

To the future of work from anywhere

Point of View

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Abstract



The evolution of work has undergone multifold change from the early pre industrialization era to the current age of information. Technology is an inevitable backbone in our lives. The global pandemic significantly disrupted the whole world. Not only had organizations to expedite their digital transformation, but their entire way of working and people engagement underwent a major shift. As per Owl Labs State of Remote Working Report 2020, 77% of respondents agree that after COVID-19, having the option to work from home would make them happier.

Given the amount of flexibility and autonomy with the new normal, we are surely not going back in time. Work from Anywhere, Hybrid Teams and Asynchronous mode of collaboration are going to be some of the key traits of digital organizations. TCS boldly announced its own secure borderless workspaces (SBWSTM) vision – that by 2025, only 25% of the workforce will work out of TCS facilities at any given time. Similarly, many other global leaders have echoed the need of hybrid remote and onsite working models. The Millennial and Gen Z working population have always been digitally native. However, are the Organizations and the massive multi-generational working population ready for this paradigm shift?

We believe Remote is the new Normal

Remote working does require considerable thought process and pivoting. Its real time implementation is much broader and deeper than what is perceived initially. A well-structured mechanism is needed with strong leadership support for a significant shift in the corporate culture. While Individuals need to embrace Remote working, Organizations require real commitment in enabling the guidelines, process, and norms. Tools, Technology, and Infrastructure are significant investments for empowering individuals and enabling organizations reap the benefits of remote working.

Through this Point of View article, we present the 3E model of Embrace-Enable-Empower to help organizations and individuals seamlessly master the art of work from anywhere.



We believe that the future shift is going to be a Hybrid model with flexibility of work from anywhere. This evolution of workplace and working style is not just a short-term change but a revolution to the new world.

Embrace

Every change is a new beginning. The first step is to embrace it with a fresh perspective. As an individual, our ability to unwire and rewire the brain is important. The state of resistance and frustration is counterproductive, and reduces energy levels. So, in order to ace Remote Working in a friction-less mechanism and sustain this work style, we need to continuously focus on 3 supporting pillars at a conscious and sub conscious level.

■ Well-Being Physical | Mental | Emotional

It is necessary to care of our overall wellbeing, so that we can contribute in an efficient way. Being physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy is going to significantly amplify productivity. With the global pandemic, Countrywide lockdown situations amplified the importance of emotional health especially with a rise in a feeling of isolation and loneliness during work from home. Meditation and mindfulness are great techniques to balance emotions and stay in the present moment. Ergonomics needs to be a key criterion while setting up the Home office. This encompasses the Sitting Posture, Light Intensity, Adjustable work desk and comfortable Headsets. Also, it is helpful to take hourly break from the work area for stretches and movement. Remote work has mental health and work-life balance benefits, too. 72% of all survey respondents agreed that the ability to work remotely would make them less stressed and 77% report that working remotely would make them better able to manage work-life balance. (Owl Labs 2020)

■ Purpose Outcome | Collaboration | Learning

How well do we engage with the work that we are doing? Do we really understand what are we trying to achieve and why? With no access to peer colleagues in the proximity and no water cooler conversations or coffee breaks with colleagues, it can be quite daunting to make meaningful progress especially without clarity on the purpose of work. Leaders have huge responsibility of communicating the purpose, vision, and goals in a location independent mechanism. How can the blockers be raised when we are not able to proceed further? Are there any real time synch up channels to connect to when feeling lost or just want to vent out? Is the learning mechanism adaptable in the new remote working model?

■ Work-life Harmony Flexibility | Decoupling | Social

One of the most common challenges of working remotely or from home is the environmental distraction. House chores, Child Schooling, Pets care etc. are major responsibilities. Moreover, with no clear separation or boundary between Work and Home, it is highly possible to get onto an “Always Online” mode. This requires some constructive thinking and prioritization of “Living holistically” over “Eat Work Sleep”. Marking availability hours in the Open calendar will create a transparent view among team members. Equally important is to disconnect and decouple from the work zone to live life in a harmonious way without compromising the social element or health

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factor. Finding work-life Harmony not only reduces stress, but it also prevents burnout and social isolation. It is about incorporating work in life that promotes happiness both at home and work.

Enable

While an individual might be ready to embrace, what is an equally an important question to ask is, whether our organization is ready to Enable the right ecosystem” to “Work from Anywhere”? Organizations need to do more than just lip service, marketing talks, press releases- they need to focus on and enable the right conditions and environment to facilitate the remote working. One of the bigger challenges an organization faces today is that external ecosystem, regulations, laws, and guidelines have still not evolved with the ‘New Normal’, and act as an impediment instead of an enabler to facilitate “Work From Anywhere”. Here are the 3 Key pillars defined to help organizations apply the right levers to Enable

■ People Talent | Performance | Joyfulness

In the “New Normal, it is important to ensure that Talent growth and competency building are not compromised or neglected. A host of alternative options, related to Talent management, have evolved during the last few months, be it online virtual training or virtual learning solutions. Virtualizing the Gamification techniques and remote coaching options have become the new normal. Organizations should ensure that at periodic intervals there are employee connect opportunities for re-energizing the continuous work environment and avoiding burnout. To ensure a balance of work and recreation, there are several activities that can be done by the organization to reduce stress and bring joyfulness at work. Examples of these activities include Fun@Work, #NomeetingDay, Family Connect@Home, Flex Shift (9:30 AM To 1:30 PM / 4:30 PM To 8:30 PM). These initiatives from organization will help in creating the right set of structures and help in bringing joy at workplace in these challenging times.

■ **Processes** Compliance | Security | Guidelines

Organizations need to reimagine their existing processes in view of the Remote way of working. While most of these processes were digitized in the pre Covid era, we still have few compliance processes as relics from the past, requiring physical presence of the approver. Lot of regular processes like Timesheet's approvals, leave approval, asset movement across geographies have been automated across organizations and are in line with the compliance requirements. This has reduced lot of time spent on micro-management and helped to increase the trust. IT security continues to be a major threat facing organizations, and in this remote world has become a bigger challenge to address. This compliance is being handled through security tools. Periodic guidelines or guard rails need to be established by organizations highlighting the risks in not following the compliance and security processes. Another key challenge faced by organizations is constant change of the guidelines and how quickly an organization can adapt to such dynamic changes.

■ **Policies** Regulations | Employee Benefits | Infrastructure

Regulations can either be External or Internal that can impact the Remote Way of Working. External Regulations are defined by Statutory bodies, government organizations and local cities / authorities. They need to be clearly followed by every organization without any timeline. In the case of Internal Regulations, as compared to external policies and laws, it's a little easier for organizations to align their internal policies with the remote way of working. This includes a complete reimagination of the policies to suit the new age Remote Worker. Organizations need to focus on Reimagining the employee benefits by providing innovative incentives like Internet allowances, designing a Home Office, Home workplace kit, camera enabled devices etc. Organizations also need to reimagine the way IT assets, physical infrastructure, physical desk, and cubicle redesign happens in the new normal. Lot of these changes

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are dependent on the country / region specific regulations that need to be factored in before reimagining them. Considering long term outlook, Organizations need to invest in a "Phy-Gital" (combination of Physical and Digital ways) enabled infrastructure that will aid in a hybrid way of working.

Empower

As personal and professional lives merge in the space of our homes, both organizations and individuals need to be empowered in new ways to work from anywhere. Socio-Technical solutions are needed to bridge the individual and organizational contexts. Individuals, Teams and Management have specific and intersecting needs and challenges that need to be considered.

■ **Individuals** Personalization | Productivity | Connectedness

Work from home may not be always suitable for all. Flexibility to choose the option to work from office, home or shared spaces would be important to reduce the stress on individuals when normalizing remote work. Staying focused and productive in a home environment that brings multiple demands for attention is challenging. Self-discipline both in being productive and in maintaining wellbeing becomes important. Apps that help focus and timebox, like Focus booster, Pomodoro, apps that help improve thinking and relieve stress like Brain.FM(music) and Headspace (Meditation and Mindfulness) are some that provide a new approach. Analytics tools that provide individuals insights into their own work style like Microsoft MyAnalytics that gives a weekly dashboard based on areas like focus, network(people), collaboration and well-being in terms of ability to disconnect can enable self-management. Greater sense of belonging has been reported to improve remote working experience – through access to communication tools like chats, videoconferencing, VPN and secure data management that removes multiple approvals and bureaucracy in information sharing can lower the feelings of isolation.

■ **Teams** Hybrid Workspace | Asynchrony | Transparency

For teams to function seamlessly on premise or off premise, access to productivity, collaboration and information sharing apps through hosted cloud services will need to be enabled. Examples include Office 365, SharePoint Online, Onedrive, Google Workspace. In addition, effective meetings in a hybrid workspace require conferencing capabilities coupled with apps and facilitation techniques that enable brainstorming and group work. Virtual workspace apps which mimic the office set-up and provide both visibility and personalization in interactions like Sococo could be ways to address the need for connectedness. Video conferencing options like Zoom, MS Teams, Webex coupled with Whiteboarding and brainstorming apps like Miro, Mural, Stormboard can be leveraged, complimented by facilitation techniques like liberating structures, Open Space Technology that enable inclusion and engagement. Communicating across the team and different time zones or flexible working hours requires asynchronous communication channels like MS Teams, Slack, and threaded messages. Transparency is key in distributed work environments, enabling visualizing the work and self-organizing around the work to reduce follow-ups and status checks. Digital tools that empower teams to see the workflow and manage work like MS Planner, Trello, JIRA, Azure DevOps are a few examples of solutions to meet this need.

■ **Management** Communication | Engagement | Impact

Without visual cues, people in managerial roles find it difficult to gauge engagement levels, communication and working styles of teams. Nascent tools like Kona and Elin, AI powered Slack bots could help analyze how individuals communicate over Slack, Zoom, and provide insights to help leaders and managers be better communicators, gauge engagement levels and address emotional and softer needs. It also helps know personality traits and enable equal focus and opportunities to vocal (e.g., extroverts) and not so vocal (e.g., introverts) people. In a hybrid work context removing the bias toward team members with whom in-person interactions have been more than the remote working team members is a key socio-psychological factor. Investing in building facilitation skills and learning techniques to engage across virtual and physical spaces will be useful in ensuring engagement and avoiding biases. A shift in perspective is required in managing performance from presentism, visually gauged by time spent heads down at work, to outcome focused delivery with reportable impact. This will require visual work management tools and clearly articulating purpose and expectations and enabling autonomy, mastery and collaboration.

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A New Way Forward

The global pandemic made us shift to a new way of working and living on an unimaginable massive scale. However, only organizations that have approached this shift in a well thought structured manner will find it sustainable in the long run. The employee workforce is powerful in this digital world, and it is necessary to incorporate their voice and feedback to tweak and implement systemic improvements. To address sustainability, we look at the both the dimensions.

■ Is this Sustainable for Myself? Persistence | Reflection | Happiness

Our working patterns have been reinforced over years and it will take some time to rewire them completely. It may be useful to continuously reflect on how we are adapting to the new normal. Is it helping me to stay engaged and well connected? Are we getting the timely communications and mentoring as the pre-COVID 19 world? Does it create a sense a balance and growth?

■ Is this Sustainable for the Organization? Innovation | Perseverance | Value

Is the organization continuing to innovate and generate more value? Have they created mechanisms to continuously capture employee's feedback, learn and adapt from that?

We believe that the future shift is going to be a Hybrid model with flexibility of work from anywhere. This evolution of workplace and working style is not just a short-term change but a revolution to the new world. The 3E model of Embrace-Enable-Empower provides an overall approach to step forward to the new paradigm shift. The new age working population holds power and they need a healthy environment to thrive and succeed.

The 3E model of Embrace-Enable-Empower provides an overall approach to step forward to the new paradigm shift. The new digital age working group holds power and they need an environment to thrive and succeed. We believe, together we can leap forward "To the future of Work from Anywhere" with infinite possibilities and abundant opportunities.

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Richard is the Global Managing Partner for Enterprise Agility for TCS, focusing on improving the effectiveness and responsiveness of IT and Business services for TCS customers, transforming Operating Models and optimising the value of People, Processes, Products (tools) and Partners.

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Vanishri has been with the Tata group for over 25 years, with 18+ years in IT spanning roles from delivery to leadership. A management consultant at heart, she has adapted her business background to IT and led large strategic programs, managed C-level stakeholders to drive sales and delivery of consulting services. She has worked in multiple geographies providing a strong global view on cultural and market nuances. She is currently focused on driving Enterprise Agility sales and delivery across IEMA, APAC and ANZ, while supporting global initiatives aimed at consolidating and expanding services globally.

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Ashutosh has an overall 24+ years of experience in Consulting & transformation engagements. During his tenure in the software industry, he has coached and mentored teams to transform into an Agile Way of Working. His areas of interest include writing articles on Agile practices, designing gamification tools for coaching, developing servant leadership skills and delivery of consulting services. He is an ardent propagator of Psychological Safety culture in teams, and has been an evangelist spearheading Agile practices across diverse domain & geographical entities.

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Lisa Joseph - Agile Coach for Enterprise Agility at TCS. Lisa has over 20 years of experience in the industry. Her core expertise has been in application of Lean and Agile principles in the context of global IT transformation programs. Over her career, Lisa has played multiple roles as trainer, facilitator, manager and coach and helped in creating high-performing teams and business units that consistently deliver value. She is a firm believer in Brain Based Learning and Organizational Behaviour Management and their potential for change in people's mindset. Her passion is to create learning organizations.

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