

The importance of modern communication tools during the pandemic

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Overview

Humans have witnessed more technological advancements within the last two decades than in the past thousand years. In today's hyper focused world where information is readily available and accessible at one's fingertips, it is hard to imagine how people lived even in the early 20th century. Profits of corporations have surged, and the overall living standards of the general population have improved markedly. Innovations occur for making a person's life easy but even we couldn't imagine how much these innovations have taken over our very existence which has led to an overwhelming shift from individual needs to corporate needs. We have all heard of the saying that time is money, and this is especially true for the business world. The ability to write emails, make and sign documents on the go and transfer information from one device to another would not be possible without magical communication devices like smartphones and laptops. Come to think of it the internet itself is a "digital" communication device.

Technology in the workplace

Before we get to the bedrock of our discussion, we should carefully examine how scientific evolution has enabled and empowered a seamless spread of information. A few decades ago, preparing the financial statements for a company would be a daunting task involving hand-written numbers and making tedious calculations. Take the invention of a simple device like an electronic calculator which gave computational accuracy for mundane tasks. Now we have software packages like Microsoft Excel which allow the same jobs to be done neatly.

To keep a company's operations running smoothly and proficiently making use of modern and innovative technologies is imperative. Everything ranging from record keeping, handling payrolls, customer on-boarding to talking to people hundreds of thousands of miles away, technology has allowed us to transcend barriers. Improved software and hardware solutions are helping corporations boost productivity in the workplace, reduce anxiety and keep of track of long-term goals. Furthermore, with the power of a few lines of computer code we have eliminated the need for many jobs thereby allowing humans to focus on the important stuff.

Just before COVID-19 hit, face-to-face meetings were already becoming a thing of the past. The upside of virtual communication is that it allows colleagues to coordinate with each other faster and share their work with their superiors in real time. Tools which allow screen sharing, real-time file sharing during a meeting are on track to make the practicing of emailing obsolete. With the arrival of cloud storage and the ease of accessibility, employees can work from the comfort of their own homes on their laptops or tablets.

Improvements in communication tools are allowing us to enter into an era of transparency and are transforming the traditional corporate leadership roles for the better thereby giving all stakeholders a seat in the decision-making process. Another important aspect of using modern communication gadgets is the ability to hire off-site employees. This unfettered access to talent saves office costs, provides the opportunity of a diverse work force and ensures better engagement.

COVID-19 has accelerated the paradigm shift

With the end of the previous decade several things were already witnessing impactful changes, but the COVID-19 pandemic has just accelerated that timeline. The lightning fast digitization of all activities from learning to working means that every aspect of people's lives went through a dramatic adjustment just for the purpose of keeping us sane till the health emergency died down. Just take the example of office jobs which have all gone remote. Corporations around the world are using a significant chunk of their cash flows to cut down on office spaces and increase the benefits to employees for staying at home. This "black swan" event has proved to be an eye opener for businesses who have been reluctant to explore new technologies especially with the world moving towards de-globalization and a severe demand crash. Cash-strapped companies which are wary of bringing their employees back out of the fear of health emergencies are looking for ingenious ways to keep themselves afloat by turning to systematic communication methods to keep their operations running.

Dissecting the communication tools being used in the new paradigm

Globally when the pandemic-induced lockdowns first went into effect it was as if all major natural disasters had hit at the same time. Everyone ranging from government entities, the world's largest organizations, educational institutions, small businesses etc. had no clue how to react other than to hunker down and wait out the storm. However, it was evident that the pandemic and its effects would last much longer than expected and people had to adapt rapidly or risk a collapse of social order. Government mandates made it clear which services were classified as essential and which weren't. This gave companies in all sectors a way to figure out how to divide their employees (depending on the sector) and integrate technological tools which were already slowly creeping in.

Let's take the example of the largest social network: Facebook. Since they did not manufacture a physical product, they mandated that all employees must stay at home for at least the remainder of the year. Corporations (especially in the tech sector) like Facebook have the budgets to easily incorporate digitization seamlessly. Let's shift our focus to a

different company in a different sector for example PepsiCo. Now most employees on the frontlines which are involved in the manufacturing and shipping process will be at risk so adoption of digital tools for communication is difficult. However, office-based employees will opt for working from home and use remote working tools like Microsoft Teams, Slack & Zoom to keep connected with each other and their managers.

Every piece of technology be it hardware or software including the smartphones, laptops Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts etc. is seeing a massive jump in usage with the onset of the crisis. These tools are important for collaboration and smaller companies especially in the services industry with teams of less than 500 people are relying heavily on these methods. To understand the shift let's look at Zoom a videoconferencing company which was founded in 2011. In April 2020 it was reported that usage on Zoom had exploded by almost 20 times since December 2019. A significant portion of this jump can be attributed to corporate usage. This gave Zoom a market capitalization that was higher than that of the 7 largest airlines in the US. This is just one example of how the pandemic accelerated much needed change.

Modern communication technology has revolutionized the way we work daily. This ability to work from anywhere at any time means that more opportunities are available for people throughout the world because companies can attract talent which does not need to sit in an office. Less people travelling also means that there is less pollution and while the effect is not much, something is better than nothing. Let's look at the aspect of networking without which most businesses cannot survive. Corporate social networks like LinkedIn is one of the most widely used communication tools in the professional world. The accessibility provided by such an application is transforming the science of business dealings and maximizing potential for both organizations and individuals.

Evaluating the pros & cons of modern communication gadgets in the “new world”

Companies that have welcomed digitization are more adaptable to changing situations and would never completely return to the pre-pandemic style of work. They will adopt a new hybrid model which would involve a mixture of both work from home and the office. The increased use of communication tools will streamline operational inefficiencies and automate mundane tasks thereby increasing productivity on the end of the employer and providing a better experience for the end customer or client. While many businesses are reluctant to adopt new methods especially in an uncertain environment, digital transformation is not a huge investment. If done correctly it can actually be used to control costs and can sustain the business over the long run. However, using these tools would obviously put a strain on mental health. Cybersecurity threats and data breaches are a real

concern when it comes to communication technologies. Overall technology has a strong impact in the workplace, and it can enhance any idea due to its power to foster collaboration. Companies that are not taking advantage of such tools risk a sloppy end. Transforming workplace trends is the future and it was always coming at us. COVID-19 has just given us an excuse to do it now.

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