

FUTURE OF WORK: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR HR?



Webinar Facilitator:
Sajjad Parmar

Sajjad Parmar is the Head of Reward for APAC at eBay, and based in Singapore. eBay Inc. is an American multinational e-commerce corporation based in San Jose, California, that facilitates consumer-to-consumer and business-to-consumer sales through its website. eBay was founded by Pierre Omidyar in 1995, and became a notable success story of the dot-com bubble.

The Asia-Pacific (APAC) is the part of the world in or near the Western Pacific Ocean, and varies in area depending on context, but it generally includes East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania.

TerraBiz & SIMFOTIX Professional Development (UAE) were privileged to have Sajjad speak to a global audience of over 500 people representing 100 companies who registered for the webinar on the question of the future of work from a human resource development viewpoint.

Terrabiz has Hamza Hashmi as its CEO, and has been very active in the human resource development sector



through corporate trainings and the arranging of sector-wise conferences. Together with Qazi Waqas Ahmed he has co-founded SIMFOTIX in the UAE.

With a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from

FAST-NU and an Executive MBA from the University of Adelaide, Sajjad Parmar has been with eBay for 6 years and held his present assignment since 2017. Prior to that he worked with GSK (Regional Reward Manager – Asia, Aug 2013 – Aug 2015) and Unilever (Reward Manager - Asia, Africa, Central & Eastern Europe, Jan 2008 – Sep 2011). Since 2005 Sajjad has volunteered for the Manzil Education Organization, a Non-Profit Organization providing free education to children in the slum areas of Karachi.

Global Village Fragmenting?

Massive change has been in the air for quite some time now, with conflicts and upheavals restricting movement and global populations becoming increasingly clannish, threatening the global village that had emerged post Internet with dreams of a borderless world.

Then the pandemic arrived and caused a radical shift in old established paradigms. It jolted the world out of its rat race fever as it took people out of circulation through quarantines and lockdowns that put paid on conventional livelihoods, forcing people to re-think traditional thinking and get asymmetrical in their approach to life.

Technology enabled work-from-home, as yet merely fashionable speak at coffee parties, now became the only option, with substantial numbers managing to pivot with speed and grace without skipping a beat while the vast majority of blue collar workers fell by the wayside even as COVID-19 extracted an awful, horrific toll on human life.

Analyzing The New Paradigm

How the so-called new normal will manifest in the post pandemic world's workplace was what Sajjad Parmar occupied himself with in detailed fashion, focusing on the trends to lookout for in determining the future of work and the new hybrid system that has been accelerated by the pandemic.

HR's capacity to lead through this change in fundamentals is where the cookie is destined to crumble, with harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) to bring greater value and meaning to employees promising to be the game changer.

WANTED! Thought Leaders

Lead the change and don't let leaders and business tell HR what to do, said Sajjad, exhorting HR functionaries to be thought leaders driving engagement, productivity, employee wellbeing, sustainability and business growth, with imbuing fairness, consistency, transparency and doing the right thing ensuring the balance between company and employee needs, he said.

"HR roles have been very reactive. We are firefighters constantly solving problems. We need to lead the change and be thought leaders, identify gaps, figure out what needs to be done and create value for our self, for the function and for the business."

The pandemic has cause a fundamental shift with hybrid working focused on performance management whether on site or off site, to holistic wellness embracing both financial and emotional wellness of employees with technology and AI powered analytics accelerating the change. "Employees haven't been in their offices for over one year. We have all been forced to work out of our homes. Now our preference between onsite and offsite has fundamentally shifted."

Top Priorities

According to the 2021 Gartner HR Priorities Survey the top organization priorities have included improving operational excellence, growing the business, executive business transformations, optimizing costs, innovating for success and



managing risk and regulatory demands.

Between May 2020 and May 2021 focus was on the key HR

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function of growing the business which has now eased a bit as we better understand the pandemic dynamics. It went down last year but now the focus is back on growth.

In the absence of revenue streams the focus increased on optimizing costs to remain sustainable. Employment cost is either the number one or number two cost in any organization. The focus here eased a bit in the middle but is now on it again.

"We have been in a space where we have never been before so the focus on managing risk went up. Countries went into lockdown in the midst of new rules and regulations. Risks increased and regulatory requirements went up. Now that we have better understood the new normal, that focus on risk has decreased."

Key Themes

The five key themes transforming the way HR will work in the future include redesigning jobs, delivering learning through technology enabled platforms and building consumer grade experience to drive business transformation and productivity. On the elevating HR capabilities front the digitalizing of HR and driving data-based decision making to derive people insights through predictive analytics complete the five themes.

Remote-ability

On the issue of hybrid working the survey found employee preferences to vary with 10% favoring fulltime remote working and 30% preferring mostly remote with periodic prescheduled individual or team face time. Employee burnout has emerged as a downside in these two cohorts.

40%, however, opted for a blended regular prescheduled combination of onsite and remote working, and 20% voting for mostly onsite with occasional remote. Nobody, as in 0%, opted for fulltime onsite. "But we are social animals and employers would like to see employees back in their offices."

Remote-ability determines how and where people will work in the future. The global experiment of work-from-home has been flagged a success, heralding a new future, with 81% of respondents currently updating their remote working program as their number one focus area when considering their future of work strategies.

Location strategies can pose a challenge, however, with tier 2 and 3 cities not sufficiently developed to support talent acquisition and development.

New Normal

56% of the organizations have most of their workforce working remotely as of December 2020 while 43% have permanently expanded the population of employees who work remotely, with 46% monitoring productivity of remote workers or actively considering it.

“It’s ultimately about providing the flexibility whether onsite or offsite, making sure the employees are productive and have the tools to do their jobs well, and are completely engaged. Performance management and talent retention are top priorities in APAC. Companies have always struggled with performance management and 2 out of 3 companies are revamping the way they do it.”

This gains added importance when employees are working from home. 2020 was the year when the maximum number of managers evaluated the maximum number of employees during the year, and over 50% of the employees were not satisfied by their performance management evaluation.

“Whether the problem lay in goal setting or in the evaluation and adequate reward, the challenge is in improving the performance management deliverable. If we do poorly here then it will reflect on the reward system because we are not differentiating performance, and this will impact motivation.”

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) has become a huge issue in recent years, with a lot of the discussion around company culture and issues like the #MeToo movement, gender equity and racism across the world.

Delving Deep Into Detail

Talent acquisition is favoring a virtual/hybrid selection process and onboarding with leadership development looking at leading for virtual collaboration and execution in a bias-free, inclusive culture. New tools and tech adoption include wide adoption of virtual white boarding, other collaboration tools, as well as the widespread adoption of common use communication tools.

Also in focus is communication and change strategy in virtual, physical and hybrid environment that establishes a ubiquitous and borderless culture based on beliefs. Finally, employee experience based upon new flexible work models to support individual needs through empowered, networked work and organizational designs and a work environment that is safe physically and emotionally.

Wellness

Wellbeing is a state of balance that consists of having the appropriate resources, opportunities and commitment needed to achieve optimal health and performance for the individual and the organization.

The evolution of employee wellbeing has gone from disease management in the 1990s that was concerned with the management of active diseases with success rated in

decreased health care costs, to physical wellness and disease prevention with employee behavior change measuring success in the 2000s. Now it’s about holistic wellbeing with multidimensional wellbeing leading to employee engagement.

Red Flags

Since the pandemic started, 42% of employees have experienced a decline in their mental health, and red flags have gone up around domestic violence and suicides which are often not reported. Employee assistance programs (EAP) have been fairly swamped with requests, and although 82% of the companies globally consider employee wellbeing a priority, many firms lack a wellbeing strategy in their culture, talent attraction and performance objectives, and this has exacerbated the employee engagement challenge.

In Asia most of our retirement plans are not adequate. 50% of the respondents prefer an organization that protects employees’ health and financial wellbeing.

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On the physical front are programs that help support both mind and body through quality healthcare insurance and preventive healthcare programs that include access to the latest digital platforms. Emotional wellbeing is catered to through programs like paid holidays, access to counselors, and other time off programs to support life at home and at work ensuring mental resilience and managing stress.

Money Matters

For financial wellbeing a variety of programs help ensure financial security both in the present and in the years ahead because the feeling of financial security during working years and through retirement is important. A sense of altruism is ingrained through striving to have positive impact on customers, communities and the planet through daily work and various community engagement programs.

Financial wellbeing rates very high, with those who have it twice as likely to work until the age of 70 or later. Two-fifths of the employees surveyed were living pay cheque to pay

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cheque and reported both health and financial issues. They were thrice as likely to be disengaged and suffering from stress, anxiety or depression in the last 2 years, and five times more likely to have poor eating habits, losing 6 more days due to absence.

Data-driven Smart Machines

The impact of artificial intelligence (AI), analytics and data models is most evident in gamified recruitment using assessments that are science and competency based, evaluating cognitive abilities and psychometric profiles of candidates.

By harnessing technology everyone can be assessed for every role thus casting the talent net far and wide, with immersive real work based gameplay providing a natural environment where candidates get personalized feedback reports and development suggestions. Millennials prefer gamified simulations over other assessments, creating a superior candidate experience.

Better insights lead to faster decision making and reduce time to hire, with better pre-screening insights allowing recruiters to spend more times with candidates that matter. The more engaging and fun experiences result in more candidates completing the assessment and getting unbiased AI insights.

Salary Bonus Equity

Data driven compensation models determine salary bonus equity that provide minimal salary increases for higher salaried employees with salary increases linked to positioning rather than performance, with equity lean in for top performers and high potential.

Promotions ensure position correction at the new grade, and maximum bonus for top performers ensures differentiation between poor, solid and top performers.

Rich Returns On Investment

A data-driven talent culture that assesses knowledge, behavior and mindset yields better talent decisions and outcomes, with decision makers who make effective talent decisions five times more likely to have higher retention on their team; over 7 times more likely to have a high performance team that is highly engaged; and nine times

more likely to have good bench strength on their team as per the 2019 Gartner Talent Analytics Client Survey that quizzed 1057 respondents.

Hr Function Broad View

The type of data going into the analysis provides a broad view of the HR function and includes illness and injury rates; training completion rate; employee engagement scores, employee productivity/performance rates; team/function-level productivity/performance rates; investment in learning and development – cost per head of training; revenue per contracted or part-time employee; return on investment of the workforce; employee pay and benefits; employee-CEO pay gap ratio; gender pay gap ratio; employee turnover rates; employee intention to leave; high potential turnover rates; and succession planning data.

Predictive Analytics

Measured across business value and difficulty, these follow a rising curve beginning with description analytics (hindsight) and moving to diagnostic analytics (insight) to predictive and prescriptive analytics (foresight).

There are limitations to adoption, however, with properly educated people needed to work on AI expensive and hard to find. Then there is the matter of employee data privacy. Moreover, AI requires deep learning and regular review which makes for a maintenance challenge. Then there is the limited availability of data that makes products' integration difficult, with many products and services needing time and data to fully utilize AI capabilities. Not all forms of data modeling is AI, it needs to be remembered.

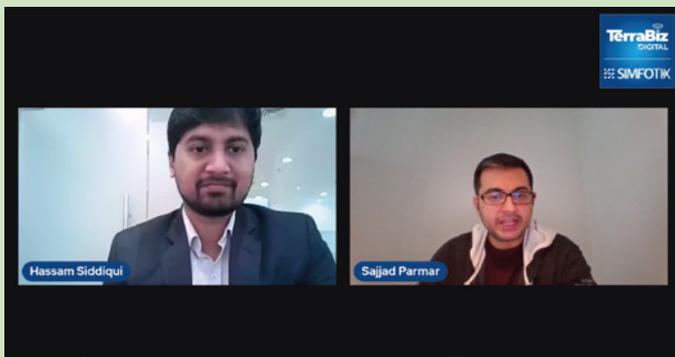
Conclusion

We as the human race have a lot riding on our ability to pivot and surge with speed and grace in the face of disruption. The future just doesn't belong solely to the brave, but to the prepared more so now than ever before. Courage is at the core of human advancement that requires us to lose sight of the shore and sail in uncharted waters. But moving from reactive to proactive is what will make the difference between success and failure. To achieve that enlightened cadres of human resource practitioners will be central to the task.

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Q&A

The sixty minutes passed quickly but the manner in which Sajjad Parmar organized his material he managed to provide an impactful view of what the future of work would look like going forward.



Hassam Siddiqui moderated the Q&A session, with **Jamil Janjua** (CEO Octara) wondering about the future of the HR Department given all the progress in technology and digitization. “For us to keep adding value we have to evolve,” replied Sajjad. “Analytics is going to be in the center of how we drive decision making. We in HR have to ensure that we’re investing the right amount and talent in this direction.”

How do we differentiate between AI and automation was another question that came from **Muhammad Bilal** of International Steels Limited. “The digitization of pay-slips is an example of automation; putting a power-point presentation online and letting employees download it is an example of automation. AI is far more complex and built on advanced mathematical and data models with very specific training and skillsets needed to operate it. There is no right or wrong in AI; it’s continuous learning requiring a lot more technology and deep understanding.”

Wasim Malik from Midas Safety asked how Sajjad saw the pandemic impacting the landscape of organization design and work systems. Clearly he had been multitasking elsewhere and missed the preceding 50 minutes. “I talked about the redesigning of jobs to accommodate the 30% or so who won’t be returning to the physical office/workplace. It has to

link with business strategy and how the future is seen to unfold. OD consultants start with the business objective. The pandemic has forced us to think about the future and hybrid models. The change in technology has been accelerated. A lot of things have to be done online now.”

A very important question came from **Essa** who felt that the biggest issue facing employees was that managers didn’t trust remote work, so what could HR do in promoting hybrid culture with high trust? “May be there is an issue with the managers. We have to create a culture of trust within the company. We must hire people who are capable of doing their jobs and managers must trust them to deliver. A serious conversation needs to be had between managers and employees.”

Qasim Iqbal from Food Panda felt that companies were salary heavy rather than benefits and there was pressure for more benefits. How could employee expectations be managed? “We must figure out how much we are spending on benefits and what is the utilization level. If the utilization level is low then we are wasting money. The biggest issue around benefits management is communication. A lot of the employees do not know of the benefits on offer, and those who do know are blank about how to go about securing them. Medical benefits, for instance, save employees from financial ruin in the case of illness.”

Fahad Arif from TPS wanted to know what ratio would be best between AI and excel driven data analytics? “I would park AI for the time being. If you have an excel file with all the employee information you can do a lot of analytics right there using excel tools.”

Ashaar from Lucky Motors wanted to know what the future was of human interaction, and **Syed Zeeshan Hussain** from NBP Funds asked about the impact of mental health on employees during the pandemic; clearly another couple of multitaskers who had been away during the last 50 minutes.

“I have already discussed this in a few of my slides concerning emotional wellness. The need for emotional wellness will continue to occupy center stage going forward. All of us are struggling with it. Over the next few months the pandemic will remain a reality. We need to figure out ways how we can support our employees. There are a lot of counseling services available in Pakistan and around the world ■”

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