

## COVID-19 HAS ACCELERATED DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PULSE

Before the COVID-19 disruption, very few could feel the pulse of digital technology and innovation. Online governance and management engagements were next to non-existent. COVID-19, or coronavirus - as we came to know it, changed and disrupted the playing field. The advent of the global coronavirus lockdowns hassled the ultimate final nail and elevated nervousness. The traditional office working model collapsed. A significant proportion of executives, especially *baby boomers* and *Gen X*, became tech-converted at a fast rate and scrambled to adopt virtual environments, to retain existence and support productivity. For many, that meant having to absorb and ingest decades of change almost overnight and to *fix broken windows* on the eleventh hour.

For the tech-dependent and tech-connected, there was un-paralleled but determined paradigm shift. For the less tech-connected, as observed in the hospitality sectors, amongst others, a near total collapse became eminent. COVID-19 triggered the way we interact, view and see everything. The formula and essence of basic human rights, as most know it, became a matter of guided principle. COVID-19 triggered and accelerated the adoption of digital technologies and innovation thinking. Almost everyone was fast exposed to unprecedented digital technologies and transformation, from *Baby-boomers* to *Millennials* to *Gen Z*, who quickly and humbly accepted remote working or remote studying as part of the new norm. A lion's-leap became obvious as incentives to advance technologies that support effective modalities as working away from offices is becoming more prevalent. For that matter, private homes and residences are becoming office workplaces and educational institutions.



By speculation, working away from traditional offices became a bigger share of all work considerations. In essence, remote working became synonymous with many jargons, amongst others: telecommuting, teleconference, teleworking, mobile work, flexible work, flexible workplace, work from home, remote work, remote workplace, video conferencing, virtual office, virtual work, home-based office, home-based work, work from anywhere, digital workplace, online work, work from a remote location, etc.

Traditional theories would suggest that opportunities and creativity emerge from disruptive circumstances. These obvious observations prompt one to ponder and submissively accept that COVID-19 has shifted the direction and pace of digital transformation and innovation. Amidst the pandemic, life must go on. In fact, concerted efforts had to be made to pump required oxygen into business veins and save livelihoods. Thanks to un-paralled improvements in digital workspace technology.

With remote working, employees are observed to work beyond an 8-hours work schedule, while balancing work and family life, a key ingredient for employee satisfaction. However, remote work presents challenges and opportunities and may have other implications for the future of the workforce. Stakeholder value creation (i.e., realizing benefits at an optimal resource cost while optimizing risk) is often driven by a high degree of digitisation in new business models, efficient processes, successful innovation, etc. In this regard and as opportunities are harnessed, information security and cyber security risks become eminent.

Given the dependence on technology and new ways of working, Chief Information Officers (CIOs) have a vital role to play in establishing a positive hybrid workplace culture. According to global research and advisory firm, Gartner, predictions of 2019; CIOs were to become an important culture change factor—such predictions are now patently true. Similarly, and according to ISACA—an international professional association focused on IT governance—culture, ethics and behavior of individuals and of the enterprise are often underestimated as factors in the success of enterprise change journey.

An ancient philosopher is often acknowledged for not just saying that “*change is the only constant in life*”, but also that “*the fear of change is also a constant*”. This implies that change is occurring continuously. Every organisation must and will change with every change. However, and keeping the technical jargon at bay, the following key considerations are key in maximising the true value and benefits of change:

- What are the drivers (for change)?
- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- What needs to be done?
- How do we get there?
- Did we get there?
- How do we keep the momentum going?

As the pandemic evolves, leading to changes in how we live and interact, the services of the Fund have become more critical than ever before. In this regard, our information systems (technologies, processes and people) become an important catalyst in achieving its objectives towards excellence service. Supporting remote working is no longer an exception—it is the rule. To this end, the GIPF has invested in critical information systems infrastructures and systems and remains committed to:

- fostering improved governance and modernise security capabilities to resist, detect and respond to emerging cyber threats.
- improving the ability and capabilities for staff to work securely regardless of location.
- delivering better outcomes and efficiency through innovation and excellence in information systems and processes automation.
- Agreeing to service standards with clients and assessing performance levels.
- improving delivery of services through the development of a professional workforce.

These interventions have enabled and continue to provide required levels of automation and self-service capabilities for our members to access and review their benefits entitlements, anytime—anywhere. On this basis, members will require less physical presence at the Fund's premises, and only approach such premises in exceptional cases. Further, these capabilities are key ingredients as we *guard and grow* the Fund for the benefit of its members. The Fund remains confident as it invests in and explore new technologies and processes to deal with and ensure excellence service.

The Fund recognises that digital transformation and innovation are not technology issues—they are a deliberate and foundational change in how the Fund delivers value

to its members. Certainly, this requires the characteristics of a business leader, and a CEO with a unique ancestral business transformation foresight. We remain proud that we have such a resource.

I will leave the in-depth and insight of this aspect for another day. In the meanwhile, whether you agree with me or not it is not easy to innovate and effectively respond to disruptions, unless you are innovative and have the capability to feel the digital transformation pulse.

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