PANDEMIC: WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

October 14, 2021

Richard Busby, M.S.

Tags: Learning Leader, Learning Architecture, Operations Architecture

The 2020-2021 Pandemic disrupted many fairly stable organizations by forcing change and new learning. How it affected your organization, depends on where you started in the following capability areas:

- Policy: Governing rules about "what to do"
- Process: Agreed steps to do work
- Productivity: Quality, speed, volume of work performed, cost containment.
- Physical Environment: The facilities, grounds, utilities, equipment, devices, network etc.

In my own experience, the shift in workplace modality followed this pattern:

1. Work was co-located. One main central location.
2. Then the COVID-19 Pandemic Happened, triggering a rapid shift to remote work.
3. Hybrid Work started: After a year, the workforce began a gradual return to the onsite location, focused at first on front line employees, and concurrently offering greater flexibility to accommodate remote work 1-5 days a week, depending on the role and business requirements.

The three workplace modalities, in my experience, were sequential.
Here are some observations of the impact to 4 areas of capability:

Capability	Co-Located	Remote	Hybrid
Policy	Pre-Covid: Slow policy change	Shift: Policy Change: i.e. Inventory, Performance Evaluation	Employee re-entry criteria (i.e. vaccination, testing requirements, contact tracing, revisiting HIPPA)
Process	Pre-Covid: Slow process change	Shift: Helpdesk, Break/Fix, Clarify Process Ownership, Communication, Contract Mgmt, Learning, onboarding	Onsite testing? Privacy (Vaxed/Unvaxed)? Hybrid team mgmt. Leadership style and attention split
Productivity	Pre-Covid: Slow productivity capability change	Shift: Change curve for productivity, less need for onsite custodial = attrition. Scarcity: roles with onsite dependencies.	Diligence about communicating expectations with clarity
Physical Infrastructure	Pre-Covid: Slow physical infrastructure change	Demand for remote work devices, web-access, support	COVID testing area. Physical distancing for co-located employees

Observations:

1. Pre-COVID optics may cause some leaders to choose not to embrace flexible work modalities such as Hybrid and Remote teams. Leaders that expect to return to the pre-2020 norms, gravitate toward a co-located workforce. This mindset may be missing the value employees place on flexible work.
2. The budget was challenged. Lost revenue, coupled with additional costs incurred to purchase equipment for remote work restricted planned projects and programs.
3. Costs of physical infrastructure. Facilities were underutilized. This make some question the need for large facilities or capital projects.
4. Newly found flexibility in work modality is appealing to many employees. This conflicts with some leadership thinking (see #1)
5. The 2020 pivot to remote work did not mean "we were good at remote work."
6. Recognition that business continuity planning has real value.
7. Managing hybrid teams requires willingness of leaders to learn new skills to motivate, communicate, and engage with people, manage work, and check on the mental well-being of the people   that do the work we sell or provide.

Broadskilling's Take on our Situation
The Future of Work is being formed right before our eyes. What will you choose to do to shape the future of work from where you stand? What did we learn that we can embrace? What did we learn that we need to fix?
Strategy is an ongoing mindset, not a "once and done" document. The past 24 months lead us here. The "Smart money" rests on our choice to keep strategy

alive. Leaders attended to the COVID positivity rate frequently in the first 12 months of 2020. Strategy has to adapt and be communicated with regularity and transparency.

Think Broadly. Learn Deeply.

Richard Busby, M.S. (richard@broadskilling.com)