

ICC India & UNICEF Webinar

'BUSINESS CONTINUITY IN DISRUPTIVE TIMES: FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKPLACES'

Thursday, 25 June 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The unprecedented disruption and pace of change around the globe caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in organisations reinventing processes and policies. Agility, creativity and sensitivity to work, workforce and workplace have become key to adapting successfully to this highly fluid situation.

In these uncertain times for systems to be effective, organisations need to focus on the employee well-being. In addition to having to digitalize workplaces immediately, organizations are having to juggle between maintaining key values, managing legalities and deadlines. For the employees, work from home presents its own set of challenges such as family, personal and work demands.

Last month ICC India and UNICEF hosted a webinar to discuss the complexities of remote working and innovative solutions to contend with emerging challenges and how organisations must reinvent

processes, policies and solutions that might help companies become agile, and creative. The webinar discussed ways in which organisations can function efficiently and also provide a healthy work environment to its employees by revisiting policies related to working hours, day-off, employee well-being and family needs among others.

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

The COVID – 19 pandemic is unprecedented on almost all parameters i.e. size, magnitude, speed, scale, coverage and global impact. And so, it is quite natural that this is affecting the business continuity dynamics in a way nothing has happened before. The COVID-19 pandemic has also upended the lives of families as health systems buckle, borders close, and schools and businesses shutter, contributing to strains on employees, customers and their children.

Today, the employees, especially the frontline, are fearing to go out or return to their

offices or manufacturing units. They are not just concerned about their own safety but of their family as well. Also, their families need to be assured, felt safe and secure so that they can comfortably let them go for work. Thus, traditional HR practices that have been a product of years of attempt to create an intersection - a harmony between social and cultural needs of the workers with organizational demands are insufficient for these times. They need to be recalibrated to include the realities of this dynamic and challenging situation.

Corona crisis has exposed our societal fault lines and their impact on businesses more than ever before - foremost are the patriarchal nature of system and mental health. There has been a rise in fear, uncertainty and anxiety among general population towards mental health. The conversation around psychological well-being has been largely muted. However, now is the time for companies to invest in employee's overall wellbeing including mental health which is a real need of the hour.

Companies need to arrange hotlines and counselling facilities for their employees.

The most vulnerable need to be protected in this crisis as pay-cuts and layoffs may further lead to exploitation and/or consequently impact early childhood development and education, especially among children. As per an estimate by UNICEF, close to 290 Million children and adolescent in India have got impacted due to the school closures. Children who are the most vulnerable in this situation, not because of fear of illness, but more-so because of how the lockdown has shaken up their reality i.e. fear, uncertainty and perceived parent neglect, can have severe long-term consequences.

Businesses and companies have enormous sway today in protecting their employees and their respective families by providing them time, information, services and resources, especially in the context of COVID-19. All these challenges to the working environment require reassessment of policies and family friendly & employee sensitive approaches greater than ever before because, work is home and home is work.

Many businesses have now taken to digitalisation which is now turning out to be a must for companies to survive as not only work but customers have also gone online. However,

digitalisation is not the only thing that companies need to do, and they must also ensure employees' well-being amid these dire times. In these uncertain times for businesses to be effective, organisations need to focus on the employee well-being. To help employees amid the pandemic, the organisations must have empathetic leadership, and ensure a healthy work environment. Further, family friendly policies are also important to building a new future of work.

Thankfully, many organisations, particularly their top leadership, have started embracing the new reality and are thinking in this line while providing for better insurance policies, sufficient medical coverage, safe and secure workplace environment for their employees. Companies are taking cognisance of the evolving working scenario in the light of COVID-19 pandemic and are shifting from basic infrastructure policies to people oriented and also creating the efficient system to support its implementation. The progressive organisations have already recalibrated their existing HR policies to better suit the requirements of their employees and the remaining are in the process.

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