Homeworking has its problems, but it points to the future

Much has been made in recent weeks of how workers and organizations alike have embraced remote working in the wake of the lockdowns caused by the coronavirus. Indeed, so great is the enthusiasm that — even as governments declare a return to work is safe — many employees remain reluctant to leave their home offices.

What has been rather less remarked upon is the fact that — even for knowledge workers who do most of their work in front of a computer — working from home is not really the same as working in the office. Leaving aside for a moment the fact that the quality of the home working experience largely depends on the home — it is obviously a lot better for somebody with a separate space within their home than for somebody in a house share having to work in their bedroom — remote working throws up a lot more problems than simply worries about employees becoming isolated and concerns about ensuring a corporate culture survives. Chief among these is the fact that — while organizations of all types and sizes demonstrated remarkable agility in switching to remote working almost overnight — the technology often does not work as well remotely as it does in the office. […]

The study, *The New Digital Workplace*, suggests that 36 million American corporate technological devices run more slowly when they are remote, "no doubt crippling[1] employee productivity." Moreover, more than two-thirds of employees questioned said their work was disrupted while IT departments fixed their issue, with a quarter saying they were unable to work at all and nearly three-quarters saying they had to wait up to weeks for their problems to be fixed. […]

There has been some discussion of the problem of employees — cut off at home with little else to do — spending longer than they would normally "at work" […]. Moreover, when even the things that employees used to do while on a break from their screens — such as chat with colleagues — now have to take place via technology the working day is more tiring than it used to be. Meetings have long been the bane[2] of the office worker's life. But many of them would no doubt now give a great deal for a real-life gathering in a conference room as opposed to the current need to sign up for yet more screen time via Zoom, Microsoft Teams or whatever system is in vogue.

The current situation creates "unique opportunities" for a complete rethink of how work is done and for organizations and IT to "create a digital ecosystem that empowers employees to work in whatever way suits them for maximum productivity and engagement."

Clearly, there will be an important role for IT in this brave new world.

Roger Trapp (a UK based journalist with an interest in management),
"Remote Working Has Its Problems, But It Points To The Future",
Adapted from *www.forbes.com*, July 21, 2020

[1] Crippling: reducing
[2] Bane: nightmare