

# Merging tech with employee wellbeing

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There is no doubt that Covid-19 has been a catalyst for change. As social distancing becomes the new normal, entire workforces have needed to connect as well as collaborate remotely.



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Throughout this sudden metamorphosis, two organisational components have played a critical role – technology and people. On one side of the coin, businesses have needed to be digitally ready for business continuity, and simultaneously, the safety and prioritization of people has had to take precedence. Together, these elements have paved the way for the future of work to reach the world sooner than we imagined.

## **Technology is more than a platform – it's a connection**

Over the last decade, remote working has been hailed as the 'future of work'. Previous studies have shown that through technological enablement, remote work has not only boosted productivity but also had positive economic results.

According to a report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr), which was commissioned by Citrix, potential US economic gains from a flexible working culture could accrue to approximately \$2.36 trillion per annum. This would not be possible without technology advancements such as cloud computing, business apps, mobile tools, and video conferencing.

The good news is that the workforce of tomorrow will embrace the technological aspect. A report by Ernst & Young indicates that this year, millennials will make up 50% of the global workforce and 75% by 2025. As the internet generation, they bring with them a willingness to embrace technology as a driver of remote work.

While technology is a key enabler for the future of work, a factor that needs to be considered are the people behind the platform. One could possibly also take a lesson from the past. In 2009, a top technology firm ventured into a remote working experiment – where 40% of its 386,000 employees in 173 countries were working remotely.

By 2017, most of the employees returned to the workplace. The reason was simple – the social aspect. Findings within the 2019 State of Remote Work report produced by Buffer echo this experience. When asked about the downside of location flexibility, 49% of remote workers noted that their biggest struggle is wellness-related. More specifically, 22% can't unplug after work, 19% feel lonely and 8% can't stay motivated.

### **The secret behind remote working success: employee wellness**

With these struggles in mind, the key to remote working success could lie in the creation of an integrated wellness strategy.

The wellness strategy needs to take into consideration the necessity of personal connections, realistic work schedules and continuous skills development as a crucial motivator. Employers should also consider how they support the emotional and physical wellbeing of employees and make sure that wellness is top of mind for all employees and leaders, and potentially intertwined in the culture of the organisation.

Working from home means that the lines get blurred between work and home life and we have seen how interruptions or the potential for interruptions causes significant stress amongst employees. We need to create a safe environment for those employees who are not comfortable to switch on their cameras during online meetings so that employees know that it is alright that their kids or pets pop up on a screen.

According to the 2020 Mercer Talent Trends Study, only 29% of HR leaders have a health and well-being strategy in place. Skills development is an area where businesses need a core focus. The Mercer study goes on to say that just 34% of HR leaders are investing in workforce learning and reskilling as part of their strategy to prepare for the future of work, and 40% do not know what skills their workforce has today. The rise of remote work under lockdown could, therefore, be an opportunity for businesses to address these challenges proactively.

### **The watershed moment: Ensuring a sustainable way of working**

While no one can accurately predict when the Covid-19 pandemic will end, one thing is certain, the world of work will be changed forever. We are now more aware of the rising threat of superbugs. In fact, The World Health Organization has referenced a post-antibiotic era, in which common infections could once again impact society and seasonal lockdowns may occur regularly as winter rolls in. Remote working could be here to stay.

Perhaps the ideal balance lies somewhere between the best of both worlds, where employees can work remotely and, or within an office environment. Armed with an employee wellness strategy and technological innovation, the future of work will

be a new and exciting frontier, with people at its very centre.

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