

Work From Home a Tough Proposition for Manufacturing, Services Sectors – Expert Fear Job losses

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Even as India Inc implements work-from-home to counter the threat of Covid-19, large-scale implementation of the same across sectors such as manufacturing and services looks difficult. **Industry experts are also anticipating job losses as a result of the ensuing economic slowdown.**

According to senior HR consultants, while IT companies have some experience in enabling such practices, a majority of the industries in India are just not open to the idea of working from home as a culture.

“IT companies have the necessary systems and security features in place that allow employees to opt for remote working. Usually they may be having 20-30 per cent of their employees working from home at any point in time. Now it could be well over 90 per cent. But implementing the same for services and manufacturing companies would be very difficult,” RP Yadav, CMD, Genius Consultants, told BusinessLine.

Even if companies were to give their employees laptops, one big challenge would be to make available however, making server connectivity. Besides, there could be security threats, particularly in cases where a lot of data is handled. Even IT companies may not be adequately prepared for employees working from home on such a large-scale basis.

However, organisations are likely to ensure that advanced security measures are put in place to maintain data confidentiality and the traditional physical gatekeeping methods could be replaced by virtual gatekeeping, said Anjali Raghuvanshi, Chief People Officer, Randstad India.

Companies gearing up

In the wake of Covid-19 outbreak, Capgemini has provisioned additional laptops to enhance remote working and work-from-home. Tech Mahindra has relaxed the work-from-home policy for its associates. The company has also advised employees to adequately leverage technologies such as tele presence and video conferencing, said Harshvendra Soin, Chief People Officer, Tech Mahindra.

FMCG major ITC has also advised offices in some locations to put in place and execute “contingency plans” at the earliest including work-from-home arrangements.

“Business continuity plans are being put in place to address any potential contingencies and for social distancing. All businesses have been advised to set up a core contingency management team,” Amitav Mukherji, Head of Corporate Human Resources, ITC Ltd.

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Tata Steel has instructed its employees to refrain from using any mode of public transport and is encouraging them to pool-in their private vehicles for commuting to and from workplace, wherever feasible. In case this is not feasible, employees will be extended work-from-home or special leave as applicable, a Tata Steel spokesperson said. The company has also advised all expecting mothers to work from home or avail special leave with immediate effect, till further notice.

Mynd Solutions, which already has a business continuity plan in place for the security and continuity of services and data availability on the cloud, has also started focusing on potential scenarios and ways to mitigate the same in the light of the ongoing coronavirus situation, its CEO and Co-founder, Vivek Misra said.

Fear of job losses

The slowdown in sales and sluggish demand could result in job losses. A number of sectors such as aviation, hospitality, tourism, and consumer goods, are likely to witness job losses. Fresh hiring's are also likely to be hit.

"Recruitments have been frozen as there is a lot of uncertainty. At any point in time, we have a mandate for 1,500-2,000 recruitments, but nearly 50 per cent of the companies have asked us to put it on hold," Yadav said.

Given the scenario, it will take at least a year or two for the job market to return to normal.

Paradigm shift

According to Neeti Sharma, Senior Vice President, Team Lease Services, one of the key takeaways of the current situation would be that corporates will start becoming more open to the concept of remote working.

"This will also open doors for more technology-enabled working, whether it is tools, infrastructure, connectivity, equipment's.... a lot of that will open up from the corporate standpoint. There will also be a big shift in terms of being prepared for such eventuality – this was a once in a lifetime occurrence and we were not prepared. Corporates will look at putting in place business continuity plan to take into account such eventuality rather than letting it come as a rude shock," Sharma said.

This will trigger changes not just in the minds of employers but also employees who will learn to understand and respect the discipline that working from home demands. Organizations will also work on tighter monitoring and governance mechanisms for remote working and ensure that systems and processes are more fine-tuned, thereby creating the right culture.