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Keeping Innovation Alive during this Unprecedented Pandemic

By Pavan B K, April 2020

Abstract

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease that causes respiratory illness through a new virus. This virus has infected more than 200 countries. The first COVID-19 case was reported in Wuhan, China in November 2019. Subsequently, the disease has spread to more provinces in China, and to the rest of the world. The WHO has now declared it a pandemic. The number of people infected worldwide currently has crossed more than 2,529,668 and the death toll stands at around 174,676. On a positive note, about 667,624 people have also recovered from this deadly disease.
While several countries have extended the lockdowns, the World Health Organization (WHO) has given a six-point strategy on lifting the restrictions and speeding up testing. It has been over four months since the world was informed of the Sars-Cov2 virus. Even as India has crossed over 13,000 cases this week, it has also seen a record number of recoveries. Another positive development comes in the form of new treatment options for the pandemic that are showing some promise.

This has caused a huge impact on the IT industry worldwide, leading to a freeze in the hiring process and paving the way to layoffs. This document gives information on the following:

- Impact of COVID-19 on the IT industry
- Actions taken by OneOrigin to minimize the impact

Problem Statement

The rapid spread of Coronavirus is a major issue for the entire world. The virus has spread across 200 countries in less than 90 days and has affected multiple workplaces leading to a direct impact on business.

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Background

Impact of COVID-19 on the IT industry

The world economy is expected to suffer a huge loss and world GDP would reduce by half, largely concentrated in China, and is expected to have adverse economic consequences. If China's economy slows to 1.2 percent in the January-March quarter, the GDP shock to India from the demand side could be about 0.4- 0.5 percent, according to The Economic Times report. But the rest of the world slows if China slows, Enterprises in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe, which have halted operations or have significantly reduced their scale owing to COVID-19, are pressurizing Indian IT services vendors to reduce their level of support and maintenance functions.

That said, The aim of OneOrigin is to have smooth delivery to its customers with minimal impact on the business while keeping the employees safe. Initially, it was taking precautions to avoid the spread in the workplace but, the challenges changed during the 21day nation lockdown. The plan was to ensure employees worked remotely with no impact on productivity. Currently, With the restriction on movement of people following the scare, companies' ability to deliver services on-site can get impacted but that could be addressed to some extent by working remotely.

Impact of COVID-19 is majorly on the following:
- Many companies have banned travel completely and few have even imposed very strict travel restrictions.
- Most companies are monitoring the situation and developing a plan to tackle the same. This may delay the appraisal process, which might intern delay increments by at least a quarter. It may also lead to a complete washout and few companies have opted for delayed or decreased increments and bonuses during this appraisal season to compensate for the loss.
- Many companies have frozen hiring and the coronavirus outbreak has triggered unprecedented mass layoffs and furloughs.
  - Walt Disney World (The amusement park) will be furloughing 43,000 employees starting April 19.
  - On April 7, Tesla sent an email to employees saying it will furlough all nonessential workers until at least May 4, and reduce all employees' pay by at least 10%. These cost-cutting measures are expected to start on April 13.
  - On April 3, Under Armour announced that it will temporarily lay off about 6,700 employees starting April 12.

○ U.S. companies have already announced more than 1,000 job cuts as a result of the outbreak, according to Challenger, Gray and Christmas and USA TODAY research. The losses include the 165 workers at Wayzata, 145 drivers at the Port of Los Angeles, 360 by Oyo Hotels, and 250 by Christie Lites, a stage lighting company.

Solution

No vaccine has been developed as of now to prevent COVID-19 from spreading. However, The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved limited emergency use for chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for COVID-19.

Steps taken by OneOrigin to tackle the current situation.

Before Lockdown:

1. Surfaces (e. g. desks and tables) and objects (e. g. telephones, keyboards) were wiped with disinfectant regularly, as contamination on surfaces touched by employees was one of the major ways that COVID-19 spreads
2. Emails were sent to promote regular and thorough hand-wash to employees.
3. Sanitizing hand rub dispensers were put in prominent places around the workplace and were made sure these dispensers were regularly refilled.
4. Display posters promoting hand-washing, respiratory hygiene were displayed across the workplace.
5. We made sure that the employees had access to places where they could wash their hands with soap and water as washing hands thoroughly kills the virus on hands and prevents the spread of covid19 to a large extent.
6. Employees were asked to work from home if they had any COVID-19 symptoms like fever, sore throat, cold, coughed, etc
7. Paper tissues were available at workplaces, for those who develop a runny nose or coughed at work, along with closed bins for hygienically disposing of them as good respiratory hygiene prevents the spread of COVID-19.
8. All business trips are canceled temporarily.
9. Pre-order on sufficient supplies and materials including tissues and hand sanitizers was done.
10. The appraisal process was completed as planned and performance payout was released to make sure there was no impact on the employees.
11. We will be going ahead with the onboarding of employees as planned to those who we had offered a job and we will not consider employee layoff at this point in time

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During Lockdown: WFH was mandated to every employee

1. When it comes to WFH, We have to consider many factors such as family and responsibilities therefore we have flexible work hours.
2. Regular HR connects with the employees to help solve any issues that they might be facing while connecting from home.
3. Virtual engagement to keep the employees connected with each other.
   - Photo contest - To make WFH interesting, we have organized a Photo contest via Google Chat where the employees can click a picture based on the theme for the day and post it in the group where the picture with maximum likes would be the winner
   - Connect over coffee - At OneOrigin, we have a culture where all the employees get together in the evening during the coffee break and have some fun, to keep this culture alive during WFH, we have organized "Daily coffee break" (~15 minutes) virtually, where employees can connect through Google video chat and continue to have fun.
4. Emails were sent regarding work from home tips and the online training will be organized

Conclusion

With family, working from home can be challenging if we do not maintain a regular rhythm. And It is true that sometimes work-life integration can go for a toss while working from home. The Impact might vary from company to company but OneOrigin is taking many steps to the best extent possible and making sure that it is close to Business as usual.

To crack and make the most of your work from home, here are important points.
- Your first task is to create a workspace in your house that is conducive to WFH. Ideally, you will work in a room by yourself behind a closed door.
- Get organized, Get your laptop, diary, pen, cell phone, and chargers in place. If your spouse is on WFH too, share time slots and children related chores. Organize routines and rules for other disturbances like the maid and doorbell.
- Plan workflow
- Plan your work before you start the day. Have a task list or target sheet in front of you. Prioritize your projects and schedule time slots including extra time in between to cater for contingencies like unforeseen work calls and new tasks received from your manager.

- To crack the productivity code, schedule the toughest tasks for the morning and calls in the afternoon. Work in bite-sized chunks of 25 minutes, thereafter stand up and walk around for 5 minutes, preferably in sunlight and fresh air. Use a music list or a background sound on your speaker if it helps you focus. When you are productive and happy, you can enjoy and appreciate the perks of WFH better.