

1-15-2021

From Rote to Remote: Working During a Pandemic

Derrick Manns
derrick.manns@tsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions>

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

Recommended Citation

Manns, Derrick (2021) "From Rote to Remote: Working During a Pandemic," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 22: No. 2, Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25035/visions.22.02.06>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol22/iss2/6>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Visions in Leisure and Business by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

FROM ROTE TO REMOTE: WORKING DURING A PANDEMIC

Derrick Manns, Ph.D

Executive Director Curriculum and Graduation Initiatives

Texas Southern University

Hannah Hall 304 B

3100 Cleburne, Houston TX 77004

derrick.manns@tsu.edu

FROM ROTE TO REMOTE: WORKING DURING A PANDEMIC

ABSTRACT

This pandemic was unexpected and has caused tremendous problems throughout world societies. One of the outcomes has been that there have been a number of individuals who have had to work from a remote location, especially their homes. This has had a tremendous number of ramifications for the individual as well as organizations. The primary focus of this article is to explore the ramifications of working from remote locations and to identify a model for how the individual has adapted to the pandemic in terms of personal as well as business processes.

INTRODUCTION

How does one even begin to think about working from home when you have been going to an office, business or other place of work for years? When many of us left our places of employment, schools, hotels, and other locations in March 2020, the thought of us not returning to our offices, businesses, or place of employment, recreation, or restaurants was unthinkable. When we first started to learn about COVID 19, we thought that it would be a short lived

phenomenon and that the medical professionals would take care of it in a few days or weeks. Well those days turned into weeks and those weeks into months. So what does that mean for those of us who are lucky enough to still have jobs? What are families with kids expected to do now that they are schooling from home? What about those professions in recreation and tourism that relied on tourists for their livelihood?

While there is some research on working from home, telecommuting, and short-term situations, this Pandemic has us thinking about what the “new normal” may look like. This article will examine the work from home patterns given the recent Pandemic. Frank Olito (2020) indicated that “as companies shift to a work-from-home strategy amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, more Americans are working remotely than ever before.” So, what does that mean for the average worker?

Regardless of what type of work you do, this Pandemic has affected everyone. It affects the way that we eat, shop, interact, collaborate, and get work done. What do you do when seemingly overnight they tell you that you can no longer come to the office and work? Your files, computers, colleagues, projects, research are all somewhere other than your home. What do you do? Where do you begin? Do you have a home office set-up? Adequate internet access and computers for not just you, but your family as well? Some families have spouses, kids, or others in their houses or apartments and limited devices. What do you do when you have children and no access to daycare? Schools, colleges and universities? Do you have access to web cameras for these new virtual meetings? Do you have a Zoom, WebEx, Hangouts, or Microsoft Teams account? If so, do you know how to use it? Does your team have it? Who can teach you to use it? Are there enough laptops in your office to go around?

ISSUES/ADAPTION

There are many life changing issues that individuals and organizations have been encountered during this pandemic. The primary issue is can society return to a normal or will there be a new normal in which adaptations have to be made. The primary focus is the exploration of the impacts of change: What are individuals and organizations going through and how have they adapted? How has these adaptations affected individuals? The personal insights of individuals will allow to gain some insights on how this pandemic has affected society.

This article is not about the causes or opinions on the Pandemic and COVID 19, it has more to do with the effects of employees, businesses, human resource functions, technology resources and some creative uses of the internet to redesign how we do business.

Jouany and Martic (2020) wrote in a Blog on Smarp.com, that “While **remote work** used to be offered by some companies as a way to offer a more flexible lifestyle to their employees, it has now become that norm for most businesses.” They go on to say that remote work is not an option or privilege since COVID-19, it is the norm. Businesses must reshape the way the work gets done. How do you go from a relatively low work from home rate to the exact opposite in a matter of 2 weeks? Most businesses have required employees to work from home. Some businesses are deemed essential to the health and welfare of the country. Ken Dixon from the ctpost defines some of those essential businesses as those in:

- Homeland security
- Healthcare
 - Infrastructure (Commercial trucking, Airports, Water and wastewater operations, Utilities)
- Manufacturing
- Retail (Appliances, Electronics, Computers, Pet supply stores)
- Food and agriculture
 - Services (Accounting and payroll, Auto supply, sales, service, Bike sales and repair)
- Basic necessities (Food banks, Shelters)
- Construction
- Safety and welfare (Police, Fire, EMS)
- Vendors, IT, Logistics
- Defense

With all of the above services considered essential (not an exhaustive list), what is the rest of the country to do? Those in education, non-essential, food services, places of worship and many other small businesses that have been the backbone of many of our communities. We have seen HR offices get resourceful. Outside of the Federal response and the stimulus package, many businesses have redesigned their work models. In an effort to keep their workforce, full and part-time employees are working from home. That comes with great freedom but also great responsibility.

WORKING FROM HOME

Do employees have the necessary technology to work from home? Once employees have the basics technology needs covered, then you need to provide remote training to make sure that they can utilize the technology efficiently and interact with the public and other team members. How do you train that many employees at once? Most have resorted to webinars and conference calls to make this happen. But what about security? Most companies have set up Virtual Private Networks (VPN) to limit company exposure to security breaches. So many IT personnel have had to learn to provide step by step guides to keep the workforce engaged and connected.

SUCCESSFUL TIPS TO KEEP EMPLOYEE ENGAGED AND PRODUCTIVE

Juoany and Martic (2020) cited a study after the Pandemic that successful companies are able to create a sense of belonging for their employees. Businesses must create that sense of caring and keep their employees connected. How do we communicate with people? Everything can't be shared online can it? Not everything can be sent via email or put in some newsletter or on some web call. How do you have personal questions answered, how do you discuss goals for the organization and assign team members to tasks for? That means that we have to be more intentional about the frequency and type of communication that we undertake. Virtual meetings are critical to the care and development of staff.

The careful and deliberate communication provide employees with the tools to make decisions, contributions, and engagement. But everyone has to participate. This can't be left up to a few people to do all the work which is typically what happens in small groups. That is why everyone must have the ability to have their voices heard and share in accomplishing the goals. On a more practical level, there are distinct advantages of working from home. Juoany and Martic indicated that employees saved time commuting, lower expenses, increased productivity, higher retention, more flexible, and less sick days and employees calling in. But on the other hand, how do you measure time on task for staff that are not in person? How do you foster a work-life balance? The remote work means that you are expected to be available at any time to respond to work related questions and assignments. The authors indicated that there are more distractions at home. What about those with school age kids who are also remote? This article is not designed to provide answers to all of these questions, we are hoping to raise the questions and contribute to the understanding of what all of this means going forward. Perhaps in looking at this problem we need to identify a model that would allow us to look at this in a systematic way.

MODEL

The current virus crisis has brought confusion across world societies. Because of this confusion, it is difficult to analyze the crisis and how it has affected the different segments of society. There is one group that wants to use science to close the society and use isolation as a tool to overcome the virus. There are others who wish to selectively isolate segments and keep the business community running to drive the economic engine. There are many positions between these 2

extremes. Each has used data to justify their positions. There has been a rush to collect data about number of cases and deaths. There has also been an extensive mobilization to obtain equipment to protect individuals from the virus who work in essential services that have to interface with others who have the virus. There is been much controversy about treatments and their effectiveness. There is little discussion about how to treat the virus and more discussion about number of people contacting the virus and deaths. The primary focus should have been the development of treatment and application of this science in a consistent way to help reduce the effects of the virus. The controversy over treatments has been a significant part of the problem. Meanwhile, many have been waiting for a vaccine that will be developed to control the virus. The vaccine obviously is a solution that is highly desired.

Even when the vaccine is developed, and an effective program is implemented, the old societal norms may not return and there will be new norms established. It must be recognized that with any crisis whether natural or contrived the primary result in most cases has been to speed up changes that would occur within the society anyway. This does not suggest that all changes would have occurred anyway. It is obvious that newfound norms will exist and have a profound influence upon society. Other changes would have occurred in the crisis and speeded up their implementation. The key issue is which organizations have been successful and why. This type of information will help in the preparation for the next such crisis and serve as a basis of training.

The traditional approach to dealing with the subject of planning and change is one based upon information sciences. (Evans and Elphick, 2005; Nunamaker, Weber, and Minder, 1989) This approach is established upon research and development and innovative procedures in the sharing of knowledge. The core of this method is on how to solve the problem as well as a system for implementation to achieve objects. The strategic issue to success is the sharing and communication of information. This problem-solving dialogue occurs at many levels and depends upon social structures and relationships to effectively implement a plan. (Mirbabaie, Bunker, Stieglitz, Marx, and Ehnis, 2020) Size of the system requires different approaches to establish these connections. These systems depend on micro linkages to be successfully solving the problems.

There are many different models that depend upon some of theories such as: knowledge creation, translation, and transfer; diffusion and adoption; invention and dissemination strategies; and organizational learning and communication. (Akça, and Özer, 2014; Chilton, and Bloodgood, 2010; Green, Ottoson, García, and Hiatt, 2009) One of the best guides to this literature is still Havelock's work. (Havelock, 1971; Somers, 2009) This was a comprehensive review and provides a historical base for perspective.

One of the interesting models that has potential application for understanding the current situation is organizational resilience. (Kantur and Iseri-Say, 2015; Somers, 2009) This type of

model was developed for understanding how organizations have an ability to adapt or cope with new situations. The traditional planning models use a content approach that involves a step procedure to solve problems. The organizational resilience model is based upon process of creating organizational structures and functions to achieve solutions through a dynamic process. So often the traditional models are linear and have a limited perspective. Resilience models have a multilayer process and use a systems approach. The difference perspectives of resilience are based upon the end goals of achieving normalcy, advancement of position beyond normalcy, or anticipation of future positions. (Duchek, 2020; Kantur, and Iseri-Say, 2015) The initial research identified 6 elements to understanding organizational resilience (Mallak, 1998). In the initial study, a factor analysis was used to identify these factors:

Goal Directed: This is a skill that is based upon vision to guide creative processes in seeking solutions. It requires decisiveness and confidence, especially in leading teams. Decisions are made based upon time constraints.

Avoidance: Caution is used in approaching problems and solutions. Chaos should be avoided as it adds confusion and as a result increase the difficulty in decision-making. Individuals must show wisdom in approaching tools that are on hand to solve the problem.

Critical Understanding: The effective use of information based upon a comprehensive understanding of the tools for solution and how they apply to the current crisis. This involves manipulation of system elements and the sharing of information to solve the problem.

Role Dependence: This involves how the system structure and personnel fits together to solve problems. It is based upon team functions and understanding how to solve the problem based upon human resource skills to use the tools to solve problems.

Information Sources: A multiplex of information resources are needed to gain understanding. It is the understanding of these information sources and being able to use them to conceptualize solutions. This provides perspective and it is important to have the conviction to act on the solutions identified. The basic thread of this dimension is the ability to seek truth from the sources provided.

Resource Access: This is the ability to know what resources are needed and to develop the necessary relationships to access the resources needed to solve the problem. This may involve an element of risk because many traditional resources will not allow them to be retrieved and the individual must have the necessary resolve to access the resources anyway.

These elements have been studied and have been found to provide great understanding in planning and change, especially that relates to crisis management. (Duchek, 2020; Kantur and

Iseri-Say, 2015; Somers, S. 2009) The common thread through the 6 elements of resilience is one of the process of knowledge and its application, especially as it relates to a dynamic systems approach. What this means is the effective use of information from individuals who have a comprehensive perspective and can see the implications of particular strategies in the solving of problems now and in the future. One of the ways that this can have meaning is the ability to understand the adaptations by individuals that have been made by the crisis that have been effective. Effective in this arena is the sustaining of business and the sustaining of a balanced life (Quality). This means that there is some degree of normalcy that is provided to the business and the life of the individual. This is not only an element of survival of one that may indeed provide prosperity. It is understood that in many crisis that conditions favor some elements of the system and because of the nature of their business or lifestyle they will prosper. This is not a direct result of their efforts but a result of the crisis and the development of favorable conditions for their product or life.

The essential element is understanding how the elements of resilience are applied to the current crisis. In order to gain a perspective about this current crisis, it will be necessary to study the successful adaptations in relation to the resilience elements. (Kim, 2020; Pearson and Clair, 1998) This type of study does not assume any position toward the crisis and its cause but seeks to understand how adaptations have been made and on what basis they been made to achieve success. In terms of business, the success as outlined earlier is in terms of sustaining the current business level, in fact maybe the increasing the business level. Individual success is the maintaining of one's normalcy as much as possible. What this suggests is that there is not a significant crisis in their life to cause destruction and even growth and maturity.

It is essential that the resilience model be studied in relation to case studies to determine if this model helps to understand the confusion that exists with this crisis. These case studies must be examined in relation to the processes that are related to the resilience model. One element that is apparent from the review of several case studies is the creativity of the individual whether in business or for their lifestyle. This involves thinking out-of-the-box and seeing potential applications that help solve problems.

The purpose of this manuscript has been the identification of potential models that has the ability to analyze the current virus pandemic and provide a framework for in depth understanding for future action, if this happens again. It is essential that the analysis be from bottom up using adaptations as outlined in the resilience model to provide a clear understanding of ways to solve and help with these kinds of problems. This does not disregard governments influence to provide an environment for application of information. Individual must take responsibility to solve the business and the individual's life's problems.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

For employees to be able to work from home sometimes it not easy to just say check your emails from home. Many times, there are security measures, protocols, and specialty software that is needed to get things done. What types of training has been provided by these companies? Is it enough, adequate, or up to standard? In a report by BCG in 2020, it is suggested that businesses “should support this collaboration by investing in their people.” One recent move is to provide online training. The BCG report indicates that it takes less time than traditional in-person training and is more cost effective. There needs to be a focus on the skills that businesses need and what can be done when there is a mismatch. There are many opportunities for private providers to fill this gap and provide those services. For many, the ability to reexamine their training, and provide the necessary skills for their employees to be successful. With an emphasis on the internal training needs, more resources can be directed towards retaining and promoting current employees rather than having to replace them all the time.

Many employees for the past number of years have traditionally gone to an office, work-site, or other location to carry out their work. But when this pandemic hit, that shifted overnight. How do companies and employees make that transition working from home with little or no infrastructure to do so? Many companies if they want to survive have to make this transition to stay competitive. Lin Gensing-Pophal (April, 2020) indicated that employees may have “issues dealing with the necessary technology, managing distractions, staying organized at home or a host of other concerns.” In order to be successful, training must be provided. Employees need the skills and tools to mimic the face to face experience that many were used to.

But what online experience do they have? What about video calls that are live? Staff needs basic training on what a remote office looks like. What about backgrounds, photos, personal items? Many staff even need to be reminded that professional dress is required. There are many stories of people who thought their cameras were off but were live and led to some inappropriate or embarrassing situations. While most employers were able to route phone calls to employees, many are using their cell phones for business. This too is exposing employees to how they answer the phone. So additional customer service training needs to be covered in this training. Most importantly, staff need to be trained on the tools they use. For example, Zoom, Webex, Teams have become the standard for videoconferencing. But not all staff know how to use them. But after some videos and training, they can be proficient. Staff will also need to learn about VPN and security measures to keep the company and personal information safe.

While this pandemic has disrupted everything that we do, it does not have to stop us. It has the ability to reinvent some of the work and ways that we operate. With the right amount of caution, training, and flexibility, we can not only survive, but thrive during these uncertain times.

REFERENCES

- Akça, Y. and Özer, G. 2014 Diffusion of Innovation Theory and an Implementation on Enterprise, *International Journal of Business and Management*, Vol. 9, (4), pp 92-114.
- Chilton, M.A. and Bloodgood, J.M. 2010 Adaption- Innovation Theory and Knowledge Use in Organizations, *Management Decision*, Vol. 48 No. (8), pp 1159-1180.
- Dixon, K. March 25, 2020 Full list of ‘essential’ businesses.’ Ctpost. Retrieved, <https://www.ctpost.com/news/coronavirus/article/Full-list-of-essential-businesses-15149788.php>.
- Duchek, S. 2020 Organizational Resilience: a Capability-Based Conceptualization, *Business Research*, Vol. 13, pp 215–246.
- Evans, N. and Elphick, S. 2005 Models of Crisis Management: an Evaluation of their Value for Strategic Planning in the International Travel Industry, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 7, pp 135–150.
- Green, L. W., Ottoson, J. M., García, C., and Hiatt, R. A. 2009 Diffusion Theory and Knowledge Dissemination, Utilization, and Integration in Public Health, *Annual Review of Public Health*, Vol. 30, pp 151-174.
- Grensing-Pophal, L. April 14, 2020 Training employees to effectively work from home, Retrieved from <https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2020/04/14/training-employees-to-effectively-work-from-home/>.
- Havelock, R. G. 1971 Planning for Innovation through Dissemination and Utilization of Knowledge, Center for Research on Utilization of Scientific Knowledge, University of Michigan, Arbor, Michigan.
- Jouany, Valene & Martic, Kristina. April 8, 2020 Remote work: 20 ways to engage and connect with your remote employees, SMARP. Retrieved from <https://blog.smarp.com/remote-work-20-ways-to-engage-and-connect-with-your-remote-employees>.

Kantur, D. and Iseri-Say, A. 2015 Measuring Organizational Resilience: A Scale Development, *Journal of Business, Economics and Finance*, Vol. 4 (3), pp. 456-72.

Kim, Y. 2020 Organizational Role and Employee Work-role Performance after a Crisis Situation: Exploring the Effects of Organizational Resilience on Internal Crisis Communication, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 32 (1-2), pp 47-75.

Mallak, L. 1998 Resilience in the Healthcare Industry, 7th Annual Industrial Engineering Research Conference, Banff, Alberta, Canada, pp 148-152.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/12953188_Measuring_Resilience_in_Health_Care_Provider_Organizations.

Mirbabaie, M., Bunker, D., Stieglitz, S, Marx, J. and Ehnis, C 2020 Social Media in Times of Crisis: Learning from Hurricane Harvey for the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic Response, *Journal of Information Technology*, Vol. 35 (3), pp 195-213.

Nunamaker Jr., J. F., Weber, E. S., and Minder, C 1989 Organizational Crisis Management Systems: Planning for Intelligent Action, *Journal of Management Information Systems*. Vol. 5 (4), pp 7-32.

Olito, Frank. 2020, March 26 8 Surprising statistics about people's work-from-home habits, *Insider*. Retrieved from <https://www.insider.com/statistics-peoples-work-from-home-habits>.

Pearson, C. M. and Clair, J. A. 1998 Reframing Crisis Management, *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 23, (1), pp 59-76.

Puckett, J., Pagano, E., Henry, T., Krause, T., Pashnmeena, H., Trainito, A., and Frost A. July 7, 2020 Call For a New Era of Higher Ed-Employer Collaboration, BCG. Retrieved from <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2020/new-era-higher-ed-employer-collaboration>.

Somers, S. 2009 Measuring Resilience Potential: An Adaptive Strategy for Organizational Crisis Planning, *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, Vol 17(1), pp. 12-23.