Creative HRM: WFH forever?

How all firms struggle to find new ways to retain talents post-WFH era?

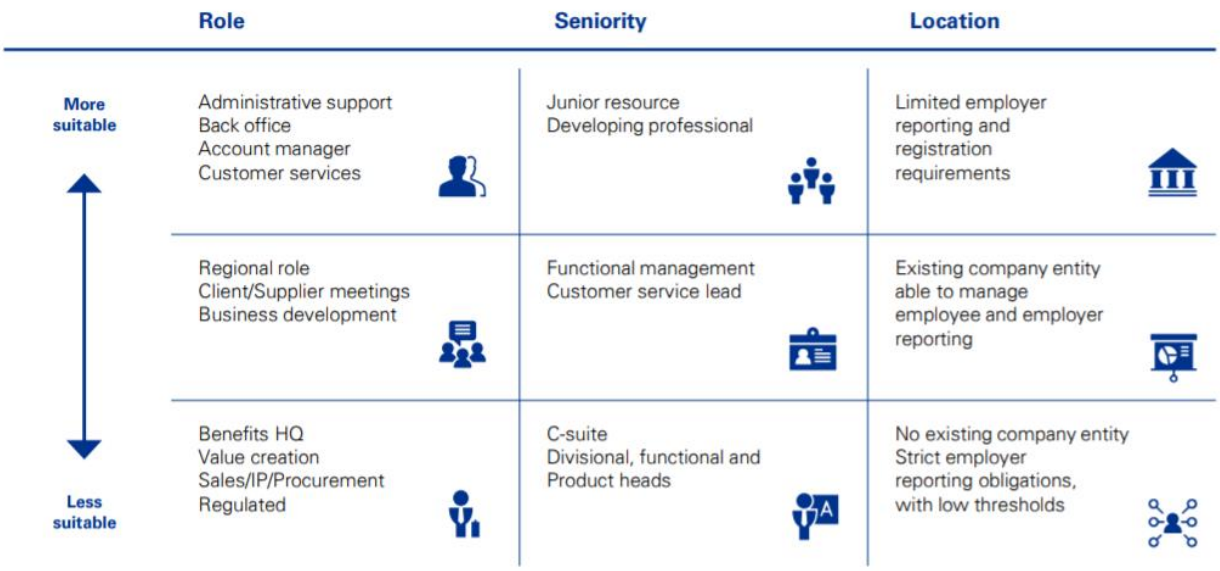
2021, over a year went by with no sight of returning to normal daily lives. When trips from the bedroom to the t-shirt board meetings in your living room is endless, dogs are probably the most exciting thing in our everyday lives. And when global lockdowns feel like forever, many managers and global corporate leaders are wondering how they could retain their talents and keep them happy to work for shareholders. Since, working for any corporate on earth will feel the exact same way. Wake up-shower-t-shirt-living room-Zoom-dinner-bedroom, repeat. And working for google or just your local consulting company will feel exactly the same way. We know for a fact, that humans, as social animals, don't work well with Zoom beer parties and online events. As well as, online meetings can only bring up only a certain level of understanding when you only see half of the colleagues' faces from 5,000 miles away. Yes, activities as social animals might return to restaurants and longed for trips post-pandemic. However, WFH might stay for a very long time. Afterall, who wants to commute 2 hours a day in the painful traffic just to sign some silly bureaucratic unnecessary documents.

Corporates in the supremely disruptive eras such as 2020-2021 have adapted to forever policies such as Work Anywhere, Shared Services, Agile and Lean, while some global corporates are complaining that their employees especially the younger millennials don't want to get back to the normal 9to5 work life (more like 9to9).

We've all read or heard about the 'Great Resignation', where employees are quitting their jobs at an unprecedented rate for more favorable work situations, or simply taking some time off. According to a recent report by Monster.com, as many as 95% of employees are considering changing jobs.

While many of these statistics apply to individuals in the services industry, similar concerns apply to the tech industry. A recent survey from Prudential suggests that 26% of workers plan to leave their employers after the pandemic, and 72% said the pandemic caused them to rethink their skill sets. Of those looking for new jobs, half of people currently working remotely say if their current company does not offer remote work options long term, they'll look for a job at a company that does. The implications for shifting most or all a company's workforce back to the office are also significant. They range from planning around real estate expenditures to how to change the way they operate their IT and business process functions and how they can encourage their supply chain partners to do the same.

Companies need to be sensitive around bringing people back to work in the office. A significant portion of the workforce may not want to go back to the office; forcing them to do so will motivate them to leave – a situation particularly risky in the current acute talent shortage. Particularly in companies whose workforce leverages younger demographics, forcing them to return to the office could quickly become an acute problem.



Some companies are actively establishing their own work anywhere policies as well as ramping up shared services i.e. Global Business Services (GBS) centers offshore, or expanding their existing GBS centers, in addition to outsourcing more work to offshore third-party service providers. However, creating a shared service for each function is not an overnight task. Moving only organizational boxes only creates more complexity and requires much more communication if the right work systems and good communication tools are not in place. For example, a company might decide it is better to do shared service of IT and purchasing to reduce cost and processing load. However, their IT capability might not be able to respond immediately to the WFH requests and might need to purchase a few more

laptops to facilitate changes in the WFH era. All of a sudden, you will have internal customers who are on 24/7 Zoom calls with clients yelling at you to why purchasing of one computer needs 3 months of internal of approval. This only adds fuel to the flame when the IT unit is already crippled from all the IT issues that arise daily from working remotely. While some functions such as operations, engineering, and production might not be able to WFH forever, all of the service functions e.g. finance, strategy, marketing and sales can definitely work at the beach for all anyone would care, as long as, they deliver results. Afterall, your CFO's brain would not be effected by his shorts by the beach. In fact, several social studies even promote that one would think much better when in less stressful and open environment such as the beach.

The other critical barrier, in the pre-pandemic era, to extreme WFH and supreme, shared services might have also been culture, processes and procedures. These unhealthy and ineffective dull processes also must be 'slain' for the ease of doing business and sanitation control reasons. Government agencies are very much used to not taking any of their own risks and require endless meaningless protocols of face2face meetings and physical signings. Therefore, communication on social chat platforms, emails and mobile phones are almost non-existent 'officially', in the bureaucratic era. Dozens of meaningless paperwork had to be printed, rewritten, checked, approved for the 10th time before the messenger deliver the signed physical document actually arrive the client. Physical meetings with dozens of people yawning in pointless meeting rooms are seen daily in less developed bureaucratic countries such as Thailand.

In an era when even the prime minister goes online meetings daily with their COVID-19 doctor teams, everything is now at lightspeed. This also means that administrative work and those redundant physical bureaucratic activities will not return (or face crazy protest from the younger generations). Restructuring the organization of the future is essential when tedious processes seems to be slain by this pandemic, forever.

Yes, we are all social animals, therefore, while working from home forever might seem like a great idea for the younger millennials to escape work to enjoy the beach, a good KPI system must also be in place to administer their performance while they are working (more like skinny dipping and work at night) by the beach in Phuket. Therefore, communication tools such as mobile phones, laptops, internet connections, cloud computing and work systems in corporate offices must be in place. As well as, the culture of slaying of meaningless protocols and processes of paperwork for agility must be embedded. Moreover, for the exact same reason of humans are still social animals, HR should focus on only activities that brings more communication and understanding to each other such as employee relations, internal relations tasks. New year parties, potluck parties, incentive trips are all roots of better connectivity and culture creation. Everyone will be much more excited to join potluck parties while working on the beach, rather than doing the inversed of attending a 5-day meeting in traffic and spend only a few hours at the beach on weekends.

A well crafted work from anywhere policy and plan has been added in the Business Contingency Plan (BCP) in 2020 in every corporates around the world automatically, to ensure that the system and company still works, during this tough time. Why would it be a barrier to use it forever post-pandemic time for better efficiency? With more of the workforced used to working from their living room and by the beach, Strategic HR must be smart enough to craft a good balance of work from anywhere policy to sustain further in thi post-pandemic era.