



# Work-From-Home (WFH) in the Insurance Industry: Adapting to the New- Normal

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**NATIONAL  
INSURANCE  
ACADEMY**



**Building a better  
working world**



A Study by  
*National Insurance Academy, India*  
*and EY, India*

Note: The WFH practices adopted by various organizations, as quoted in this study were shared by the officials of the respective organizations during interviews taken by the NIA team. We have mentioned names of the respective officials in the acknowledgement section.

# From the Director's desk



The COVID-19 Pandemic has overnight disrupted the way businesses function. The lockdown enforced in March 2020 compelled a majority of employees in the insurance industry to Work-From-Home (WFH). This study explores how insurance companies have managed to provide customer service in these challenging times and how digital infrastructure has helped the smooth transitioning from office-to-home. The study also explores employees' perceptions about the change, and its impact on the future workplace scenario. Most importantly, the study explores how insurance companies can capitalize from lessons learnt during these times to enhance organizational performance and effectiveness.

My colleagues at the NIA, Dr Sushama Chaudhari, Head-HRM & OB, Ms Ruchika Yadav, Research Associate conducted this qualitative study on "Work from Home (WFH) in Insurance Industry: Adapting to New Normal". They partnered with the team of Ernst & Young India, Mr Sunmeet Chahal - Partner People Advisory Services, Ms Neetisha Arya and Ms Nupur Dsouza - Managers E&Y to present a framework on adapting to the New Normal in this report.

I am happy to present the report to you, and, I hope you find it useful.

G Srinivasan  
**Director**  
National Insurance Academy, Pune (India)



# Acknowledgements

We profusely thank Mr. Mukesh Gupta, Managing Director, LIC of India; Mr SK Mehra, MD & CEO, Health Insurance TPA of India; Mr. M Muraleedharan, Head of Technology, Se2 India; Ms. Amrit Jadka Arora, Head HR, GoDigit General Insurance (GoDigit); Mr. Saptarshi Bhattacharya, Head-HR Shared Services, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Co Ltd; Mr. Vaideswaran, DGM, New India Assurance Co Ltd; Mr. Arun Sharma Head-Customer Experience Management (CEM), HDFC ERGO General Insurance; and Mr. Sandeep Mankad, Head-New Business Initiative, SBI General Insurance Co. Ltd. for their valuable inputs and insights on the initiatives taken by these respected personalities with regard to the various aspects of "WFH - the New-Normal".

We also thank the other senior and junior executives from Life Insurance, General Insurance, Standalone Health Companies and Insurance Brokers who participated in the candid conversations about their experiences related to WFH during March to May 2020. We are thankful to Mr. G Srinivasan, Director National Insurance Academy for constant support and encouragement and the EY team for providing functional insights to chart the course for the future.



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# The study

## Setting the context

The COVID-19 pandemic has suddenly crippled normal life and how individuals and institutions function in the entire nation. A “lockdown” was enforced in March 2020 to restrict the transmission of the Corona Virus. The lockdown led to a majority of employees across sectors having to **Work-From-Home (WFH)**, and the insurance industry was no exception. In these times of crisis, customers have a greater need for seamless insurance services, such as life insurance, health insurance, or continuation of risk covers for other types of insurance. The insurance industry is caught between two conflicting needs. On one side, there is a need for restricted movement and limited manpower in offices. On the other side, there is a greater urgency and need of providing insurance and relief to customers at this time. In order to cope with this conflicting situation, a majority of insurance organizations initiated WFH for their employees.

There are discussions taking place globally and in India regarding the merits and demerits of WFH. The CEO of Twitter, Jack Dorsey, has declared

that he is ‘ok even if 100% of his employees work from home’<sup>1</sup>. Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook has asserted that WFH is likely to continue in the future, and that he is planning for the remote-work scenario to become the new-normal for work in the coming years<sup>2</sup>. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has announced that WFH is likely to continue, and is seriously considering the possibility of only 25% of its employees working from its offices by 2025<sup>3</sup>. However, Microsoft’s CEO, Satya Nadella, has cautioned that making remote work permanent could have negative consequences, because it will limit social interaction and pose serious mental health problems for workers<sup>4</sup>. He believes that virtual video calls cannot replace in-person meetings. Mr G Radhakrishnan, Chairman and Managing Director of United India Insurance Co. Ltd. stated during a recent webinar ‘the post-COVID world will not be the same as we knew it’<sup>5</sup>. Mr Tapan Singhel, CEO of Bajaj Allianz General Insurance expressed his concerns about mental health of employees if WFH continues

for a long time. He stated it during a webinar organized by NIA, Pune, called Customer Service in COVID Era: A New Paradigm<sup>6</sup>. Mr Nandan Nilekani, Co-Founder and Non-Executive Chairman of Infosys said that ‘eventually two-third of employees might work in the office with one-third working from home’ because the gossips and social interactions lead to creative ideas<sup>7</sup>.

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to study how various insurance companies - large/small and public/private - are coping with the situation and facilitating an uninterrupted service delivery system in spite of working from home after almost three months.

In order to study the pros and cons of the situation, we telephonically interviewed 27 executives working in Indian insurance industry, representing all levels, functions, and genders to understand how they faced the crisis so far and their experiences regarding WFH. We also discussed challenges faced, lessons learnt, and innovative approaches which they adopted to facilitate the new normal.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2020/05/13/twitter-ceo-jack-dorsey-tells-employees-they-can-work-from-home-forever-before-you-celebrate-theres-a-catch/#7233a5e12e91>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.theverge.com/2020/5/21/21265780/facebook-remote-work-mark-zuckerberg-interview-wfh>

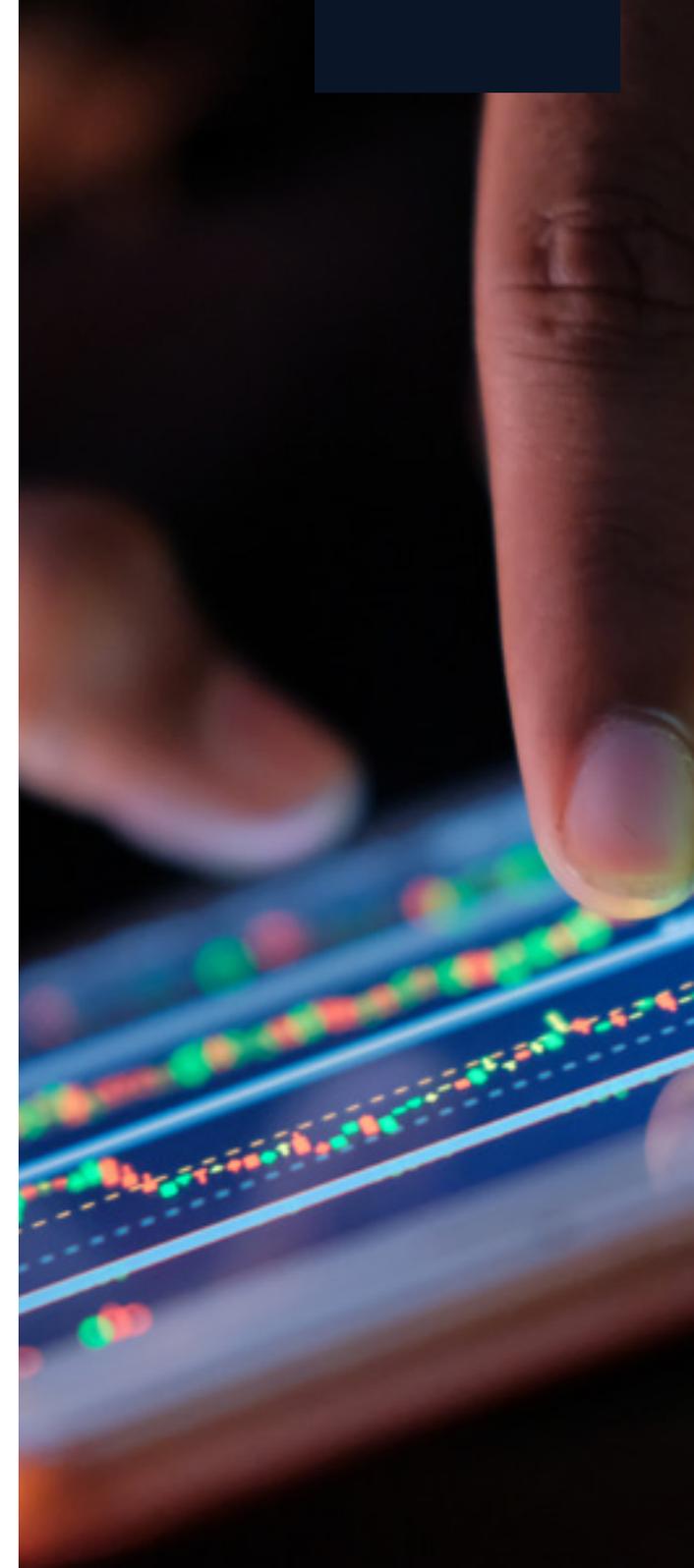
<sup>3</sup><https://www.businesstoday.in/current/corporate/post-coronavirus-75-percent-of-3-5-lakh-tcs-employees-permanently-work-from-home-up-from-20-percent/story/401981.html>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/technology/news/story/permanent-work-from-home-can-be-damaging-for-mental-health-of-employees-says-satya-nadella-1679313-2020-05-18>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jc6iCmU5LwU&t=3s>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jc6iCmU5LwU&t=3s>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.timesnownews.com/business-economy/economy/article/nandan-nilekani-on-why-people-should-work-from-office-too/600139>



## Get the ball rolling: ensuring digital infrastructure for WFH

While all insurance companies have business continuity plans, they have never been designed or tested for a situation like COVID-19 where almost all employees had to be cut off from their offices overnight. The fact that the timing of the event was during the end of the financial year, compounded the problem because insurers normally witness heightened business activities, closing of accounts, disbursement of commissions, and payment of premiums during this period. Regulators provided a major concession to customers for delay in payment of premiums. While the move helped insurers too, they had to carry out other regular activities such as sending renewal notices, change in nomination, and other services like change in payment mode etc. without a stop. The major challenge for insurance companies was the availability of required digital infrastructure at employees' homes, such as internet connectivity and virtual meeting tools, to ensure business continuity. Simultaneously, they also had to ensure, absolute data security and productivity, and ensure the comfort of employees who had to work with digital tools for long hours.

Irrespective of the extent of digitalization, every company has taken initiatives to provide digital infrastructure to facilitate WFH. Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC),

a mammoth organization with a large branch network, has rendered services to more than 30 crore policy holders and coordinated with more than 10 lac Agents during this period. LIC has not only managed to disburse commissions to its agents as per schedule through a centralized mechanism, it also facilitated the underwriting of policies remotely through agents. Interestingly, the investment department was also able to work remotely, and, their dealers started transacting from home as per SEBI guidelines. As a policy, LIC has been providing laptops to its select cadre of employees to facilitate WFH.

Dr S Prakash, Managing Director of Star Health and Allied Insurance in a Webinar opined that WFH is likely to continue for a few more months and his company has made sure that health claims and other operations run smoothly during this time<sup>8</sup>.

Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company (BAGIC) has allowed some employees to take home their desktops and laptops in order to ensure uninterrupted customer service. BAGIC also reimbursed the charges incurred for data card acquisition to its employees who were operating from small towns and could not get WiFi connections.

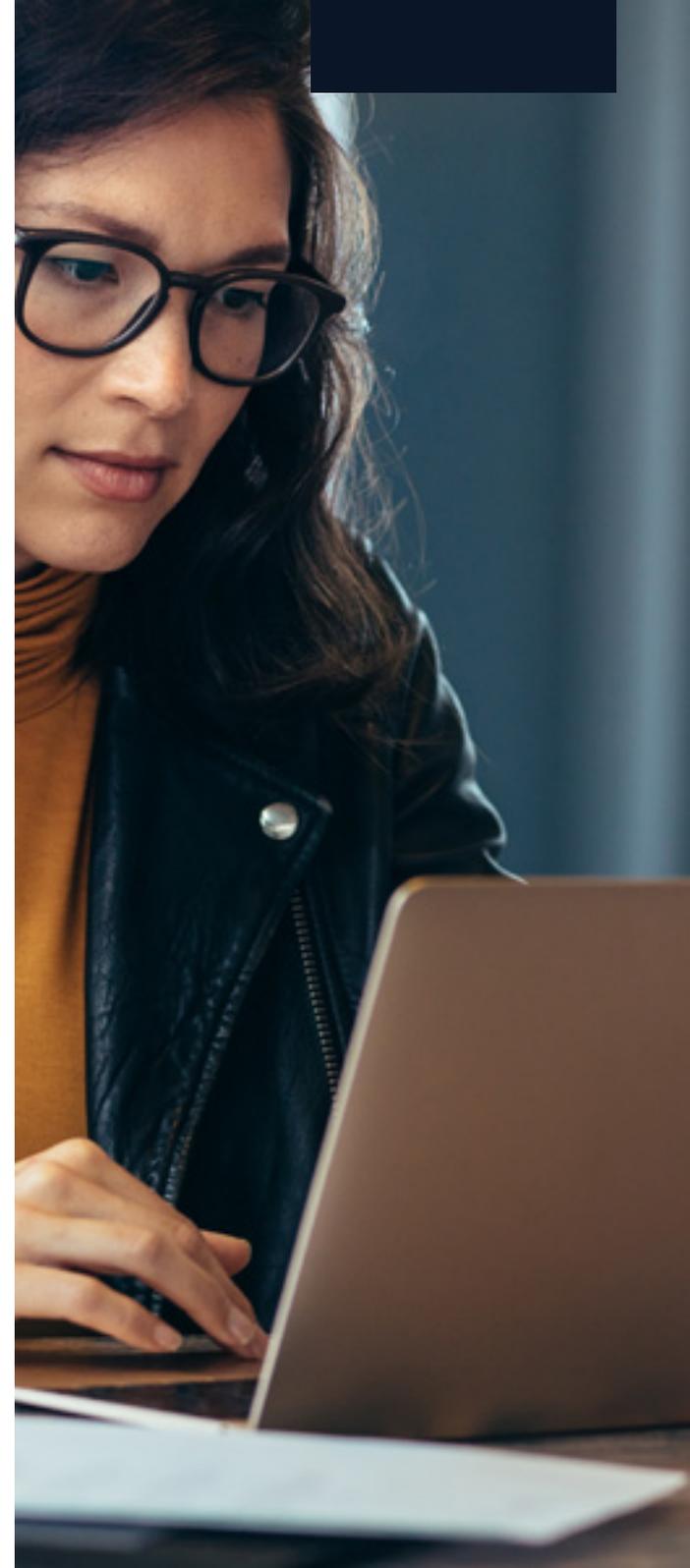
GoDigit ensured that every single employee working from home was

provided with a laptop or equipped with a desktop along with a WiFi connection and a dongle to stay connected. All operations are being managed by remote-desk technology and their dedicated cloud computing capacity. Incidentally, GoDigit is the only insurance company which is completely on the cloud.

Employees of New India Assurance Co Ltd, apart from using laptops/desktops at home, in some cases, as per business priority, have been given access to their office desktops from their homes. For many of its personnel in the head office, the facility has proved to be extremely beneficial to continue operations during the strict lockdown situation.

Se2 India, an Insuretech company, has allowed its employees to work from home using company laptops besides their personal computers. The company had hired additional laptops before the lockdown was announced to support its ongoing business service delivery. Digital infrastructure in the organization, such as virtual desktops and security mechanisms for remote working, enabled a seamless switchover to the new work norm.

HDFC ERGO used its digital infrastructure to divert calls from customers to individual employee's mobile numbers. That way they could provide services to each and



<sup>8</sup>[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWdJTmY\\_20E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWdJTmY_20E)

every customer trying to reach the company during lockdown even when 100% employees were working from home. The company also ensured the availability of laptops and internet connectivity within 3 to 4 days of lockdown 1.0 to its employees. HDFC ERGO's website is a Sales and Service Website, and customers reaching out to employees for various services and queries were educated to use the company website to fullest. As and when the customers contacted the company for any kind of service or complaint, other relevant features were also explained apart from addressing their query. As a result, digital transactions have increased manifold. The company was also able to accomplish speedy disposal of queries and reported higher levels of customer satisfaction.

Health Insurance TPA of India put a business continuity plan one week before the lockdown 1.0 and made sure that health insurance claims could be settled by any branch for any customer throughout India with the help of technology.

Quoting a respondent from a public sector general insurer about his experience of WFH:

“

Productivity has increased despite the hindrances. In fact, we have realized that we are able to do the same amount of work with less staff. (As of now, only 3 people can work on VPN in the office. If more people use it, there are connectivity issues.) Renewal is not an issue since most customers prefer going to their current branch for renewal. So there is business growth also as we are able to maintain the base with renewals plus some fresh business which we are getting through mails.

Another officer said:

Work from home is a very big possibility for our organization. We have been using VPN and doing all approvals on e-mails. We coordinate through video calls. Very few people or departments, like accounts department, may visit the office as per need once in a week or so. Everything else can be done virtually online with the help of e-mails and video conferencing.

”

All executives we interviewed mentioned that they extensively use 'virtual meeting tools' like Microsoft Teams, Cisco WebEx, and Zoom. Their respective companies have made sure that employees are appropriately oriented and well trained to use these tools. Se2 India has made sure that all its employees are comfortable and adept at using various ancillary tools available in the organization, such as WebEx, Skype, and Microsoft Teams. It has scheduled regular 15-minute meetings to check business continuity in services and has ensured ease of access to the infrastructure, tools and connectivity for employees.

The other major issues apart from the availability of digital infrastructure and connectivity at employees' homes are fear, anxiety, and confusion which might have arisen due to the unprecedented situation presented by the pandemic. The companies adopted WFH effects to continue the business activity as well as address the above mentioned concerns experienced by its employees. However, WFH is not only about the provisioning of adequate digital infrastructure at home, but also about feeling comfortable, ability to work in the new environment, and committing oneself to continuous office work in spite of fear of contagion.

## Impact on employee outreach and people processes

GoDigit has taken a number of initiatives to make sure that pace of work in the organization continues smoothly. They address knowledge gaps of employees through product trainings which employees can access from home. They have an online induction programme for those who joined the company since the lockdown was declared. Their HR team contacts the employees on regular basis, arranges e-meetings (on video) and keeps track of their work. GoDigit also has an online employee engagement programme called 'virtual happy hours' to boost staff morale and to reinforce interactions within and among teams. These programmes, include activities over a video call, such as having a group chat or playing games. The HR team also takes the initiative to call every employee to have a one-to-one interaction to know about physical and mental well-being of employees.

BAGIC makes sure that it contacts every employee to enquire about their wellbeing. Additionally, BAGIC also connected with Alumni and and wished them well. BAGIC has established a dedicated call center and has appointed a doctor on 24/7 call to attend to employees' medical emergencies or answer queries. The company has also developed a COVID-19 database to keep track of any infections among employees, their



families, or friends. They have also created a database on how many of their employees are staying in 'RED/ Orange/ Green/Containment Zones'. In addition, they keep track of district-level announcements related to the lockdown, including relaxations, so that they may issue prompt advisories about the opening of offices and travel arrangements.

Many organizations have started WhatsApp groups to help employees seeking medical or any other assistance.

Some companies have made sure that they do not postpone anything of a routine nature because of the lockdown, be it the training schedules or appraisal process or releasing increments or giving of bonus or awarding of winners, or granting promotions, because they strongly believe that everything should go on as per the timeline.

The top managements of organizations have realized that positive and proactive communication with employees through virtual meeting tools or social media is extremely essential to ensure that they maintain a high morale in this difficult time.

Top management officials of Health Insurance TPA of India connect with employees working from home on a regular basis to ensure their wellbeing and address issues which they raise.

## Perceived benefits of Working From Home

Based on the discussions, officials and respondents outlined benefits of WFH like:

### 1 Productivity

LIC of India, as per the government's guidelines issued during the lockdown, had 85% of its branch offices open and functioning. LIC agents were equipped with digital portals to underwrite and issue e-policies within the prescribed guidelines. LIC has ensured that customers can pay premiums through any suitable digital payment mode. They have successfully managed their data centers, core systems and portal systems remotely.

Life and general insurers have ensured that customer service functions, such as renewals, underwriting and claims disposal are not hampered in any way, and, delays, if any, are minimized. Only few employees could work from the office as per government guidelines, which helped in coordinating and attending to business priorities.

*One of the executives working in a private general insurance organization said:*

“

Earlier we never delivered or deployed anything on Friday because after that there are 2 days off. Now since we are working from home we can deliver even on Saturdays and Sundays. Every day is a weekday now.

Many respondents spoke about productivity, efficiency and benefits of WFH. Some of the responses are reproduced verbatim below:

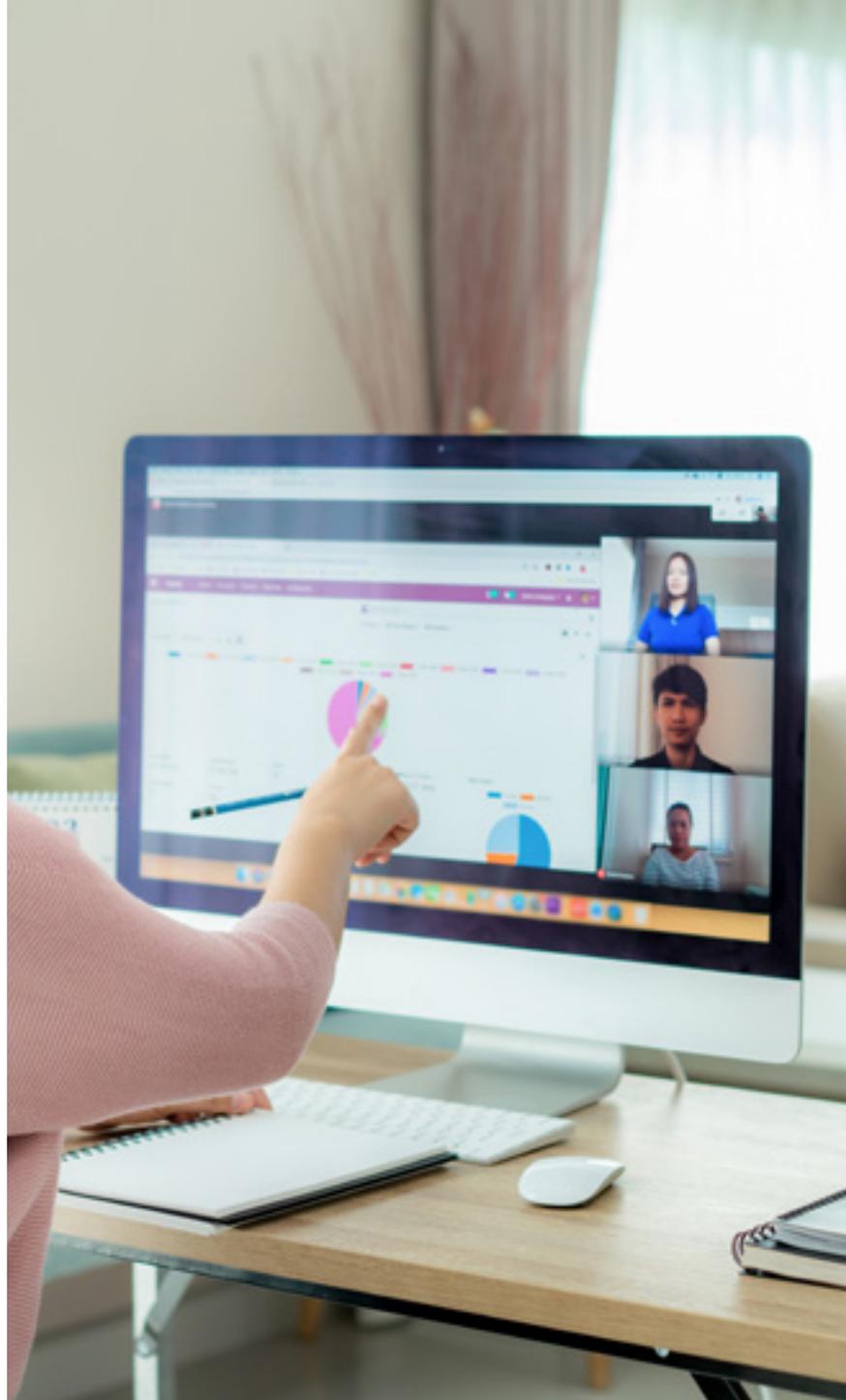
- ▶ Productivity has increased by more than 100%. Whenever the year-end activities get over, the reinsurance configuration needs to be completed in our system for the next financial year. Earlier we used to do it in 5 days for each line of business. But during this lockdown period we have completed it in just one single day.
  - ▶ Work from home provides more productivity and better supervision - in the sense that our nature of work warrants quick online disposal of requests and mails. No paper work, approvals are on mail. Quicker action and better record keeping (if one is conversant with cloud storage, like Evernote, OneDrive, etc.)
  - ▶ Some people have started coming up with creative ideas and solutions in their routine tasks. People are getting freedom in exploring their creativity, by at least a small amount, if not to a very large extent. They are creating ready reckoners which help in better coordination and data sharing pan-India. Knowledge sharing via WhatsApp chats has increased. People are readily providing solutions
- from all over the country for a problem that someone faces. This will also reduce over dependence on one person for a task even when a person is on leave or is not available.
- ▶ Issues can be discussed and everything can be resolved with the online platform. Work from home is the new trend. It is the new way of working. Going to office, travelling for 3 hours has become completely obsolete, since productivity level is almost the same. There is not a huge difference in the amount of work being done and the focus that we have. It is almost the same. Things are being managed very well. It has been 2 months into this and I have not faced any issues till now.
  - ▶ Best advantage is that travelling time is saved a lot. I get a lot of time to do exercise which also increases my efficiency and keeps me motivated towards my work. We are also free from some of the useless discussions that happen in the office. We can now simply focus on the task to be done and once we are done with the task, we can focus on other things.
  - ▶ I am in IT department, and everyone is saying that we have really risen to the occasion. Business continuity plan has been done very beautifully in our company. People are able to do their



job. So it is quite satisfying. We had to put everything on 'on-mode'. It is much more than what we were doing in the office. We have tried to give Request for Proposals (RFP) on e-mail. We have put extra hours in the night also for sending the RFPs and getting quotations on mail, even getting approvals on mail. Good thing is that we have released payments worth at least 10 crore during this period, with all approvals on mail.

- ▶ Meetings have become more productive; earlier a lot of time was wasted to find a meeting room, settle down, and exchange pleasantries; now we can have more focused discussions.

However, while employees are currently reducing TATs for response/service delivery by working extended hours on weekdays and weekends, the questions are: (i) Can this approach be sustainable in the long term? (ii) Is increase in productivity being observed in certain pockets in the organization, or do these views hold across teams and levels? Further, how can productivity of front-line sales staff be assessed if both the volume and value of transactions have dropped during the last 2 months? These are relevant issues that need to be reviewed and resolved.



## 2 Dealing with redundancies

Resetting and realigning processes to facilitate WFH had an added advantage. Companies could identify process, role, and skills redundancies. These could be removed through business process re-engineering and tweaking some of their standard operating procedures.

GoDigit extensively used cross training to remove skills redundancies and improve product knowledge and to build capacity.

Going forward, business process engineering will become important to ensure better streamlining and efficient processing.

As one respondent said:

“

There are chances that if social distancing guidelines continue then there will be spare work spaces, and 100 % employees cannot function during the office hours. Thus manpower strength can be better utilized if shift working is introduced so that customer service hours can increase.

”

### 3 Flexibility and trust

Lockdown has presented an extraordinary situation in most of the households where kids, spouse are all in the house and mostly domestic help is not available. For working couples, challenges have increased in terms of balancing office work and daily life in the same place.

Most organizations have accommodated flexible time schedules and have ensured clear communication about objectives and expectations.

GoDigit mostly used video calls for office communication. Employees were expected to follow the office dress-code routine during the video calls so that the office decorum/etiquette was followed, and sincerity and diligence in each and every activity was elicited. Flexible schedules were accommodated to the extent possible.

Health insurance TPA of India modified some of its claim processes and allowed customers to upload requisite documents through WhatsApp for claims pending. The company dedicated a set of employees to look into such pending claims and support the customers in completing formalities.

Se2 India has ensured empathy towards its employees and offered flexibility to choose appropriate channel (such as video calls or audio calls) for meetings, appropriate tools (such as WebEx or Microsoft Teams or Skype) for online communication, and appropriate devices (such as mobile or laptop or desktop) for connectivity. They also organized a session for their employees to share the experiences and efficient practices adopted as a result of the work from home routine.

A senior vice-president of a private general insurance company said:

“

Initially everybody had misgivings as to whether this kind of a proposition will work or not. But after a few days and initial hiccups, the only question that mattered was : what kind of a routine can you actually have when you are working from home because in office the entire day's schedule is planned; whereas, while working from home people initially thought that maintaining a routine was not possible because everything had to be coordinated over phone calls. But acceptance of the situation eventually increased across the board because work had to be done. While working from home it is more about an element of trust and acknowledging the fact that whatever a person is telling you is right because there is no need to put everyone under a surveillance system, which in any case would be hampering your own time and their time too.

”

### 4 Cost reduction

WFH is also being viewed as an important cost reduction strategy. On this topic, respondents opined that:

- ▶ From a company's point of view, WFH can result in huge savings through lesser utilization of space, office expenses, and travel. A company could save some management expenses as well. If we are working with a strength of 33 or 50% people, we do not actually need all the space which is being occupied currently.
- ▶ The Call Centre is working 24\*7 as of now. I feel that it is not required. We can save electricity and admin costs. We can reduce manpower as well. In operations and claims - at least 50% of the staff can work from home.
- ▶ Almost everything can be made to happen from home. Only there might be a problem in terms of legal documentation, but if we have digital signature, we can even overcome that hurdle. This will lead to lot of saving for the organization provided security protocols are in place.
- ▶ In my opinion everything can be shifted to the home because the company is being run from home since the last 2 months. The only people who need to be in office are the cashiers who have to collect the cash or cheques. Otherwise now-a-days brokers and development officers are collecting and bringing in the premium. Even a link is now provided to the customer so that s/he can pay directly. If you ask me, all work can be shifted to the home. Claims are being settled online and all reports are coming online. Once the company takes a call to do so, almost 60-70% of the work can be shifted to work from home which will lead to cost reduction.

## The other side: challenges faced by employees

Some respondents have been very vocal about the challenges faced by them while WFH. They say:

“

In the office there is scheduled tea-break and lunch-break, and people typically may not call during that time, or on Saturday-Sunday. But now people are assuming that even on a Saturday and Sunday you are available. Those boundaries are slightly blurred.

”

Some women staff are finding WFH stressful. They do appreciate flexibility; but presently it is difficult for some of them to balance office work and personal life at home. To quote some of their concerns as follows:

- ▶ People generally have this mindset that when a lady is at home, she should be readily available for them all the time. My job requires a lot of concentration as I am having powers of up to 1 crore, and if I make any mistake I may have to suffer a lot because of that later. So I need to work with lot of concentration. Initially it was very difficult to work with so much concentration due to such disturbances. So I have now changed my work-time cycle. When people in the house are taking rest, I start my work.

- ▶ 100% work from home? I will not be happy. Working from home is more stressful for ladies. We have to take care of all household chores also. So it becomes like a double stress. Sometimes I feel that I am obliging the company by doing office work at home, as office work is to be done in the office. Many a times I feel that I am doing office work on a paid holiday or EL. And then I don't know whether I am doing justice to my office work or to my home. This could also be because this is something new for us...it is a new culture for us. I will prefer to work from office only. Work from home is not possible in insurance sales.
- ▶ Everyone's home situation is not the same. For people living in 1 BHK, it is not possible to have a separate space for work; there is constant disturbance at home, and schools are also shut. So it's difficult for especially women to manage the household and kids along with working from home. Also 100% WFH for full-time workers is actually not feasible and will become a mental hurdle. So some people may want now to get back to work and go to office physically.



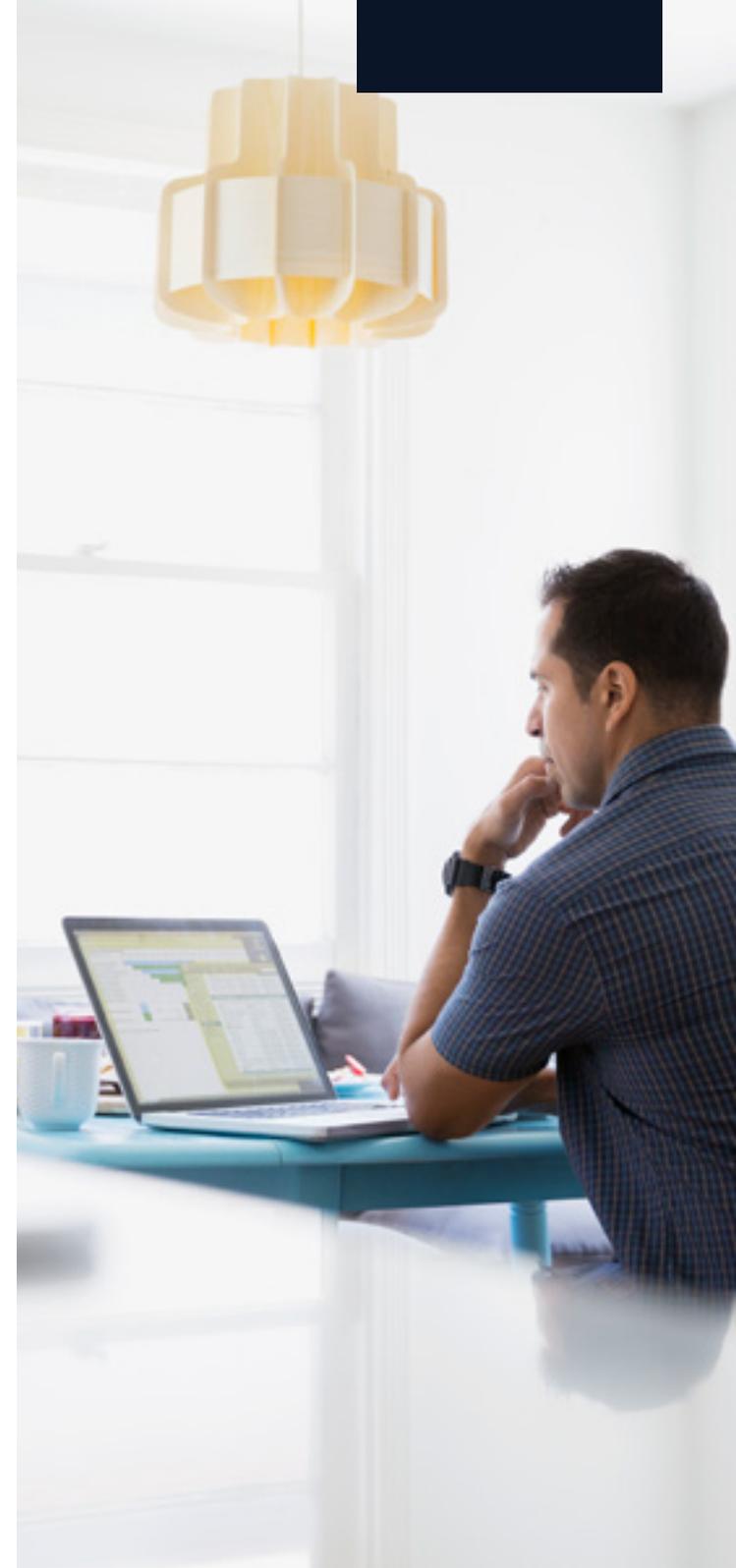
Even some men are finding WFH challenging and stressful. Some of them say:

- ▶ The only benefit of working from home is that my traveling time is saved. Apart from that, the work flow is still the same. It's difficult to manage work from home and work for home, as we tend to receive claims at odd hours also.
- ▶ In the office we can take breaks and work upto a specific time but at home there is no fixed time. We get a mail at 8 o'clock in the morning or in the evening to which we have to respond to, and even on Sundays.
- ▶ Although we are with family for more time yet we are not able to spend personal time with them as we have to attend calls at any time.

Maintaining performance levels, communication, and connectivity has been challenging; especially sales personnel do not find WhatsApp calls very effective. Below are few comments we received during interviews with respondents.

- ▶ I have to talk to my team members individually, mostly on phone, which is different from face to face communicating. Personal touch is not there. I have to put in more energy while talking on phone and understanding is also not that much on phone as we are not able to see the body language.
- ▶ Productivity has gone down; earlier I could walk up to someone to solve an issue, but now the same communication takes 2-3 iterations.
- ▶ My experience has not been very good. I am into insurance sales and being at home, it has become even more difficult. Now I am contacting people through WhatsApp calls, but it is not converting into very effective sales. The numbers have gone down. In the current situation, with lack of face-to-face interaction, convincing people for making investments via insurance has become challenging.

- ▶ Sometimes you have to short-circuit the processes. For instance, if we go strictly by CVC guidelines, the tenders are to be done in a certain way, which is not possible while working from home. Now we are only talking on phone and the actual human touch, which is required, gets missing.
- ▶ The work and home space have actually to be segregated for the physical, mental, emotional well-being.
- ▶ In case of a claim payment, we need the policy document. We need to print it. We need to take print of the voucher and take signatures. Without signatures on the documents we can't make a payment. All these things are not possible while working from home. We don't have that kind of IT infrastructure (like a printer, etc.) at home.
- ▶ I prefer to work from office only as it is more convenient. If I am stuck anywhere, I can solve the problem immediately by discussing the issue with my colleagues then and there.
- ▶ Most of the time goes into organizing and setting up the things, and contacting people. The method of working has changed. It takes little extra time as things are not in front of you. Work from home is not as seamless as it was in the office, because in office you call up someone and you will get the information instantly.
- ▶ Sometimes I feel that setting up such meetings takes up a lot of time (we are using Microsoft Team to talk to each other), as there is no IT guy to help me. This experience of working from home has never been there; in fact, we are learning it literally.



Social interaction has been impacted; casual conversations, connecting with colleagues while walking in office corridors is being missed by most of the employees. A senior executive is of the following opinion:

“

When you work in a team, when you work in an office environment that typically becomes your extended family. You are glued to everything that is happening in the office and what is going around. You are invested in the office. For any individual who is working from home, that investment goes down and then you have to take extra-ordinary efforts to be in touch with everybody else, which is why complete work from home is never a good idea. It might make sense that you allow people to choose days that they want to work from home or have a rotation basis policy, but at least once or twice they should come to the office and meet up with people, not just for work per se while work gets done but more so to keep their networks going intact.

”



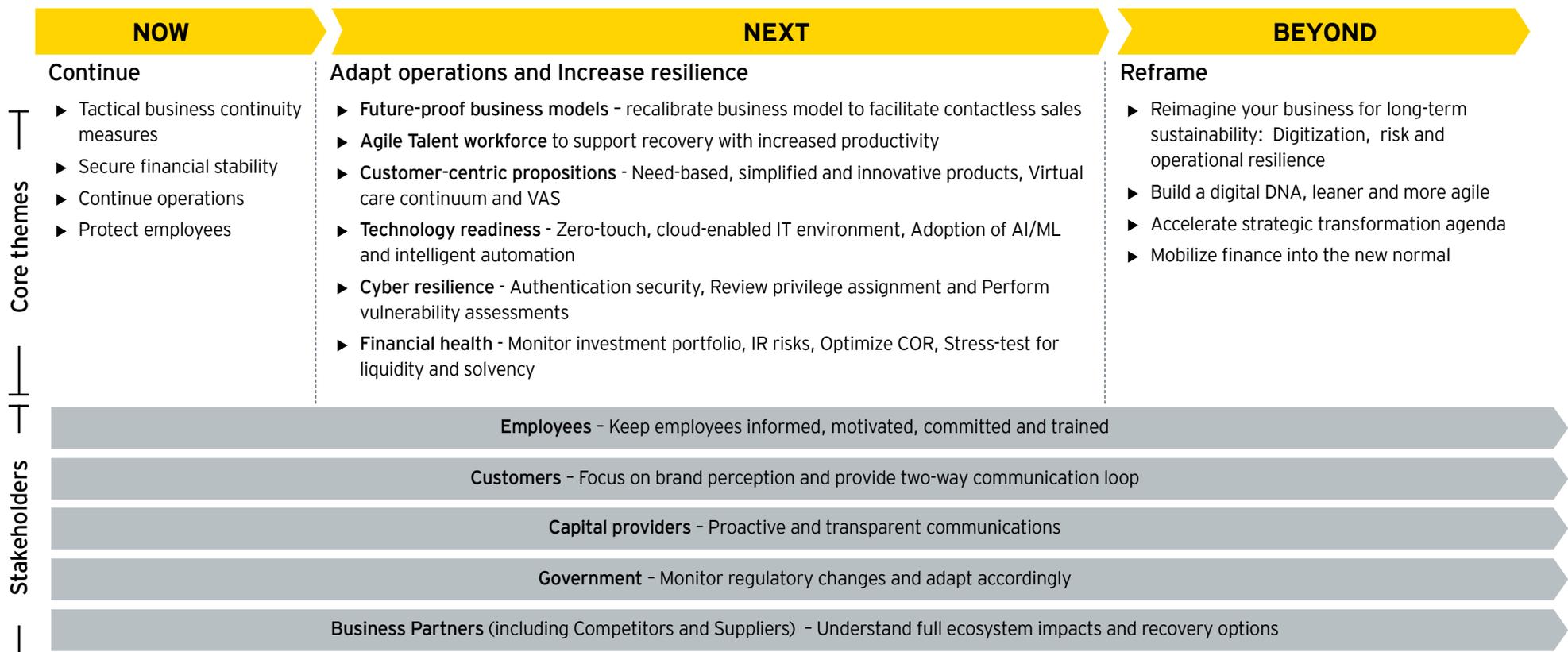
The interview data has provided valuable inputs about what is workable, and what is not feasible for the insurance companies as of now. The interview responses have also provided insights into employees' experiences, mindsets, and their viewpoints about the efficacy of WFH.

The world at large is undergoing a transformation in the way work is being done. While the COVID-19 pandemic has truly accelerated the digital adoption and forced us into an era where remote working seems to be becoming the norm, we are yet to adopt and adapt to a more sustainable and operating model.

# Crafting the future strategy

NIA partnered with EY to understand their points of view on the emerging priorities for the organizations in the 'new normal' and on how the Insurance industry could gear up to address some of these hotspots. EY entails the way forward through a framework on adapting to the New Normal.

## EY Framework on Adapting to the New Normal



While the macro situation remains quite fluid on the ground, and, business challenges multiply daily, there are some measures that we can take in the near (Now), short (Next) and the long (Future) terms in order to create a robust strategy for an effective remote working environment.

Let us now look at some of the emerging people-priorities in order to adapt to operations and thereby increase resilience for the long term.



## Workforce re-modeling and manpower planning

One of the main challenges we heard from insurance majors has been about restructuring manpower from the lens of remote working. While we are all cognizant of the latent benefits of remote working, designing a sustainable operating model is the key challenge.

EY recommends the following broad guidelines to re-purpose the workforce model:

### 1 Map changes to skill profile for critical roles

With the changes in the way we work, expectations from most roles in the organization are also evolving. With in-person interactions being limited at-least for the foreseeable future, the profile of the front-line sales managers would need to evolve. Enhanced individual comfort with technological tools and effective, personalized conversations over virtual touchpoints will become imperative for new acquisitions. Communication, which has normally been strengthened/supported with behavior and emphatic gestures, will need to be strengthened. Similarly, the evolution in skills will need to be mapped for other critical roles, so as to transform the overall skills' framework for the organization.

### 2 Realign existing workforce

- ▶ Identify activity clusters and assess the remote working feasibility levels for unique roles.
- ▶ Arrive at a remote work feasibility heat map to understand the overall workforce reality.
- ▶ Geographical re-alignment - Study the feasibility of spreading critical operations across multiple micro-sites; create hubs for long-term sustainability to survive future disruptions.

### 3 Identify gaps and additional role requirement/s

Additional role requirement for key and changing focus areas is to be identified.

### 4 Prepare manpower plan for the next financial year

- ▶ Based on the inputs from existing remote work-force model/s, we can figure out if we need the same number of employees for the said task as the dynamics change or, if required, internally few employees can be transferred.
- ▶ Additional role requirement for new roles is to be mapped.

## Hiring right

As the trend towards differential workforce capabilities and remote workforce models comes into play in the new-normal, we should now pre-empt the requirement to hire right.

Let us delve deeper in order to understand what we mean by “hire right”.

- ▶ **Right workforce mix:** A changing workforce model can open doors to contractual gig workers for project or requirement-based short-term assignments. Additionally, as we settle in the virtual workplace, the generation-mix will also undergo changes. There will be a surge in demand for talent that would be comfortable with digital platforms and open to collaboration, which can as a result have an impact on the generation-mix too.
- ▶ **Right sourcing channel:** Erstwhile source-mix will

undergo change, i. e. if your source-mix was vendor or placement agency-dependent, which in turn relied on face-to-face interviews or tele-screening, these will have to now tilt more towards job portals, websites, head hunting for niche talent, gig workforce for contractual short roles and RPO model. Additionally, the evaluation and assessment process will undergo a shift towards the virtual platform. Cost per hire would continue to be a significant metric to track effectiveness of the channels deployed.

- ▶ **Fit-for-purpose hiring:** Smart hiring by gauging retention parameters before initiating recruitment will save effort and cost, both in the short and long term.
- ▶ **Invest in smart recruitment solutions:** It is pertinent that organizations now invest not just to digitize and

automate the recruitment life-cycle but also leverage predictive analytics to indicate the success of a hire. Profile screening basis, semantic search and net scrapping can help identify profiles with a higher probability of success in the role from a vast talent base. The strength and need for insights from data analytics have been long understood, but the COVID-19 pandemic has just accelerated the need for adoption of digital solutions for working smart, hunting for niche talent, gig workforce for contractual short roles and RPO model. Additionally, the evaluation and assessment process will undergo a shift towards the virtual platform. Cost per hire would continue to be a significant metric to track effectiveness of the channels deployed.

## Intelligent automation across people processes

Intelligent automation across HR enables reduction in cost and increase in productivity. We have seen that these two factors pivot the growth of enterprises. With this solution, HR centers can optimize resources and costs spent on transactional work and focus more on designing solutions.

As we understand, the insurance sector has a heavy mix of front-line sales staff and contractual workers, who are geographically and technologically distant, it is pertinent to find solutions that can reach this segment. The HR value chain from “Hire to Retire” should be seamless and available to the maximum extent possible and adept in all scenarios. This is feasible if companies start investing in intelligent automation across critical HR processes. Some of these automation opportunities include the following.

- ▶ **Digital recruitment solution:** Document collation, offer letter roll out, background verification review.
- ▶ **Virtual on-boarding process:** The insurance sector faces the maximum attrition rate and dissent during one’s initial 90 days in office; this might accentuate in the current scenario with anxiety and job disconnect. Virtual on-boarding could provide benefits of Hi-Tech and Hi-touch during this uncertain period.
- ▶ **Learning and development:** While many of us are focusing on increased learning hours during this lockdown, we should aim at role-specific learning intervention and enable a catalogue of learning solutions for a holistic development model. Intelligent automation can provide insights on learning effectiveness and adoption level.

- ▶ **Employee self-management:** The most common impact area has been the ‘employee self-manage and benefits management. This aspect of HR was heavily driven by manual checks, i. e. reimbursement, travel claim, employee data updation, payroll process. To a large extent this has been neglected and manually driven industry; but we see immense potential in automating this segment.
- ▶ **Off-boarding:** Similar to the on-boarding process, the principle of Hi-Tech and touch should be maintained even in off-boarding to identify predictive retention opportunities and to facilitate smooth off-boarding.

## Employee wellness

As most of the employees have transitioned from an occasional spell of remote working to having to operate exclusively - and indefinitely - from home, feeling of lack of choice over the situation combined with fear of job security and the health risks for family and friends have inevitably led to increased levels of stress and anxiety. Continuing to work remotely in the long term will need focused efforts on managing employee well-being holistically. Coping with blurred lines between home and work hours, and with the isolation that accompanies it, will be critical to ensure mental well-being and in the long term, productivity as well. In times to come, HR teams will need to structure their approach and find answers to 3 key questions on:

- ▶ **The Employee Lens:** What steps can individuals take to ensure their own well-being?
- ▶ **The Managerial Lens:** How can managers/leaders ensure their team members' well-being?
- ▶ **The Organizational Lens:** What practices can organizations introduce to support employees' overall well-being?

A design-thinking approach will need to be adopted for driving the wellness agenda at all the employee-experience touch points. Holistic well-being (physical, mental, social ethical/moral and financial) will have to remain at the core of all communication, engagement or collaboration efforts. The communication itself will need to be:

- ▶ Humane (honest, transparent, empathetic and direct),
- ▶ Frequent (ensuring awareness, and alignment to the larger goal), and
- ▶ Intentional (addressing specific needs of respective audience).

Innovative engagement opportunities will need to be created to inculcate a sense of: (i) **belongingness** to the organization, (ii) **trust** building and (iii) enhanced **teaming** in the virtual workspace

## Measuring and managing productivity

Traditionally, physical presence at the workplace has been perceived as a measure of team productivity. Managers have often questioned their teams' ability and intent to work out of alternative locations. Parallely, employees have often stayed back late in the office, to 'prove' their dedication and clear the work load. While several organizations now think progressively about work from home being an effective alternative, leading remote teams, and ensuring optimum productivity are still a challenge for many. This is relatively easier for transactional roles - for instance, (a) productivity of the claims-servicing team may be evaluated on the basis of cases handled per week; (b) performance of the customer-service team can be assessed on the basis of the incidents successfully closed in a day, and so on.

This manner of evaluation may however be more challenging for heterogeneous roles, where efforts in the right direction may need to be looked at over immediate results. The idea for managers here is not to track activities performed at a micro level, but instead, it is to ensure that every ounce of effort put in eventually helps achieve the team's and the organization's goals in the best way with the best efforts.

Having a real-time, direct visibility to the team's performance would enable managers to quickly adapt to the changing business context by fixing individual accountabilities. Additionally, this will also help managers identify the re-skilling/up-skilling needs of the team, to ensure re-purposing within the year, if so needed.

## Role of the leadership team

Leaders and managers play a crucial role in the organization in managing the change, by effectively reassuring, motivating, and steering their workforce. Their role becomes even more critical in the context of building a sustainable remote-based workforce. With all the other unpredictable external changes happening constantly, leaders will themselves need to be emotionally and intellectually prepared for the future. **Empathetic** team handling, **clarity** in direction, **transparency** in communication, encouraging **flexibility** in the way of working, and **agility** in decision making will be the magic key to building a high-performing and motivated virtual workforce.

# Conclusion

By adapting to disruptions in the way of working and ensuring business continuity, the insurance community has set an example. They have adapted quickly and smoothly to the emerging situation. They have identified and resolved priorities without any disruption to customer service. Insurers need to re-invent their business operating models and adapt themselves to emerging work-force models to be prepared for the unpredictable future. The suddenness of the current lock-down situation has forced organizations to test their readiness and build capabilities for remote operations in the future. Repurposing the robust organization to meet the constantly changing work and market environment, enabled by people-friendly policies and processes, will be imperative to ensure continuous growth on a long-term basis and ensure profitability in insurance business.



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