

WORK FROM HOME HAS **FUNDAMENTALLY REDEFINED**

THE 8 HOUR WORKDAY



A great deal has been written about how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the world of work forever, with many companies choosing to establish permanent work from home strategies going forward. As face-to-face meetings have been replaced with video calls, and with email and Instant Messaging being used as the primary means of communication between teams, many businesses and their employees have found that productivity has increased.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO **HIT RESET**

The other side to this coin is that much of the increased productivity is the result of people working far longer hours than they did at the office. This is partly because they have more time available without having to sit in traffic during morning and afternoon commutes, and partly because many companies implemented tracking and monitoring tools to ensure staff were performing their tasks.

This has essentially meant that that the eight-hour work day has morphed into 24 hours. In an internal survey of MIP staff during lockdown, one of the most common concerns was that they were struggling to maintain a work-life balance while working from home. However, they listed far more benefits than drawbacks to remote working, and all have voted to keep working from home permanently.

The increase in number of hours worked has mainly been a function of the time saved in daily routines by removing the need for travel. Face-to-face meetings, too, have become faster and more productive when conducted via video call. In fact, many people have started suffering from video conference fatigue as a result of the fact that scheduling allows for back-to-back meetings when there is no need to travel between offices, and it hasn't been unusual to have an eight-hour workday completely taken up by meetings during lockdown. This has then led to staff members having to complete their work after the meetings have been held, in many cases late into the night.

These are some of the factors that are leading to a fundamental shift in people management. As companies tried to adjust to new working arrangements with teams spread across the city, or even the country, there was a temptation to monitor staff more. Employers have been keeping tabs on employees with keystroke monitoring or by reading their messages. This is counterproductive in the long term.

Bill George, author of *Discover Your True North*, writes: "The role of leaders will shift to further attention on empowering their employees, energizing them around a common mission, and measuring the outcomes of their work. Instead of measuring employees' inputs, companies will shift to results and forward-looking metrics like market share and customer feedback."

We have had immense success – internally, and at client sites – with gamification as a management tool. By providing them with a self-management framework, backed by goals and concrete rewards, we have found that not only are staff becoming more results-driven, but that keeping track of teams is easier. Companies micro-managing their employees, or using invasive tracking tools, will find that staff may feel like their privacy is being violated, and that they can't be trusted. This not only leads to unhappiness, but stifles innovation.

It's time for managers to start looking at different ways of incentivising and monitoring people.

Does it really matter that an employee working from home takes one hour during the day for personal chores, or to go to the shops, but works another four hours at 10pm? The reality is that outputs are what is important.

SELF-MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK, **BACKED BY GOALS** AND CONCRETE REWARDS

Recent research by The Adecco Group, entitled *Resetting Normal: Defining the New Era of Work*, examined the expected short- and long-term impact of the pandemic on resetting workplace norms. Interestingly, the majority of people are in favour of "results-driven work", whereby contracts are based on delivering against business needs rather than working a set number of hours.

The research also found that the sudden and dramatic change in the workplace landscape has accelerated emerging trends such as flexible working, high-EQ leadership, and re-skilling, to the point where they are now fundamental to organisational success. Employers have an opportunity to hit reset on traditional workplace practices - many of which have remained largely unchanged since the industrial revolution, and help forge a more balanced "new normal".



By Richard Firth
Chairman & CEO at MIP Holdings (Pty) Ltd