user club. Levy does highlight some moments in Zuckerberg's life where he was vulnerable. Chief among them being his breakdown while in the middle of a funding deal in the early days.

The technology journalist in Steve Levy doesn't shy from asking controversial questions. Levy, in a very nonchalant manner, throws some light on how the company harvests user data, tracks personal behavior and other sensitive themes. He opens up Pandora's box of viral misinformation and hate speeches to digital colonialism and election interference. At one point, the book might seem like a diary of Zuckerberg's thoughts and can make readers distressed as the read meanders from one corporate crisis to the next, concerned with the company's public relations strategy rather than addressing the underlying problems of Facebook's services.

Even though the author has tried to break things down for the non-tech crowd, the book is dense with a lot of information and the reader may get lost in the sea of personalities that the author has presented. The book, although detailed in description from every point of view, keeps readers wondering whether they should log in and stay 'connected' especially because of the probable repercussions given the company's history on information privacy. However, losing the battle to our own thoughts, we would probably just connect back on 'FB'. That's how Facebook has enchanted us and will continue to do so. With Zuckerberg's idea to view everything as a system that can be broken down and improved step by step (much like computer programming), the Inside Story of Facebook is just a start.

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THROUGH THE LENS



Bird watcher, **Rupesh Balsara** spots the Ashy-throated Parrotbill which is native to China & Italy. In India, it is rarely found in Northeast India at the foothills, bamboo stands and scrubby edges. This species breeds from April to August, feeds on seeds and is considered as a Species of Least Concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

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