

Remodelling Enterprises with a Human-first Approach



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COVID-19 is compelling organizations to think about transforming their business and its impact on the community. The crisis has redefined how organisations engage with their employees, clients and other external stakeholders.

Today, we operate in a changed world where the challenges we face are dramatically different

from those we encountered 18 months ago. Therefore, our response to these challenges also needs to be recalibrated. It must have a strong undertone of human values such as empathy and trust. We need to be more flexible in meeting the changed expectations of our clients and employees.

Digital technologies are increasingly enabling businesses to deliver a differentiated, human-centric experience. Automated tools and chatbots are taking over routine tasks and speeding up issue resolution; intelligent automation is unlocking greater value through more relevant, context-based responses to customers; and insights from data analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are enabling accurate forecasts for demand and customer preferences.

The Business Process Management (BPM) sector is a prime example of an industry that has remodelled its businesses and operations for the post-pandemic world. Not only did the industry transition swiftly to a remote work environment to ensure employee safety and business continuity, but helped clients pivot to a digital-only world that balances technology with the human touch.

Organizations cutting across industries have demonstrated their people-first ethos by choosing to reduce investments during the pandemic rather than laying off employees.

Organisational Priorities are Evolving to Match New Expectations

A McKinsey survey that captures employees' hopes and fears for the future shows that workers care as much about work-life balance, flexibility in how they perform day-to-day activities and well-being as they do about competitive compensation. As many as 52 percent said they preferred a hybrid or remote working model post pandemic.¹

Client expectations and behaviours are also evolving rapidly. A 2020 McKinsey report shows that about 57 percent of clients are willing to change their lifestyle to reduce environmental impact. Over 60 percent have already changed their shopping habits in favour of recycling or purchasing products in eco-friendly packaging.² Hence, businesses need to develop a richer understanding of Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) factors, and how they can realign themselves for environmentally sustainable growth.

Long-term focus on ESG will be important for companies in the new normal to differentiate their brands in the market, and attract and retain talent.

In India, commitment to ESG is picking up fast. According to a recent Kotak Institutional Equities Research Report, four out of every Nifty-50 companies are making their ESG compliance data public for long-term sustainability.³ A new study by Morgan Stanley shows that institutional investors are actively considering the positive social and environmental impact of a business before making an investment. They now want to see boardrooms proactively engaged in integrating ESG into the business.⁴

Prioritising Employee Health and Safety

One of the biggest positives out of the pandemic is the greater focus on employee well-being. Many enterprises have adapted to new models of working and implemented digital tools to better support the health and safety needs of their employees.

A study by the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) that covered 250 industry leaders found that a large number of organisations took additional steps to ensure employee safety and well-being during the second virulent wave in India. About 80 percent of companies have enhanced COVID-19 insurance cover for employees, while 50 percent are looking to set up vaccination centres in their premises.⁵

WNS tied up with Practo, an online medical consultation platform, to provide 24X7 free doctor consultation to our employees. At the height of the second wave, this move ensured that our employees did not expose themselves to unnecessary risks by visiting a doctor's clinic when they or someone in their families fell ill.

We also launched an AI-led chatbot, Amelia, for our employees to raise awareness about the contagion by disseminating relevant information and stemming the spread of falsehoods.

During the second wave, we saw companies demonstrate care and compassion for their employees in different ways – by procuring oxygen concentrators and other medical devices for their employees, disbursing relief funds to affected families and getting cooked meals delivered to their doorsteps.

Companies have re-modelled their workplace benefit plans and launched new programs to boost employee productivity digitally. They have changed leave policies and set aside leave for COVID-19, and increased the insurance cover of employees. Many are organising virtual physical and mental well-being sessions.

To ensure employees continue to receive training for career development and stay motivated and productive, companies are using digital learning platforms to conduct sessions remotely. AI-led e-learning platforms offer an immersive learning experience through modules tailored to the needs of an organisation and its employees. These platforms aggregate, create and curate, transfer and deliver lessons based on specific learning needs, and provide insights on learner behaviours and preferences.

Giving Back to the Community

Businesses across the globe have played a proactive part in helping communities weather the challenges emerging from the pandemic. To combat the second wave in India, many companies tied up with governments at the centre and in the states to procure and distribute oxygen concentrators, oxygen generators and ICU beds.

WNS Cares Foundation (WCF) chipped in and distributed oxygen concentrators to the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, Maharashtra Police and Sion Hospital, Mumbai. We also partnered with industry bodies such as NASSCOM to support the affected communities across the country.

A big impact of digital technologies in recent times has been online crowdfunding. We saw a large number of

corporations and individuals use crowdfunding platforms to make contributions as the second wave hit the country. Many of these platforms received record donations towards their COVID relief drives. Just one such platform, GiveIndia, has collected over Rs. 220 crore.⁶ These campaigns have helped hospitals, migrant workers and other daily wage workers, transgender communities, online delivery staff, ride-hailing drivers and rural artisans.

The pandemic has exposed gaps in our education system – the inability of children from less-privileged backgrounds to continue with their education during lockdowns and other movement restrictions. We need to embrace digital tools to make education more accessible and inclusive to all sections of our society.

Digital learning is one of the most important pillars of WCF. We are helping schools that cater to the less privileged with a digital infrastructure and learning tools. We are also tackling the rising issue of cybersafety by launching a portal, CyberSmart, to cultivate safe online behaviour among schoolchildren.

The pandemic has given us an opportunity to rethink our business practices and priorities, and how organisations can make an impact beyond business. A people-first approach in how we prioritise our investments will enable us to find a better fit in the future. This approach however needs to permeate into the company's business and work culture, and not take a narrow view of just dealing with the present crisis.

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/what-employees-are-saying-about-the-future-of-remote-work>

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/survey-consumer-sentiment-on-sustainability-in-fashion>

³ <https://www.kotaksecurities.com/pdf/indiadaily/indiadaily25052021rc.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.morganstanley.com/ideas/sustainability-investing-institutional-asset-owners>

⁵ <https://nasscom.in/knowledge-center/publications/ceo-pulse-review-impact-covid-19-2nd-wave-india-tech-sector>

⁶ <https://yourstory.com/socialstory/2021/05/online-crowdfunding-giveindia-impact-investing-covid-donate-charity/amp>