**IT COMPANIES ARE THRIVING IN THIS LOCKDOWN: HERE’S HOW**

A blessing in disguise?:

Well into the fourth month of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, executives from the Information Technology sector – including those who were previously worried during the beginning period of the lockdown about productivity and profits plummeting – have now reported across the nation that this lockdown has been a blessing in disguise for their sector. And this holds true across various service sectors where technology has been implemented to a great extent.

What started as a three-week lockdown has now led to the nation’s economy being inactive for four whole months, yet this has been unsurprising news to most people that expected such extended periods of quarantine, given the (presently) rising number of infected patients in the country. With more areas turning into hotspots for the disease everyday, there is no expectation for the economy to resume normally for the next four to eight weeks, maybe even more.

What did the IT and other service sectors do right to take advantage of this lockdown?

The Work From Home scenario:

One of the more popular sayings of this pandemics has always been Work From Home. This self-explanatory terms has been a boon for various individuals that cannot afford to lose their monthly incomes, and to corporate behemoths that need their cogs in the country running as smooth as they can. Work From Home has gone from an if-you-are-sick scenario to an actual optional scenario, given that its effectiveness has resulted in an emerging cost and productivity gains – various sectors are now set to have fewer people work from offices following the economic resumption post-pandemic lockdown.

It was completely normal for employees to traverse long distances to their offices before the pandemic hit, usually in cities plagued with traffic issues and high air pollution, among other varying issues that may be dangerous. With Work From Home being the norm during this lockdown, organizations in various industries have started to record gains on costs as well as efficiencies, making business leaders more certain than ever that fewer people are required to man cubicles across their organization's various campuses. Given the quick shift to the WFH model from trooping-in employees to special campuses for work, it has been proven that Work From Home is a plausible, profitable model that can change the way various sectors work today.

“With the kind of Work From Home efficiencies being delivered by us, there will be a significant impact in the long term. Work From Home is working extremely well”, stated Keshav Murugesh, former Chairman of NASSCOM, a group of lobbyists for the IT industry.

Recent dissent in the sector:

With the lockdown resulting in the increase of COVID-19 cases over a longer period of time, various institutions have resorted to job withdrawals and pay cuts for various employees. Across sector barriers, the disease has been responsible for hurt employees in both manufacturing and service industries, with the IT industry witnessing a bloodbath in tandem as well.

Hundreds upon hundreds of workers have been requested to continue in their respective companies without salaries until the end of the lockdown or worse, being fired. Such threats have been more visible towards those that have been benched for the time being and are not handling any projects for the company. Various employees have reported having to choose between severance of pay that equalled three or more months of their salaries and quit, or stay benched for another month for new projects – the catch being that the no-show of a new project meant quitting without compensation.

Various companies and institutions have been reported to not pay pending salaries to existing and/or exiting employees, making this turbulent situation even more cumbersome for workers that depend on their salaries to handle. Several others have only communicated verbally about the status of their employees, which in various cases are considered to be workplace-language threats. While many such actions are violations of labour laws, they continue unabated. While most companies have stopped their illegal practices there, some have taken the extra step to initiate other personal measures, such as forcing employees to exhaust their paid leave and continue on loss-of-pay, with no understanding of the personal risks it would take to visit a campus when quarantine measures are in place.

Despite the Central government’s orders to pay employees full salaries post-shutdown of the economy, the issue of non-payment of salaries has been on the rise even as most workers continue to work from home. The Secretary (Labour And Employment) has written to chief secretaries of all States to advise employers to not terminate or cut the pays of their employees amidst the lockdown – the key word here being “advised”, which has given various employers the legal loophole they need to continue threatening employees. While all of this has been happening across various industries, one of the more unharmed sectors of the India economy seems to be the IT industry, with some institutions and firms registering an increase in productivity.

Recovering from the shutdown:

As the national lockdown is being relaxed, businesses are resuming, albeit different regions have shown different levels of recovery. Among the metro cities of India, Chennai seems to have been the worst hit in terms of recovery from the economic slowdown, with the city’s employment and recruitment rates not recovering at expected paces. One of the reasons this could be happening is due to its overdependent view towards automobile, IT, and manufacturing sectors. “This could mean an extra four or five months for the city’s economy to recover”, stated Aditya Narayan Mishra, Director and CEO of CIEL HR.

Various experts from the IT industry have quoted this to be the “most challenging time the sector has faced in its history”. The impact of COVID-19 has truly transformed the economy of all nations around the world, and the views of various pioneers and visionaries at viewing how to revolutionize and gain from productivity more efficiently than ever before. With the IT industry of India having successfully mitigated various crises such as the Asian crisis, Y2K, and the 2008 global meltdown, this is yet another stepping stone for the sector to jump through, recover from, and take lessons on.

The CFO and Executive Director of Tata Consultancy Services, S Mahalingam, has reported that “there are many things that are going to change at this tie – global rules for migration will change, movement of people will change [sic]”. Other veterans have also expressed their views and concerns about what is in store for the entire economy of the country as well as what could be down the road of the IT industry. Indian IT companies have always come up with innovative ways to ensure that products and services are being delivered flawlessly and with near-perfect timing; the lockdown has not affected most of this chain, and have maintained a high level of delivery service even in trying times like theese.

It is expected that companies and firms across the nation will see a phenomenal amount of opportunities as various organizations across the board rethink their business environment and the way they operate their models. Greater IT enablement is increasing in potential everyday, and the COVID-19 pandemic has given such ideas a boost in their popularity. Be it digitization of companies or other delivery mechanisms, IT companies are going to have to come up with innovative ideations of products and services. According to Mahalingam, it is a huge opportunity waiting to be exploited. “I think this [lockdown] has given a lot of food for thought for Indian IT companies as well and government also [sic] ... but for their clients not being healthy, that risk is there, which has proved that it can turn this into an opportunity and come up with innovative solutions – it’s the IT sector [sic]”, he added to the PTI.