

MANAGEMENT DECISIONS IN THE AGE OF PANDEMIC SITUATIONS

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Abstract: Covid-19 pandemic has brought about revolutionary changes not only in the consumption patterns of consumers across the globe but also in the respective production-lines of various Companies and Organizations. Governments and Business Organizations across the world have risen to the occasion and brought about Digital Platforms, Web-based Conferencing, Zoom-based E-Learning for purposes of education and above all, contact-less working environment. This article traces out such initiatives world-wide in terms of their rapid changing decision-making to suit to the current global business environment.

Key words: Pandemic, Global, Digital Platforms, Online, Organizations, E-learning.

Introduction

Covid-19 pandemic struck initially the Wuhan region of China and further on, it spread its tentacles to the Countries in Europe and to America during Jan – Mar 2020. It took no time to spread to the other nations in the world. Thus, the entire global population, has been compelled to bear the brunt of this deadly virus.

The impact of this Covid-19 has been so disastrous that even the most advanced nations in terms of medical infrastructure like USA, Italy, Spain, Germany, UK etc. are found wanting to handle the patients suffering from Covid-19. The initial global reaction towards this Virus has been panic, followed by appropriate treatment by means of hospitalization. The high mortality rates in US and Europe have rattled the global conscience. Individual Nations began to gear up with their available medical infrastructure including the professional Doctors, Nurses and other para medical staff.

Tracing, Testing and Treatment have become the Mantra of every nation. While on the one hand, every country has been grappling with the spread of the virus in their populations rapidly leading the Governments announcing total Lockdowns, on the other hand, the Scientific communities across all the nations began to focus their attention on the

development and testing of an appropriate Vaccine suitable to diverse human populations.

While the Lockdowns imposed by various countries have yielded some results in terms of less rapid spread of the virus among their populations, one of the important unintended consequences, has been the breakdown of the Global Economy. Almost all the countries in the World have restricted the movement of goods and services in their countries, while the Global Air Travel has come to a grinding halt. The disastrous spread of the pandemic virtually forced people in general to their homes.

Changes in decision making by companies across the world

The current pandemic has already caused endless disruptions to businesses. Many industries have been negatively impacted, while almost 75% of companies have witnessed capacity disruptions to their supply chains. Across the globe, businesses and individuals have reacted admirably to the new ways of living, working and communicating. People have adjusted their working set ups to be based from home, and many have thrived in spite of zero physical meetings, conferences and events.

Online global & local interactions as the new norm

Online interactions have replaced physical interaction with platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Slack etc. being used in place of physical meetings, conferences and events. Many of these have been surprisingly successful and productive.

Of course, there is no replacement for physical interactions, but so many of us have adjusted to the current set up (children as well as adults). Accepting it despite how stressful or difficult, it may be.

Changing consumption patterns

One of the biggest impacts of Covid-19 on consumption patterns. The most notable change is in a dramatic reduction of discretionary spending such as footwear, clothing, accessories, travel, food and entertainment out of home.

Some of the many areas where spending patterns have increased include:

- Groceries
- At home fitness solutions
- Mental health care and solutions
- Home entertainment
- People tracking/data security
- New health care equipment and resources
- Online education resources
- Online classical dance/music classes/concerts
- Online interactive experiences, for example, museums, zoos, theaters etc.

Innovation is the key

Many businesses have been left with no other choice but to innovate or disappear during these unprecedented times. Countless businesses have stepped up to the challenge by re-designing, transforming and diversifying their product or service offering to cater to new consumer demands.

One recent example includes Spiffy – a US Car Cleaning Service which has created a new service to sanitize facilities and properties. Another includes Tunisian Taxi Start Up INTIGO, which has temporarily transformed into a Delivery Service.

Digitization is the new mantra

Covid-19 has expedited the move to digital. Organizations are now digitizing aspects of their business that they may not have earlier. Sales force customers are also accelerating digital transformation in areas like employee and end-customer engagement. In fact, sales force care solutions are specifically designed to help business, stay connected which customers, employees, and partners through the pandemic.

Innovation aiding technology

In many countries including India lockdowns are ending. Industries are re-starting operations and businesses are re-opening. But underlying this gradual return to life is the knowledge that things will never be the same. We are entering a new normal where the success of a business will depend on how quickly it can pivot and innovate.

PVR Cinemas, for example, redesigned their on-line ticket booking process to ensure that no two customers are seated next to each other. Box office ticket counters are set to become contactless and paperless. Customers will simply need to scan a QR Code to book seats or to buy snacks. Such innovative measures will strengthen customer trust and make people feel safer and more confident about engaging with businesses again.

How smart phone companies have adapted during covid-19 to ensure accessibility?

The use of phones as tools for work and education, there were a lot more reasons they were needed for. Right from obtaining the latest developments around Covid-19, to being the primary source of entertainment for millions in the country. The sudden boom in data consumption in the last few months is evident of the surge in the usage of smart phones.

In fact, the data consumption increased to a limit where COAI had to reach out to the DOT to ask streaming Players like Hotstar, Netflix & Amazon Prime Video to lower their Video quality so that ISPs (Internet Service Provider) could still offer high-speed internet access to users across the country.

Solutions were made by the Smart Phone companies keeping the new normal of customers being vary of stepping out to make purchases. Xiaomi, India's largest smart phone Player announced their 'Mi Commerce' initiative that leveraged their expansive off-line retail chain to ensure customers could receive products from the comfort of their homes.

The new hyper local solution allowed customers to simply drop a message on WhatsApp or log on to <https://local.mi.com/> to see the inventory of shops closest to their location. Once an interest is expressed, the shops will get in touch to confirm the Order and deliver the products to the customer's doorstep. This special initiative is built to ensure ease of purchase, keep partners and customers safe, and foster business continuity.

Vivo and Samsung also introduced similar solutions.

How other companies/government organizations have adapted to the new normal

Military establishments across the world have helped by using military hospitals to treat Civilian Covid-19 patients, transporting civilian patients to less crowded hospitals and delivering supplies such as face masks, gloves, food, and tests to non-mobile members of the population.

Many breweries and beauty companies have begun making hand sanitizers, athletic companies have re-proposed to create face shields, and car companies around the world have assisted with ventilator production.

Additionally, 3 D Printing Companies have also adapted to use their Printer for respirator valves, medical masks and other medical supplies. Some clothing manufacturers have also started producing surgical gowns and medical masks.

Restaurants offering take away food only – many restaurants have started to experiment with on-line/mobile ordering, if they weren't doing it already and are relying heavily on traditional methods of phone ordering. This has certainly presented challenges for small businesses that do not already have the infrastructure in place of larger corporations.

Artists live-streaming solo concerts: Some artists across the globe have gotten creative and have started to hold virtual concerts. Artists such as Chris Martin, John Legend etc. posted their live-streamed concerts on You Tube videos, and utilized Instagram live during this time to provide free shows and to entertain their audiences.

Schools all over the world have come up with new and innovative ways to teach using technology like virtual white boards, live TV broadcast, and interactive Apps. The outbreak of Covid-19 has completely transformed that as students around the world have now adapted their studies online.

Hindustan Unilever Limited responded to the major shifts in consumer demand since March, 2020. HUL launched Domex Spray for use in Homes and Offices, Lifebuoy Laundry Sanitizer, Lifebuoy Alcohol based multi-surface Spray- all to provide the best hygiene solutions for the consumers.

HDFC Bank has introduced a number of digital and on-line initiatives to reach to their customers. For instance, one such initiative was HDFC Customer Connect, a one-stop convergence platform for all Customer Requests. In the housing finance space, they were the first ones, to focus on on-line loan processing which helped during the lockdown. About 80% of HDFC's business has migrated to digital sourcing. To cater to the customers deposits are being serviced online.

Orderly goes digital to provide virtual services

Orderly set out to make some changes. Their adjustments included introducing a virtual organizing service with multiple packages to help customers get organized, stay sane, and keep their homes clean.

Find ways to provide value to their customers through digital platforms when face to face meetings aren't an option.

Weird Enough Productions gives customers something for free to help support the Teachers suddenly forced to develop virtual lessons for their students to complete from home. Weird Enough Productions made its platform get media literature and accompanying lessons free for educators. The organization also released every issue of one of its

comics for free to give students access to its diverse stories.

Building some good-will, customers can now go a long way later. Found a way to give their customer a valuable resource or service for free and stay in touch about opportunities for them to purchase other services later.

Piroshky Piroshky expands delivery services & connects with customers.

Olga Sagn Owner of Pike Place Market bakery Piroshky Piroshky has stepped up to help other business owners in the iconic Seattle market stay afloat. Her bakery already had a delivery service, so she expanded her Website and delivery capabilities to include other businesses in the market in the spirit of helping out her community she is not charging her fellow business owners for participation.

Tultex redirects apparel production to create facemasks

Apparel brand Tultex has a history of adapting to nation-wide needs. During World War II, the company produced garments for the US Military. And today, the Company has pivoted its production strategy to supply up to 2 million washable Face masks per week primarily to Professionals in the Health Care Industry. Some will even be available to consumers.

Changing investment strategies during pandemic

Since the pandemic business demand has dropped, putting organizations under immense pressure to cut costs. PVR Cinemas, for instance, has seen its Cloud Operating Expenses drop almost 70% to 80%. At the same time, the Company is aggressively investing in strategic initiatives around customer engagement, personalization, and loyalty programmes.

Other Organizations are upping their spend on digital technologies like Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The objective is to 'pandemic-proof' their businesses.

Meanwhile, sales force is seeing that some customers like ADTECH Companies, had their investment in digitization. They are better able to manage high sales volumes, while also engaging customers and teachers.

Employees & managers adapted to the digital new normal

Even before the pandemic, many organizations had implemented Cloud Conferencing Solutions and other collaborative technologies to help employees connect and work digitally. But the uptake of these tools tended to be slow and inconsistent.

That has changed over the past few months. Consumer durable manufacturer, USHA International has found that even the most tech-resistant employees are adopting to new ways of collaboration. They have realized that virtual conferencing and other communication tools can help them accomplish just as much at home as they would in the office, boosting their productivity by adopting new technologies more digital implementations will be successful.

Focus shifted to outcomes rather than intense individual scrutiny

As employees continue to work from home, the challenge for Organizations is to ensure that they stay productive while there are lots of tools to monitor employees' key board strokes or to track how they spent their time online, these insights aren't necessarily a measure of productivity.

Instead more organizations are looking at outcomes. Are employees completing their task? Are they meeting pre-defined deadlines and targets? How does their output align with key result areas?

These matrixes are more important than checking whether or not employees are at their laptops all day.

E-learning is also in focus.

No employee likes to have his/her every move monitored. Managers need to believe that once clear tasks and timelines are set, employees will care enough about their Organization and work to want to do a good job.

Care signal creates a service line to provide covid-19 education

Covid Companion is a text message-based program that helps get location-based outbreak resources as well as CDC Guidelines to communities and patients. CARE Signal prepared the program to be implemented immediately for free at any health system or pair in the United States.

Conclusion

We are living in ever-changing times in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, but as they say, change always offers people an opportunity. It's easy to get into our routine and stay with it, but when a challenging circumstance switches things up, this is our opportunity to adapt and grow.

Although COVID-19 has been financially devastating to many industries around the world, it's also great to see how many of those industries, companies, and individuals have come together to work towards a solution and innovate in a way that will make them stronger once this all passes.

COVID-19 has taken the world by surprise as millions of people are hoping to stop the spread of the virus through social distancing. With states of emergency declared in many locations, communities are rallying together to get through this time.

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