

Post-Pandemic: The Working from Home Aspect

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ABSTRACT: The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic which hit the world at the beginning of 2020 has forced humanity to implement many changes in a lot of domains. From the simple everyday grocery shop activities to the way one can perform his work for an employer. As a result, life as we know it suffered a series of transformations, both positive and negative. The current paperwork will analyze the consequences raised by the virus in the area represented by the workforce. By this line of approach, we will take into consideration the legal dispositions that had to be adopted and put into practice, the strategy implemented by both companies and institutions in order to protect the health of their employees, alongside the benefits and the negative results derived from these actions. It is certain that moving the work to an individual's domain has offered him/her an extra amount of time, however the lack of social interaction has left scars on a psychological level. Since one cannot do all the tasks on his own, the work is usually split between team members, but a team cannot be a correct social construct unless social contact is present in real life.

KEYWORDS: post-pandemic, work from home, hollow teams, aftereffects, social skills

The birth and spread of SARS-CoV-2

The year 2019 represented the ending of another decade, many of us not being able to believe or to admit that we were about to step in the third stage of the 21st century. Many companies were making top 10s of the best elements in various domains, from movies to events. The atmosphere was both nostalgic and enthusiastic as we remembered the past and scouted the future with hope. In the euphoric climate of those moments, we became too preoccupied to understand the earliest signal of the disaster about to strike us.

During the month of November, a bat carrying a deadly disease escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan, China. The animal was captured, cooked and eaten by a person, and the micro-organism started its infection. It is not clear how the transition from an animal to a human was produced in that short amount of time, given the genetical differences, however it is well known among the scientific community that these types of viruses can spread quickly (Mackenzie 2020, 7).

In December, the Chinese government informed that a new kind of pneumonia was affecting the population in Wuhan, the city being put into isolation shortly after the declaration. On a worldwide scale the consequences of the ignorance manifested by the leaders were making their debut in late February 2020. By the beginning of May 2020, many countries, including the USA and China, implemented states of emergency to contain the infection. Little to no data in regards of the disease made the battle very difficult. In Romania, the National Institute of Public Health defined a case of SARS-CoV-2 as any person who suffers from breathing infection alongside the symptoms of cough, fever and difficult breathing (Dobrescu 2020, 12). In this manner, even if an individual had a normal flu, he could have been suspected and placed into isolation.

In the following months, millions of people around the globe were confirmed of having SARS-CoV-2. As an example, by the middle of August 2020, the COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) was showing around 15 million confirmed cases, with over 600.000 deaths.

Since we live in a world dominated by globalization where we are all interconnected, it is more than clear that the driving factor of the expansion was caused by this network.

Digitalization and how a part of the workforce was saved

At the beginning of the 1970`s it was predicted that the computers will change the values of our society in an already transforming world, as a result of the technology derived from World War II and the Arms Race. Initially, the domain in which the PC`s would bring a new trend was thought to be education. The student would have access to a larger amount of data, in opposition to the traditional system of learning (Toffler 1973, 254-261).

The computers in conjunction with the birth of the internet brought a planetary network, people all around the globe being able to interact with each other. This was a steppingstone for the materialization of globalization.

Seeing the profit and the benefits when it comes to data storage, messaging and record keeping, and the multinational companies took advantage of this aspect and brought changes within their departments. Employees would work almost fully with digital information in a much easier and efficient manner than the old ways.

In the following decades, a new option was made available for many of the employees and that is to be able to work from home a limited number of days per month. By using a laptop provided by the employer and a good connection via the VPN, one could complete all the tasks from the comfort of his house. This proved to be an attractive possibility, many people choosing to work from home at least once a week.

On a general perspective it was clear that this way of operating will grow soon, however the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic accelerated this transition at an unimaginable rate. By the middle of 2020 almost all the employees in finance, human resources and other similar departments within multinational companies were forced to work from home the entire month, in order to prevent the spread. Unlike the industries in which physical presence was necessary in order to complete the work (car construction, court cases, public order, armed institutions etc.), the work from home aspect helped people keep their jobs and prevent any infections.

An employee would simply log in from their desk and exit once the hours were put in, the only other main concern was shopping for food and clothes, fact which was mostly solved due to the ascendance of online grocery/clothes shopping and delivery.

Implementing this measure made it possible for the multinational companies to stay on a lifeline and keep their employees in their key centers, also reducing the costs for rent at the office locations, the other work sectors having to face drastic measures such as layoffs.

Taking into consideration the information above we can state that working from home procedures helped save time for the employees, not having to travel from home to the office anymore, preserved and respected the health of the people involved with the companies and brought forward a much suitable environment for production growth.

Working from home in Romania, applicable law

The right to work is present in the fundamental law of the Romanian state, a subject of the law being able to choose his/her profession and having the benefit of social protection measures, as an example the ones regarding the safety and health during work (Romanian Constitution, Article 41).

On a complex scale, the right to work can be defined as the freedom of a person to choose his specialization, occupation and the place to work, in or outside the country, with remuneration, work safety procedures in place and stabilization (Deaconu 2011, 263).

The Constitution is a law which provides the principles by which a society should be guided. Each segment of this fundamental document gives birth to a series of law branches, based on the object of regulation, thus we can be in the in the presence of constitutional law, civil law, criminal law, labor law and so on (Popa 2008, 130).

Labor law is the domain which studies the regulations put in place for the workforce. Universally it can be explained as the ensemble of legal norms which govern the relations in the process of creating, executing, modifying and terminating a legal employment report, based on the employment contract (Ștefănescu 2000, 28).

In practice, a special disposition was adopted by the Romanian Parliament which contains several elements that need to be covered in order for the work from home to be legally recognized. In this manner, the employment contract requires to be modified by adding an additional act containing the statement that the employee will work from home, the address from where he/she will perform the assigned tasks, the work schedule, how the employer will verify if the individual performs his duties, the method by which the working hours will be accounted, the responsibilities agreed by both parts, the obligation of the employer to ensure the equipment, the measures by which the employee will not be isolated from his colleagues and the costs up for deduction (Law no 81/2018, Article 5).

This regulation being present since 2018 proves that Romania has kept up with the latest tendencies when it comes to modern work. Having in mind the continuous expansion and advancement in technology, the legislator saw fitting to provide a legal transcription for this asset for the workers to make a living even from home, if any situation had imposed such an approach.

The worth of this initiative was most visible during the pandemic, when the equipment and connection was installed in someone's personal place after only completing an additional act, many possible SARS-CoV-2 cases being avoided.

Social scars

As it has been with any innovation or invention throughout history, working from home has a series of advantages and a series of disadvantages. If time is saved and safety during the pandemic is enforced, the human brain can suffer great consequences due to isolation.

By nature, we are social creatures therefore we require staying amongst our kind in order to ensure the satisfaction of basic and superior needs. In this manner, if a person has the power to cover his necessities with the help created by numbers, we can assume that all the other capacities are also developed under the condition of living in a society.

In other words, if the satisfaction of fundamental needs generates more complex desires, then we can conclude that any modern skill is created by contacting other people. Based on this approach, all the finest elements such as entertainment, academic achievements, and scientific discoveries are done through interaction. Evolution itself is conditioned by this, as was the case in the past.

For the above statement to be validated we will appeal to the domain of psychology:

Firstly, the subconscious brain represents a psychic formation which contains the hidden tendencies and the emotional conflicts generated by the unknown elements of a personality (Zlate 243, 1996). Therefore, our external influence determines how our inner self is developed or transformed.

Secondly, when communicating with another person the exchange operations are not done only between the normal senses, but also between the rational and irrational brains of the two communicators (Goleman 230-275, 2018). In this way, interacting with our own species conveys more information and has a bigger data flow.

Thirdly, based on the *Theory of learning*, social patterns play an important part in the development of a person, thus we learn how to think and act by imitating others (Golu 34, 2015).

In short, the subconscious absorbs data from outside, creating conditional reflexes both in action and behavior, human interaction has a greater amount of information received and listening, watching or copying others brings us to the status of human beings.

Continuous isolation can interrupt this flow and start a series of changes when it comes to social coexistence. Working from home involves virtual interaction, thus the sense of trust cannot be completely formed between co-workers, since the data exchange is not correctly made and emotions alongside bonds are absent. The current pandemic also prohibited visiting family members or friends for a long period of time, thus everyday a worker was limited to only online interactions.

Possible consequences of this routine can be represented by the development of anxiety, depression, alcoholism and even the desire to consume illegal substances. The isolation imposed by either the employer or the government requires a careful consideration of the individual's mental health and how it might be affected by these measures.

Proposal for a post-pandemic approach

In a democratic state, the institutions are created in order to protect the fundamental social values. As these were defended when the SARS-CoV-2 entered our lives, now the same objective is present, with a focused approach on recovery.

The companies could create special programs for their employees in order to enhance the proper social context for teamwork development. Constructive games have a positive effect when the evolution of emotional intelligence is desired.

State institutions specialized on social assistance are able to step in and organize seminars or group related therapies with the purpose of helping those having problems when it comes to reintegration in a social context.

Psychologists should elaborate self-improvement materials and make them available to the public. These documents would require having in their context clear and simple explanations on how social and emotional intelligence works and why it is necessary to improve it.

Conclusions

Based on the information presented in the current paperwork, we can draw the following conclusions:

SARS-CoV-2 took the world by surprise at the beginning of 2020, forever changing our way of life and thinking, forcing us to modify our daily routines in order to protect our health.

The virus spread at an increased rate mainly because of our interconnected modern times.

Little to no data was available when it came to fighting off this threat, masks, isolation and social distancing being the only viable solutions.

The disease created problems in various domains: political, economic and social.

Many companies had to implement layoffs in order to not go bankrupt, thus the unemployment rate increased.

Due to the evolution in technology a part of the workforce was saved by the option of working from home. This measure saved time for the ordinary employee and provided more safety against SARS-CoV-2.

In Romania, the presence of Law no 81/2018 permitted a quick transition of the work from the office to one's home.

Isolation resulted from the work from home and social distancing measure was able to cause many types of dysfunctions when it came to interaction and coexistence.

For the recovery to be successfully completed, the institutions, employers and psychologists must work together and assist the population in regaining their confidence when it comes to living in a community.

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