Business Communication Post Corona: Strategies for the Hybrid Workplace

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It goes without saying that the recent pandemic has had an unparalleled impact on every aspect of our lives. The economy, culture, countless industries, medical care, work, and even home dynamics have been transformed by the spread of this virus, and they remain noticeably altered as we enter the "new normal." Even as the numbers of new cases decline in what we now consider the post-COVID-19 era, remnants of this paradigm shift are visible—many people still prefer to wear masks in public, avoid crowded places, and do their shopping online. These trends are expected to continue indefinitely, even as face-to-face interactions resume. As Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* stated, "There is the world B.C. (Before Corona) and the world A.C. (After Corona)." (Friedman, 2020).

Out of the countless venues that have been transformed by the pandemic, the workplace in particular has seen one of the most accelerated rates of change. It is for this reason that BCRP published a special issue on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) companies in January of last year. That issue covered case studies of these companies in an effort to examine different approaches to the new normal. These companies all utilized innovative platform strategies in their adaptation process, but each did so in a unique way. Uracle, with their message

integration system (Jung, Kim, & Shin, 2022); Madras Check, with their coworking systems (Cho & Lee, 2022); LG CNS, with their AI-OCR software (Lee, Lim, & Chung, 2022); and IBM, with their hyper-automation (Bu, Jeong, & Koh, 2022). All of these companies are examples of the innovations that are taking place in the fields of message integration, coworking systems, and process automation.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Communication Tools in Business

Though the shift in the workplace environment was felt by millions around the world, exactly what aspect in the environment it affected was less obvious, at least initially. According to the Management, Accounting, Office Human Resources Development Committee, when searching "COVID-19" and "business" on Google, the most related word was "communication" (Industrial Skills Council, 2021). Communication is obviously important in the business world, and it has undergone profound changes during the pandemic. In an effort to "social distance" and follow "non-face-to-face" protocol, many employees were allowed to and even encouraged to work from home. Telecommuting isn't a novel concept, but it has always been difficult to systematize due to work culture and concerns regarding work efficiency. The pandemic, of course, changed all that. With the need for employees to work remotely, companies began to reorganize their ICT infrastructure reorganization in full force. According to a recent survey, 52% of companies currently utilizing a telecommuting system introduced this system as a result of the COVID-19 crisis (Kim, 2022).

This sudden shift would have been impossible without tech-

nology. While many companies were already in the process of applying big data and digitalizing their systems even before the pandemic came onto the scene, the spread of the virus transformed these gradual steps into a more digital era into head-first leaps. Companies across the board began to increase their investments in technology and digital tools, such as video conferencing software and instant messaging platforms (Tudor, 2022). Video conferencing services saw the most noticeable growth in adoption and application, with the main characters —Zoom, Webex, Hangouts Meet, and Teams—now part of our business lexicon. Recently, Matthews-El and Watts (2023) also recommended the five best video conferencing services as Zoom, Google Meet, TeamViewer Meeting, Zoho Meeting, and CyberLink U Meeting.

Video conferencing communication services can usually be classified into three types according to their purpose—a presentation type, in which the host is able to deliver materials and invite guests to collaborate on them; a team play type for online collaborative work with team members; and a specialized social service type, which allows for the use of avatars, AR makeup, and in-app games. The presentation type and team play type are characterized by the useful work functions they offer, such as white board, screen sharing, attendance check, and file transfers.

Zoom, of course, has emerged as the most popular video conferencing service out of the competition due to its intuitive interface. Zoom allows for simple video conferencing with the click of a link and without the hassle of signing up for membership (Zoom, 2022). It has been reported that the number of Zoom daily meeting participants has increased 1,900% between December 2019 and May 2020, reaching nearly 300 million users worldwide as of 2022 (Ariella, 2022).

Other video conferencing services now offer unique features in order to challenge Zoom's position in the market. Cisco's Webex is a video conferencing service that can be accessed by up to 1,000 people simultaneously (Webex Help Center, 2022), and Microsoft's Teams enables efficient collaboration. Google Hangouts Meet allows people to join meetings directly using just their Gmail account and meeting code (Google Meet Help, 2022). In addition, TeamViewer Meeting, Zoho Meeting, CyberLink U Meeting are best for collaborative meetings, growing team, and image-conscious professionals, respectively (Matthews-El & Watts, 2023).

Issues and Considerations in the Post-Pandemic Era

In spite of the exciting possibilities these new services can offer, the transition away from face-to-face communication has been the cause of new problems that can not be addressed with solutions of the past. Cases of miscommunication and misunderstandings that occur in non-face-to-face meetings, employee burnout, and work stagnation have become more common, ultimately leading to a decrease in organizational productivity and employee satisfaction (Sankar, 2020). In an environment in which offline and online work environments are required to coexist, the in-office communication that was once the norm is now a thing of the past, presenting a challenge to organizational culture and employee solidarity.

A paradigm shift is thus needed in the way we communicate in organizations if digital work taking place across various forms of communication is to be successful. Communication problems can become more complex when telecommuting is performed sporadically and offline and online work environments coexist. Companies should thus resolve expected problems early on through proper coordination and intervention and strive to clarify their policies on online-offline work and communication.

For instance, in order to encourage communication among employees even when online, an environment in which they can share about their daily lives and engage in small talk might narrow the psychological distance between team members. The introduction of a remote team-building program, such as "tea time," in which employees can feel connected to their colleagues in spite of their remote location, can strengthen cooperation within the organization. Programs such as small group conversations and mentoring programs would provide opportunities for emotional connections with their peers that would boost employee morale.

The pandemic has disrupted traditional forms of intra-communication and has forced organizations to find new ways to support effective communication and collaboration among employees. A natural consequence of this transition is that offline communication has become less frequent, creating new challenges but also new opportunities for businesses. The future direction of business communication after the pandemic will be shaped by the continued adoption of digital technologies, with a focus on improving efficiency, accessibility, and collaboration.

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