

The Transformation to Homeworking

Prior to COVID -19, traditional forms of work have been ongoing the process of transformation. Initial adjustments were driven by the introducing new technologies, which featured information technology. This was characterized by the move to online services and the establishment of e-commerce platform. The digitalization of the workplace was meant to improve workplace productivity. One purpose behind the introduction of digitization is to reduce business costs.

To all intents and purposes, digitalization is expected to ensure increase productivity and efficiency. With the investment in new technologies, it simply means that the reduction in operating cost. The need for the number of workers required to complete tasks on a daily basis is significantly reduced. The displacement of workers becomes part of the new norm, as the net effect is that unemployment numbers continue to increase.

In the trading environment, employers are concerning themselves with finding ways to reduce operational cost. It is evident that the reduction of wages and salaries would rank high on their list. They are able to achieve this, if the introduction of new technologies dictates that there is no longer a need for the number of staff who are employed at the time. The news gets better for employers who may seize the opportunity to further reduce operational expenditure, where there is no need for the rental of office space, or where the size of the space can be downsized. Added to this would be elimination of the need for office furnishing and equipment, and the possible removal or reduction in the monthly utilities' payments.

As harsh as it may seem, the COVID-19 Pandemic could not have come as a more opportune time, as it has given employers added justification for embracing and engaging new technologies into the work. Better yet, it has opened the door to downsize operations and to embrace the concept of homeworking. The move to homeworking may be in the eyes of some employers, a blessing in disguise.

In the initial phase, homeworking may be accepted as a positive development by both employers and employees. Employers may wish to consider what control they maintain over their employees who are working from home. This raises questions

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over the level of productivity, consistency of effort and quality of work. With employees working in different locations, environments and at their leisure, there are likely to be questions raised about standards of operations.

In the new norm, issues of accountability, employee responsibility, employee assessment and discipline are ones which ought to capture the attention of all employers. The change from the traditional workplace arrangement, can lead to the loss of some control by the employer. For instance, the working of the Human Resources Department may lose its standing as the demands for its services are significantly reduced.

For the individual employee, working from home may appear to be less stressful. There is not the physical presence of a supervisor who is breathing down one's neck to complete a task, neither is there the issues of staff relations and morale to deal with on a daily basis. This might only be a state of mind, for the possibility exist, that the supervisor could still invade the personal space by way of constant telephone calls and directives sent by e-mails or WhatsApp. The employee can become overwhelmed by such behaviour, and also by the quantum of work and e-mail communication, which requires attention and action. Coupled with this is the demand placed on the individual's time to be present on conference calls or other virtual meetings.

Homeworking at the inset may appear attractive to most, given that there is no need for a daily commute and the employee can work at their leisure. It can however prove to be a pressure plate for some in having to manage work and family life in real time and in the same space.

Individual employees would be expected to satisfy themselves as the homeworking affords them a greater level of autonomy, job satisfaction and work life balance.