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HR will Transform into a Key Business Function, says AscentHR CEO Subramanyam S

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Covid-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown have disrupted the way people work. So, how does the situation augur for enterprises when it comes to the human resources (HR) function? Subramanyam S, CEO at [Ascent HR](#), a Bengaluru-based firm that provides HR automation, payroll & compliance and corporate compliance management services to companies “as large as 10,000 employees”, is aptly positioned to discuss the issue.

A Sourcing Hardware exclusive:

How is Covid-19 and the nationwide lockdown affecting HR and allied domains?

I think that Covid-19 has a significant positive impact on HR and allied domains. HR was mostly treated as a non-critical support function all these years. But the ongoing crisis is a great opportunity for HR to transform itself as a key business function. Managing the HR function in ensuring culture, productivity and well-being of a disparate workforce operating from remote locations is a humongous challenge, and I am sure that the HR fraternity will take a leap in significance going forward.

As an allied domain, HR technology, which can handle not just record-keeping but also act as a collaborative tool in achieving organisational goals, would be a great advantage for any enterprise. Let me also add that ethics and compliance, both as practice and technology enablers, will play a major role in driving value for an enterprise. That's because the organisation has to operate in the vast area, keeping costs under control and ensuring that mandatory benefits and practices are fully observed.

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Many organisations are viewing Work-from-Home (WFH) as a new normal. How do you look at the new work mode?

Well, I believe that the ability to work from a remote space will suddenly create a huge boom in workforce availability, as several women who were not willing to travel to work would now opt to join the race. Besides, professionals who were unable to relocate to pursue careers in their preferred organisations will be able to apply from their homes. They may prove to a reliable source owing to their diligence in work, and may throw up a huge arbitrage of cost for employers. Having said that, the situation will open a Pandora's Box on type of employment, and may need an hourly engagement model quite prevalent in the US. Talent acquisition and talent management will undergo a paradigm shift in the new age of HR.

How are you able to cater to WFH demand from your clients?

We have been able to make the change required for WFH pretty quickly, and we have met the deliveries as needed. The change did bring about a lot of surprises in understanding the individual commitments or competencies on the positive side, and the challenge of IT infrastructure in the country on the negative side. However, as a team, our colleagues were fully participative in all tasks and made sure we fulfilled customer commitments well in time. As an organisation which is highly sensitive to information security, we had a lot of revelations and lessons for our future operations. We believe these challenges would not go away and may become part of our work life for a longer time, and we are prepared to deal with this eventuality.

Will the WFH concept also impact the traditional role of Human Capital Management (HCM)?

Going forward, the HCM system has to transform into a full-fledged enterprise-level system. This is a critical transformation phase and will generate huge demand for a system that can take care of the employee not as a record, but as a key person in the growth of an enterprise. The HCM system needs to integrate learning systems, culture or employee engagement, and productivity measurement. It also needs to assimilate a fully knit force that can meet virtually but produce real results.

Finally, what will be the new focal area of HR technology?

We see the crisis as a great learning curve. It has helped us in testing the resilience of our company in times of calamity, and brought forth a lot of heroes who excelled in their work to meet our obligations. Till the Covid-19 outbreak, HR tech was focused on the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) technologies. But now the spotlights are on the collaboration of disparate workforces to ensure seamless delivery while upholding values, culture and efficiency. So, I believe that HR tech will work to make the extended workspace and the employee motivated, engaged and productive. We opened an innovation centre on HR technology just before the Covid outbreak, and we see a large opportunity in making the initiative work for us in making this happen.

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