

# STAYING STRONG WITHIN CHAOS ACCELERATION OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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**As a leading business organization in Sri Lanka what was the impact of COVID-19 on your business organization?**

**A**s you know we serve customers globally; we cater to more than twenty countries around

the world. Many businesses are impacted with COVID 19 such as businesses that are involved in travel and hospitality. Thankfully, a large part of our business is on the banking financial services which have not been impacted as the same way compared to other industries. From our customers perspective, they are observing

the manner we instantaneously accelerate their digital facilities where they can remotely work with their customers without having any contact under this prevailing situation. I think the biggest impact obviously is that everybody had to completely shift their way of working to a new model, as you know we have



moved 25,000 people to work from home. That is a big change for Asian countries because we are not used to it, but in European countries they have been practicing that working from home model. Many Sri Lankans on the contrary do not have all the facilities to achieve that under our infrastructure. For us it was not a big issue because we have been practicing this model since few years by moving our systems to cloud databases where the employees can access the data from anywhere and it was like a natural switch since majority of our work has been done remotely. Hence our business model is a lot more resilient during this crisis and we did not face major issues.

### **How did you analyze the issues of the existing situation during the COVID-19?**

It was really about changing and adopting to the situation. I don't think we can ever come back to where we were before. So it's all about how quickly you can transfer and adopt to the remote and digital working environment. In the meantime we must make sure that your income is consistent, so that it will help to sustain your business while you are recalibrating your business model.

### **How did you harness the power of technology to cope with the unexpected crisis?**

I think with every crisis brings a new set of heroes where some people go to the extent of risking their lives to save another's life. With COVID I think there are three sets of groups that I can consider as heroes. The first group is the medical professionals that act as



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the front-line heroes. The second group is the people who deliver goods such as food, essentials etc. all the way from farmers to our doorstep. And the third is technological people where they come and save the livelihood by providing facilities to continue your job, reaching your customers and providing all the digital support people need. Thus, technology plays a huge role in this pandemic situation where everything happens online. So, every individual involved in business has now realized the importance of technology to run

the business. What COVID has done is that it accelerated the change and transformation of all business models.

### **How did COVID-19 accelerated digital transformation in your workplace?**

As I mentioned earlier there has been a few initiatives such as moving to cloud, working remotely of which the implementation was accelerated due to COVID. Along with that we have switched to the





mobile as well. Due to the implementation of new platform, the work is so efficient that 90% tasks can be done via the mobile application. It really helped people since they could manage their other work efficiently as well. Also, we took measures to increase the information security; when everything gets digitalized more vulnerabilities can occur. It has been found that during the epidemic cyber-attacks have been increased significantly since many people are online and are using digitalized platforms to run their day to day lives.

### **What was the reaction of the employees towards the increased use of technology?**

I think we've received more positive feedbacks and comments from employees and we had used these models thankfully even prior to this pandemic situation. Hence people were able to adopt very quickly for these technological strategies. For example, most of the people started

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using MS Teams with the emergence of this pandemic but we started using Teams 3 years ago. Thanks to those features and facilities anybody could work from anywhere, where you can chat, use whiteboards and conduct meetings and do whatever the collaboration you want to do in a productive manner. Our mantra has been working from home or work from anywhere with these features and facilities and our team members and employees are utilizing the online platforms quite efficiently.

### **Did you try any new innovative strategies using modern technology? Were they successful?**

We wanted to initiate completely paperless work. During this pandemic situation we did not stop hiring people and due to that reason, we had to go for paperless process with e-signatures etc. And the other thing was we developed AI bots for tech supports. There are a bunch of bots we were able to





deploy during this period and one of the bots we deployed was for billing process; it has taken care of more than 76% of work by itself with a high user satisfaction rate. If I brief again, going paperless, increasing information security and deploying AI bots are the things we mainly focused during this time period.

### What communication methods did you use to communicate with your employees during this period? How did the participants react to your methods of communication?

I think it's very important to improve process of communication during this situation because majority of people at home don't have anybody to talk to. Therefore, we had to boost the communication a lot. In fact, we increased monthly meetings with our team to stay connected with them and to identify their ideas and

challenges. When considering about technologies we used MS Teams a lot for voice and video conferencing. Also, we used secured WhatsApp groups to chat with our members. In early days we had only emails to communicate and that was not very successful because people are not able to collaborate more in those platforms. But nowadays with the evolving new technological platforms, people can interact more with each other and do collaborative work efficiently specially with modern social media platforms. We have acquired two companies in this period fully remotely with the help of those technologies and also, we worked with them 100% via MS Teams and electronic platforms. So the digitalization process was very helpful and very effective during this prevailing situation.

### Was there a performance gap? How did you manage the post and present

### COVID-19 performance gap?

we observed a huge increase in productivity immediately after COVID because people are at home not going anywhere and they have more time to focus on their work. I think most people in the technological space have the tools and the ability to work with those technologies. Hence I don't see a huge gap in performance. We had noticed that the office atmosphere was a bit inefficient, however, when working remotely was initiated, everything gets arranged well; meetings are properly planned, and nobody disturbs you when you are working. These changes increased the productivity. There are some persistent issues such as internet connection issues, power outages etc. which result in decreasing the productivity. So, as I mentioned there are both positives and challenges as well.

### What are the lessons learnt at the pace of crisis?

I think the pandemic has been strongly influential specially in the case of digital acceleration. The second factor is the increased awareness about the damage done to the environment; when people are away from the environment the air quality is improved so each and every business needs to be environment friendly because we all already noticed the strong impact. The final lesson is the self-realization of the significance of one's personal wellbeing. I think it's a good awakening for most of the people and now they are a lot more concerned about these factors because they have identified the importance.

By Pramudya Thilakaratne