Message from the Section Chairman

As the chairperson, for 2020, my top priority is the health and well-being of our members and your beloved family members. Our section council members have been monitoring the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak closely to ensure we can make any purposeful changes in this dynamic situation.

In a mere few months, Covid-19 has brought this world a whole new reality. We are all feeling the tremendous impact of the pandemic, on our families, colleagues, communities and our work places.

First and foremost, the health and security of our members, students and partners is our priority during this unprecedented time. Our humble request is please obey the government regulations and stay safe with your beloved family.

My vision and the way forward for BCS Sri Lanka section would be:

Digitalization

BCS Sri Lanka is looking forward to work closely with the Ministry of Digital Infrastructure and Information Technology, Ministry of Education to empower digitalization and already had aligned their plan for the coming year with the vision of president to enhance the digital usage.

Collaborators

BCS Sri Lanka is work closely with board members and members of ICTA to spearhead skills development, professionalism and leadership in IT industry that leads to IT good governance.

Being partner with SLASSCOM, FITIS, CSSL and ISACA to influence them towards their milestones with the different industry experts. BCS Sri Lanka section can bring professional experience and the value addition for digital economy.

Existing members will have collaborative partnership with BFIS services such as credit card offers, special insurance, leisure management offers for each member in Sri Lankan community.

NBQSA

BCS Sri Lanka section organizes the National ICT Awards (NBQSA) since 1998 and nominates the national participants for the Asia Pacific ICT Awards (APICTA) since 2003.

This is national ICT awards which comprise best quality software in the industry to provide recognition to outstanding achievements of individuals and organizations in Sri Lanka which have contributed to the development of ICT, to create a window to gain international recognition for locally developed ICT products and to improve standards and the quality of local ICT products and services to be able to compete in the international market place.

APICTA

We emerge as the 2nd from 17 member countries in the past year. Developed countries like China, Australia, Japan were among the competitors. This year we are looking forward to become the number 1 and already started guiding the contestants.

Big data and AI forum

Last year, BCS Sri Lanka inaugurated Data and analytics summit which was well received by all the stakeholders. Living in a world where knowledge is power, we will organize a knowledge sharing secession with industry experts to reduce the knowledge gaps and improve the professionalism.

Mr K.V. Kuganathan

Chairman – BCS the Chartered Institute for IT Sri Lanka Section

Editors' message

Dear Members,

We BCS Sri Lanka Section published a news letter on behalf of the SL Section as a mark of 20th year of BCS Sri Lanka Section. Which was initiated in 2016, and the 1st Newsletter was published in January 2017. This is with the intention to communicate with the membership periodically, update the members on the activities carried out by the Section and knowledge update for the membership as part of member benefit.

We are currently releasing the 9th volume of the newsletter. Our releases are targeted towards a specific special interest groups. The volume 1 focused on eCommerce & Internet, Volume 2 focused on Application Development & Management, Volume 3 focused on IT Security & Cyber Law, Volume 4 on Management, Volume 5 on GDPR, Volume 6 on Data Science, Volume 7 on Digital Workforce, Volume 8 on Agile and the Volume 9 on Remote Working.

Thank you very much for all the encouragement and appreciation extended in this regard through email and in all other means. We hope you will continue to support us on this initiative.

Please send us your feedback to nirmalan@bcssrilanka.org we will try our best to keep up with it.

N Nirmalan
Editor Newsletter, BCS Sri Lanka Section.

Articles

Working from home (remote): Are we addressing right?

By

N Nirmalan
Consultant – Chief Process Officer (CPO), Cloud Solutions International and CEO/Principal Consultant, KenVisa.

COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges and impacts on companies and its employees around the world. Though this is something unexpected some companies has considered the possible pandemic exposure in their business continuity management (BCM) and as part of crises management, some others got ready when they heard the news of COVID-19 outbreak in China.

Many countries have gone for a lockdown as a result of this COVID-19 outbreak and the impact caused by spreading of the virus. This is going on for more than 14 days in many parts of the world and in Sri Lanka.

Most of the IT companies had long established home working procedures and in software companies this has been a common routine for quit sometime. Having said this, most companies have not tested the home working as part of crisis management activity in their BCM. This has created whole heap of issues during this long extended days of working from home.

Ideally this home working will have many impacts on the process, procedures and governance structures in an organization. The intention of this article is **not** to discuss how to establish those practices or gain benefits to organization from this. This article is with the intention of **discussing the practices that we could adopt to make home working/remote working smooth**, productive and engaging for the companies and its employees at this point in time.

The involvement of HR in engaging activities along with the support of IT, to ensure that the employees and organization gets the much needed support in overcoming this emotional rollercoaster crisis, while encouraging social distancing and safety procedures among employees.

Lookout for signs of stress in employees

Use direct conversations and observations to gain visibility of the concerns and challenges of the employees. This may be due to challenges they have in their working mechanisms or emotional challenges due to the effect of outbreak or mental stress due to work pressure and lockdown inside the house for an extended period of time.

Facilitate regular, informal conversations between manages and employees. Guide managers in handling issues arising from COVID-19 pandemic, along with job security and prospects, communicating the much needed emotional support, benefits established for the employees during the crises situation, handling workplace tension etc.

Establish escalation procedures and have regular communication with employees to ensure employees concerns are taken care and take every opportunity to make employee clear that you are there to support and care for them.

Understand and acknowledge the fact that remote working and virtual communication are different from the normal working environment, and will not be perfect. Therefore ensure respectful and professional approach to all employees in all dealings of the organization's undertakings.

Lookout for lacking in dealing with the new environment and coach the employees as per the current necessities. Establish hot lines/help desk for employees to reach out in situations that they need assistance. This can be on work related

issues, situations of emotional conflicts, may be decision making, stress management etc.

Understand the issues resulting as a result of lockdown/curfew, and can take necessary steps in coordinating/getting the essential items to employees or direct/help them to get those necessities. (some employees may be away from their families, and some may come from difficult areas; where finding the necessary food items and medication required for the family needs are difficult).

Address home/remote working needs

Ensure all employees have the necessary technology needed to make remote working activity smooth. This is beyond providing a laptop and internet connection, for eg: ensure all necessary software including the remote working software are available to conduct the required activities, necessary camera facility is available for those need to participate in virtual meetings, they are made aware of the security procedures that are to be adhered, all necessary training that is required to handle the remote working is provided or available in online self help mode etc.

Those who have trouble in dealing with technology, is given required training and support as expected. Also ensure employee remote IT support service is available during all working hours.

Make sure remote working security procedures are constantly reminded to employees and monitored.

Consider the connectivity problems in different areas and bandwidth issues with service providers and arrange alternative mechanisms for smooth working.

Establish contingency and workarounds for technological failures

Consider technological issues created by capacity outreach and have contingencies and workarounds built or support services established to address the issues, to minimize disruption.

This can be due to unexpected volumes (full capacity is not tested) of employees trying to connect to the office network remotely could create number of capacity related issues on the IT infrastructures.

This can have impacts on the resource utilization, delivery expectations and even on IT security. Organizations need to have plans to handle this effectively.

IT need to understand the levels of employees and the knowledge of IT in establishing procedures, they also need to understand the vulnerability of remote working by unprepared, IT illiterate users and take preventive measures to protect from possible exploitations.

Reinforce organizational value

Organizations would have spent time in developing organizational values and culture. These values have gained confidence in employees in working for, and trusting the organization. Specially, those policies and organizational conducts practiced. These values need to be reinforced.

During the periods of uncertainty, misconduct and politics may surface. Therefore establish channels for reporting misconduct and keep employees reminded on the punishment/penalty for non compliance. Encourage right behaviors all the time at all levels and ensure work well-being is promoted.

Rethink performance

Rethink performance evaluation criteria's. This may not be the best time to evaluate performance. All existing employees would have proved themselves in various contexts already. This crisis context would have created diversified demands and stress in different individuals. The context in which the employees are currently in may not be an ideal state to evaluate performance.

This may different for a company which has already established remote working practices; still the current pandemic context may not be the right time to evaluate performance only based on the current working.

The evaluations should always consider the previous commitments to organization and performances made, and create a justification for their commitment and job security.

Use objectives to create clarity

In the context of uncertainty the role definitions may not work as expected or even fall apart, this may lead to loss focus on what to be accomplished by employees.

Give more emphasis on achieving objectives than focusing on stringent process and procedures, in creating clarity of achievements expected by the employees. Also drive greater employee engagement.

Focus on outputs/outcomes than on strict procedures

In this crisis context working from home is very different from the environment we normally get in an office. In the remote landscape, where people are currently located would have created a different demand on employees in juggling between their work and family commitments, therefore they may prefer completing their work expectations in ways that are easiest and most productive for them.

Therefore organizations should considers outcomes and outputs that needs to be focused than in executing strict process, procedures and working hours (if the organization has not established a remote working procedure already). Also should consider eliminating along approval process and delegate authority based on sensitivity and context.

Encourage the usage of virtual tools wherever possible and schedule meetings at mutually convenient times. Empower teams to complete their assignments in their own way by providing flexibility.

Establish quick recognition mechanisms and Encourage innovation

Improve your monitoring techniques and relationships with employees through direct engagement in increasing visibility in a remote environment. Identify recognition quickly and appreciate appropriately. The uncertain circumstances urge a need to be recognized more than usual. Also the right recognition, not only motivates the recipient, it also simulate the right behavior in other employees.

Also employees who are weak need more recognition than others in keeping them motivated – this will be different in well established remote working environment - but in the context of sudden lockdown, considerations are different in looking into the psychological well being of the employees.

This uncertain environment can bring many innovative thoughts and process improvement opportunities from the employees, these ideas

should not be ignored they should be encouraged and valuable contributions and suggestions should be rewarded. In the mean time improvement/suggestion logs should be established to encourage contributions by employees at all levels, and these ideas needs to be evaluated through proper mechanism and recognized appropriately.

During disruptive times risk taking (calculated risk) and innovation becomes important for organizational success and employee engagement. Therefore while encouraging this behavior, organizations should provide opportunities to share successes and safety for potential failures.

BCS SL Section – We care for you.

PROTOCOL WHEN GETTING HOME

Take shoes off before entering home

Spray alcohol top and bottom of shoes

Also do to clothes, cell phone, glasses, keys, work utencils, computers ect.

Throw away any receipt or papers

Go to where you can take your clothes off and put them in the washer

Dont touch or sit in any chairs or beds

Go the bathroom to take a shower, brush your teeth, etc

Now you can hug your family

CLEANUPTIME