

COVID-19 and its galvanizing impact on technology in the workplace

Original post from: www.avantleadership.com/blog



Part 4 in our blog series about COVID-19 as a forcing function in the workplace: How it's leading to progress whether we're ready for it or not

A year ago, if someone said they would set up a Zoom meeting the majority of us would not have known what they were talking about. Virtual meetings have taken over in absence of in-person meetings, but that's only the tip of the iceberg. Technology has burst into our lives in ways we could have never have imagined, and it has served as a savior as we've adjusted to the abrupt removal of day-to-day interaction with our colleagues and team members (not to mention family and friends).



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I reached out to 20 or so leaders from organizations of all shapes and sizes, spanning multiple industries in the public, private and academic sectors, to gain insights about the impact COVID-19 was having on their business and their industry.

Technology was a clear solution and will continue to be so moving forward.

Relationships

There has been a strong focus on technology with employees and driving aligned organizational communication. A shift has also appeared in leveraging technology with customers. The sales function may soon be overhauled. Companies and their customers were seeing a new way of working together in ongoing relationships, as well as building new partnerships. The difference between a visit and a video meeting with a customer is not inconsequential. The savings – time, money, wear and tear – that come with initial prospecting discussions via video versus travel could be tremendous.

Meetings

Managers enhanced their meeting prep to build alignment, engagement and productivity. For example, something as simple as asking for questions in advance of a meeting created more energy in the meeting, as well as enabled participation from folks who may normally observe rather than be active. Leaders became more intentional to ensure input from all employees in the new work-from-home environment.

Adoption

Many organizations have had their hearts set on new technologies but had too many other things on their plates, or inertia working against such roll outs. The pandemic accelerated adoption and most believed the adoption would stick beyond the new normal.

Yes but

Most voiced strong support for technology during the work-from-home environment. There were some buts, however. Some companies indicated that their lack of readiness (infrastructure and/or equipment) was revealed. Many of the organizations suggested that projects were moving at a slower pace than being in the office building, despite employee sentiments that they are more productive at home. These may not be mutually exclusive views. Employees may feel more productive with reduced “drop in” visits, while at the same time projects may slow because the 30-second hallway chat while walking out of a meeting does not occur. Now for those “in between” moments to occur, a person must schedule a conference or video call.



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Leadership Coaching Tips

Jump in:

Seize this time as an opportunity to adopt technology to aid internal and enhance community and customer connections.

Turn it on:

Whenever possible turn on your video camera for internal and external meetings; it enriches relationships and communication in ways a traditional teleconference cannot.

Informal Coaching:

Leverage technology to replace the “drop ins” and “hallway chats” where informal coaching and feedback used to occur.

LUMEN is one of those technologies.



<https://www.avantleadership.com/lumen/>

COVID has prompted organizations to look at how they work and clearly has increased technology adoption. At the same time there has been an increased awareness of just how much is accomplished during the “in-between,” for example, walking down a hallway or the 30-second exchange exiting a meeting. Companies will need to find ways to drive projects forward. Platforms like Slack or Basecamp can help for project-related matters; however, those are not the proper forums for informal feedback or coaching an employee. Overall, the virus has accelerated the adoption of technology but there are still trade-offs to be understood and solved.

This is part four in a five-part blog series. Watch for the final blog that addresses Employee Safety in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and also check out my previous blogs about leadership and financial performance.