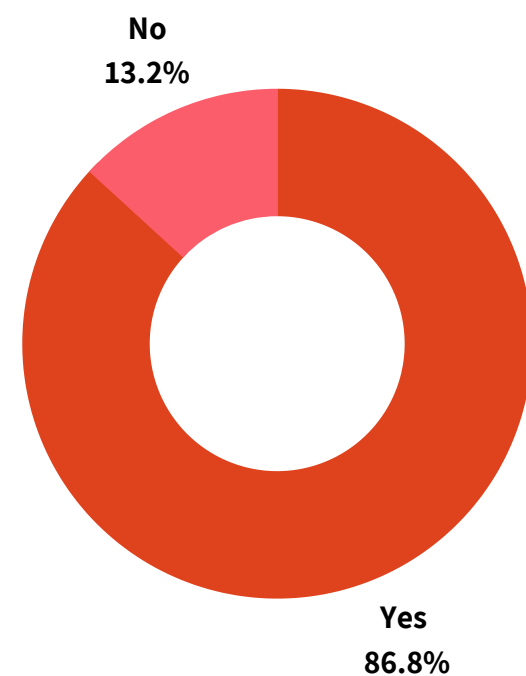An Employers Guide to

Remote Readiness Best Practices

SLASSCOM survey findings reiterate the fact that remote working is productive

With the pandemic outbreak almost every organization has to rethink the way they operate, it could be from digital transformation, flexible work, working from home strategies and how the organizational structure would look like beyond pandemic.

It is evident that remote work is productive, and it's the best alternative in the current pandemic, since Sri Lanka is experiencing the second wave of the Covid pandemic presently. In addition working from home has been adapted not only in the IT-BPM sector, also with other sectors such as banks, government offices, apparel sector etc.

In this context SLASSCOM HR forum has carried out a survey to understand work from home dynamics in relation to the Sri Lankan workforce. Survey was carried out to gauge the perspectives of employers and employees. In this report it covers both survey findings and the best practices of remote working to be adhered by employees and employers.

Do you think remote work is productive?

No
13.2%

Yes
86.8%

1

Assess Your Culture

As a starting point, assessing your company culture and adapting to provide the foundation to support remote work can ensure sustainable work-from-home success, or just the future of work in general. In other words every organization is unique. Therefore, it is important to understand internal dynamics of the organization rather than having a cookie cutter approach for work-from-home strategies or policies.

TIPS

Employers need to create a cross functional team to align organizational values with business objectives to come up with transparent work from home policy document.

2

Invest In Productivity Tools and Tech

First and foremost, to ensure the success of your employees by providing them with tools to aid how they stay connected and productive. Ex: Make sure all the software your company uses is up to date. Don't utilize inferior software as it makes working more difficult.

These may include project management tracking apps such as Asana, Jira and Airtable, chat/messaging apps like Slack and Microsoft Teams, and video conferencing apps such as Zoom and Google Hangouts.

Facilitate internet connectivity using dongles or wingles with company paid internet connections.

Create a helpline and ticketing system specifically for remote employees, and outline the procedure that employees must take in order to escalate technology related issues.

Invest in a VPN. Your employees will be using personal Wi-Fi connections sometimes. Keep internal data safe by connecting your employees to a VPN.

Create a Productivity Hacks forum so employees could share tips and tricks to complete tasks efficiently and effectively, further this portal can be used as a Q&A forum to clarify technology/work related issues.

What is a work from home policy?

A Work from Home Policy is an agreement between employer and employee that clearly defines the expectations and responsibilities of employees who work from home. In addition which defines their eligibility to WFH, the process for requesting work from home privileges, as well as the approval process etc.

Survey findings: **90% of the survey participants responded that they have some kind of work from home policy stated by their respective organizations in place already. 86% of respondents felt each company should have a remote working policy. An interesting insight extracted from the survey was that 81% felt the biggest advantage was the time saved of commuting.**

Survey findings: **Our survey found that the majority of Sri Lakan IT-BPM companies utilize Confluence, PowerBI, Miro boards, Rally, Jira, Bit Bucket and Azure as their primary remote working tools.**

TIPS

Companies should make sure there is a high efficiency in resolving technology related issues of remote employees. (Example: Dashboard to monitor turnaround time and feedback of technology related issues).

Make sure the VPN connectivity does not hinder the productivity of the employees.

Make sure to communicate about internal community portals on a frequent basis so employees reap most benefit out of these forums. Appoint forum moderators.

Tackling and Increasing Productivity

3

Monitor Work Outputs.

At the start of each task;

- Have one-on-one chats on a regular basis to understand employee's mindsets and challenges.

- Agreeing a desired output with team members makes it a two-way dialogue.

- Create strong virtual meeting disciplines . Share advance meeting agenda, Stick to the time schedule, have productive discussions, invite feedback.

- Monitor progress against output on an ongoing basis in an identified tracker (% complete).

The responsibility of a company is to serve the customer. The responsibility of leadership is to serve their people so that their people may better serve the customer."

-Simon Sinek-

Survey findings: showcase four key areas to improve remote work productivity.

- **Equip teams with tech and productivity tools**
- **Establish daily check-ins**
- **Non-work interactions and team building**
- **Provide emotional and steady support**

Survey findings: **Remote work productivity is being measured by most organizations using 180 degree feedback, self-check and schedule among the employers who submitted responses to the survey**

4

Recognize Your Workforce

Managers/ Employers need to recognize that each individual team member is dissimilar, communicate with them and listen to their requirements.

Understand that performance might vary contingent on how individuals adapt to the new norm.

To ensure team spirit stays upbeat even in a virtual environment, managers should find suitable ways to reward and recognize teams for their good performance.

Have regular check-ins with each team member and also the team as a whole to gauge their physical and mental well-being

TIPS

Leaders should act as role models and pave the way for a healthier and more sustainable work environment when working remotely. Only then can we fully reap the benefits of working remotely

5

Build the Culture Regardless of Place of Work

Regular communications from leadership teams are encouraged.

Be transparent and communicate values of the organization consistently through town hall meetings so there are no surprises for employees.

Make sure Empathy is at the center which is a critical aspect in building a sustainable remote work culture.

Train your Team Leaders/Managers to become more emotionally intelligent and empathetic.

Encourage appreciation of family members who support the employees to carry out WFH.

TIPS

Have town hall meetings to communicate the importance of the remote work and recognize the progresses made by teams/companies frequently and request for employee suggestions.

Regardless of the employee's place of work, special attention needs to be placed for team members to feel individually recognized, valued, and committed. (Example: companies delivered pizzas, hampers, Exercise program subscriptions were given, etc. Some token of appreciation will be valued by employees)

Conduct regular training sessions for management teams/team leaders to become active listeners, and to build; emotional intelligence, authentic leadership, empathy, etc.

Utilize virtual platforms (Workplace by Facebook, Yammer, Whatsapp Informal groups, video conferencing tools) to share achievements by team members and the company as a whole. It could be personal/ professional/ family success stories within the intranet creating inclusivity.

Remove Isolation and Increase Collaboration

6

Promote Collaboration Across

Make sure face-to-face interactions are an important part of the meetings. When working from home the face-to-face meetings and human interactions are absent, presently there's a question of the effects of physically seeing colleagues, which is an important focus point.

Have non-work related meetings once a week to understand their personal developments in their life.

Occasional in-person meetings (when pandemic situation rest) at least once in two weeks to compensate for the absence of in-person interactions.

Replicate ad-hoc chats on Friday afternoons about people's exciting weekend plans the same way we speak on a Friday afternoon in a real office.

Allocate traditional operational expenses such as electricity, water, maintenance into employee recognition activities.

TIPS

Encourage regular meetings with Video on, tolerate distractions at home(kids, family members, background noises, home setup etc) and be empathetic.

Online coffee chats, sharing of a new recipe or a Cooking Experience, Remote birthday celebrations.

Create a fun lineup of songs if listening to music while working is your jam. Share it with your colleagues too to share the vibe.

Organize weekly coffee meetings at a casual setup.

Work with human capital teams to come up with tangible impactful recognition plans such as giveaways, spot recognition bonuses to increase productivity.

7

Promote Work Life Balance and Mental Wellness

The burnout risk is present for employees when working from home continuously without log off times. Therefore, employers need to promote work life balance through different mechanisms.

Suggest employees designate a workspace (That will assist them to compartmentalize "work" vs. "home.")

Encourage employees to set boundaries to start and end their days. Communicate you don't expect them to "clock in" at the crack of dawn or stay online 24/7.

Help employees prioritize their wellness and create psychological safety.

Provide company paid subscriptions to Programs like Peerfit which facilitates both in-person and online-streamed workouts. Alternatively provide company paid Yoga classes and promote meditation.

Appoint designated counsellor for employees to have timely sessions to discuss mental wellness and psychological matters.

TIPS

Engage in personal dialogues to make sure employees have flexibility in meeting times depending on personal commitments.

Share best practices in creating a home office. Create and share info-graphics on WFH best practices via internal communication channels.

Have a strong internal communication campaign emphasizing the importance of digital detox with log off times.

Create strong communication campaigns internally. Ask leaders to promote psychological safety by inviting to speak-up and share their ideas and concerns. Invite regular feedback at all levels, measure psychological safety via anonymous surveys.

Invite employees to use counsellor service for their mental health issues and treat the data with confidentiality, Create chatbot or online portal(anonymous) to seek support virtually. If company cannot afford to have a dedicated councillor, team managers could be up skilled to have unbiased conversations to help team members.

8

Streamline Communication Channels

In the absence of in-person communication, internal comms must be dialed. Employers need to audit existing communication channels and update the main purpose of each channel.

Whatsapp- for rapid, lightweight, informal communication, and as a second touch for timely announcements.

Email - for longer communications, team-wide announcements, and internal programming (like news digests).

Zoom/ Teams - for meetings.

Assembly - for employee recognition and remote employee engagement.

Form a strategic cross-functional team consisting of marketing, HR, Operational and IT, along with leadership to continuously improve internal communication channels and its effectiveness.

At the end, it's all about empathy, trust, and ethics

During remote working only the physical work place is shifted to a home environment whereas processes, policies remain unchanged. It is the responsibility of both employer and employee to facilitate trust, empathy and self-disciplined especially in a remote working environment. Empathy brings out the best in people.

In most cases, physical separation from office and co-workers can breed these complications. Because we are not in physical proximity, it is sometimes forgotten that we are working with people who have their own lives, families, problems etc.

Trust is a virtue that need to be with both employee and employer especially in a remote working environment. Both parties need to be transparent in what is been said and done. Moment this is weak from either party conflicts arise where it could tarnish the employer - employee relationship.

In addition, professional ethics play a major role when you're operating in a remote work environment. It is the responsibility of both employer and employee to maintain ethics at all times adhering to core values of the organization.