



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WITHIN THE PANDEMIC

MR. OSHADA SENANAYAKE

DIRECTOR GENERAL - TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORY COMMISSION OF SRI LANKA

What was the impact on technology and telecommunication as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Sri Lanka?

There was an overnight change in home fronts, business fronts and school fronts with the declaration of a lockdown state of the country and

MR. OSHADA SENANAYAKE A VISIONARY BUSINESS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROFESSIONAL WITH OVER 15+ YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN CORPORATE MANAGEMENT, STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION, BUSINESS ANALYSIS, PROCESS OPTIMIZATION, SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY MANAGEMENT WITH EXPOSURE IN WORKING ACROSS MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS AND COUNTRIES (INCLUDING SRI LANKA, US AND UK). HE IS CURRENTLY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF TRCSL-TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORY COMMISSION OF SRI LANKA.

people were compelled to move to online platforms in order to continue with their daily lifestyles.

There was an overnight spike in the use of mobile and other computing devices and telecommunication as majority companies declared work from home and educational institutes introduced online teaching. On the other hand, with the increase in usage of telecommunication, the risks of threats to cyber security and cybercrimes increased.

Therefore, we can see that there was an overnight digital transformation in Sri Lanka due to COVID-19. With this unplanned digital transformation as the TRCSL our main concerns were on how to monitor the increased usage of devices, to protect the users from cybercrimes, to facilitate the demand for telecommunication, to remove infrastructural barriers in accessing telecommunication and, to provide concessions to the users who were going through difficult times due to COVID-19.

As the main facilitator of telecommunication what were the actions taken by the TRCSL during this digital transformation amidst the COVID-19 lockdown period?

The actions taken by the TRCSL in a short span of time to ensure continuous connectivity of Sri Lankans scattered island wide includes provision of e-learning solutions to school children (eg: E- Thakshalawa), introduction of special work from home and study from home connection packages at concessionary rates in collaboration with leading telecommunication service,



“The TRCSL managed to respond COVID-19 successfully mainly due to the digital transformation that took place within the organization since the staff of TRCSL started to work online from 19th March 2020, immediately after the impose of lockdown in Sri Lanka”

network mapping and improvement of telecommunication infrastructure and not barring connections due to non-payment during the lockdown period.

On the other hand, the TRCSL staff was dedicated to ensure that the contact fronts of the government COVID-19 response units and COVID-19 fighters were

kept intact without any technical disruptions to smoothen the COVID-19 response of the government.

The TRCSL managed to respond COVID-19 successfully mainly due to the digital transformation that took place within the organization since the staff of TRCSL started to work online from 19th March 2020 which is immediately since the impose of lockdown status in Sri Lanka.

A sudden digital transformation within an organization is generally resisted by the employees. What was the reaction of the staff members of TRCSL with regard to this digital transformation?

The TRCSL was on the verge of digitalization since December 2019 and the COVID-19 accelerated the process of digital transformation.

The staff members reacted to the digital transformation that took place within the organization in a positive note and adopted quickly to the changes that occurred around them. The enthusiasm and the cohesion of the employees were notably high.

Despite some staff members not having mobile devices and accessibility to telecommunication facilities at the initial stages of online working, the TRCSL managed to get all employees on board through provision of infrastructure.

The dedication, commitment and the enthusiasm of the staff members with regard to the digital transformation resulted in an increase in productivity which led to the TRCSL manage the digital transformation successfully exceeding expectations.



What are the lessons that the TRCSL learnt from COVID -19 as an organization?

Digitalization improves cohesion between members of the organization, telecommuting improves productivity (productivity does not depend on physical presence), changes should be welcomed and accepted and, the importance of work-life balance are important key lessons learnt by TRCSL during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

What are your key insights of COVID-19 that would help to boost the telecommunication industry?

The TRCSL identified changes that should be done in the industry to further boost the industry.

Firstly, the telecommunication service providers should facilitate the mobile agility of the users which improves the competitiveness of the

“ Digitalization improves cohesion between members of the organization, telecommuting improves productivity (productivity does not depend on physical presence), changes should be welcome and acknowledged and, the importance of work-life balance are important key lessons learnt during the COVID-19 lockdown period ”

service providers.

Secondly, the laws regarding telecommunication and cyber-crimes should be updated continuously.

What are your key insights of COVID-19 that would help to boost the Sri Lankan economy?

Firstly, I believe that COVID-19 should not be used as an excuse but as an opportunity to implement changes by individuals, organization, the government and the entire

community.

Secondly, the business models of enterprises should be revisited and amended to address the modern needs in the world and to move ahead with the technological developments that are being taken place.

The government organizations should make this an opportunity to embrace change and transform themselves for the betterment of everyone.

By Tharani Sooriyaarachchi and Hasini Gunasekera