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Remote work in times of Covid-19.

Inspiration

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REMOTE WORK
IN TIMES OF COVID-19

"Since long time ago we´ve learned to live in our country only on rights. Now is the time to live on our duties as citizens"
Editorial note Corriere della Sera 08 March 2020.

"I'm scared about what message we are telling our kids when faced with a threat. Instead of reason, rationality, open-mindedness and altruism, we are telling them to panic, be fearful, suspicious, reactionary and self-interested"
Dr. Abdu Sharkawy [Facebook 05 March 2020.]

The purpose of this document is to compile some points to take in consideration to act while facing the impact in our daily life of isolation as imposed measure to control further propagation of the COVID-19 epidemic.

We have based the reflections of this document on more than 14 years of direct experience leading and managing teams in emergencies interventions while working in the humanitarian sector. Moreover, the experience supporting private enterprises and public sector in handling situation of crisis created by terrorism and disasters created by natural phenomenon.

This document has been written during the epidemic of Covid-19, but can be applied to any crisis/emergency situation that cause an abrupt interruption of activities, mobility and in general the interaction of people.

There are concrete points to put in practice immediately aiming to reduce the negative impact of the current situation is causing on our coexistence, productivity and wellbeing.

We must stop ramble about if the virus will affect our region, this is practically a fact. Therefore, we have to start working to avoid being taken by surprise and unprepared. No room for panic nor extremism, but concrete actions.

At the same time, it is time to assume our individual responsibilities, our duties as citizens and help to prevent the expansion of the virus, promoting healthy habits, avoiding spreading misinformation and actively fighting discrimination and social divisions. Moreover, we must open our hearts, our compassion towards the most vulnerable people.

This is a document to help confronting the situation we are facing right now. The reflections included here are not exhaustive, some needs would emerge according to the particularities of a region or company itself.

The priority in these moments of abrupt disruption of the working and social reality should be towards our employees and collaborators. The survival of our company beyond the current crisis depends of their wellbeing and their families.

We can't underestimate how the feeling of belonging to your company and the cohesion among team members increases after having lived a crisis together.

Similarly, we must be aware of the negative effects that forced isolation, like the current one aiming to stop the spread of the Covid-19, creates in human beings.

This document starts by emphasizing that our priority is our people. We also speak of the ideas you should keep in mind since the initial moments when a remote work is somehow imposed. Further we review some aspects to take into consideration to avoid a total rupture of the functionality of the organization/company. To finalize we mention some points that each person must take in consideration while working from home.

The message is clear and direct: we must be prepared don't wait to be surprised by the situation.

PEOPLE FIRST

- Three key words: Communication, Transparency and Vulnerability
    - To have a fluid and permanent communication with and within the teams of your company is the top priority in times of crisis
    - Giving more transparency to fundamental aspects in this moment represents an important step to enhance understanding and appropriation of the reality.
        - Sharing the real financial muscle, avoid speculation about the future. In a way it is a form to move from uncertainty to a more rational level.

    - Everybody, including directors and management teams, can have fears about the future and the health situation of their families in the middle of this epidemy.
        - It is ok to make visible those fears, just don´t freeze or get into a catatonic state.
        - Leading from vulnerability is one of the key skills for leadership in modern times. It makes leaders more

humans and put them closer to the people they are working with.
    - Invite and stimulate the people to express what they are feeling and thinking.

- Be attentive to the signals showing the difficulties, the struggle your teams are facing to cope to the situation and the increase of stress levels.

- Pay attention to expressions of anxiety, boredom, depression, and similar.
    - It is wise to create a light and agile way for people to show daily how are they. The aim is to detect signals from people that have more difficulties to openly show and share their feelings and fears.
    - Active listening, a dynamic between peers, help to avoid escalation of stress and anxiety.
    - Find professional support (internal or external) to severe cases.

- An interesting resource is to have an external accompaniment of somebody that is not in the middle of the same crisis.
    - Someone having the capacity to observe from a distance and give elements that we, in the middle of the crisis, can´t observe.
    - Someone to help us to visualize the right dimensions of the situation.

- Use only official information
    - Proactively let aside all fake news and rumors that the only thing they produce is misinformation and panic.
    - Follow the advices from authorities, in particular health indications.

PARTICIPATION FOR A BETTER PLANNING

- It is time to understand that people working in your company have something to contribute. Their contribution is specially needed to face the crisis.

- That´s why it is fundamental to increase the participation at all levels.

- A participative action plan would be much more effective.
    - We will obtain a better analysis of the situation and the possibility to discover opportunities
    - Priorities and lines of action will be defined
    - The levels of appropriation and fulfilment will be higher.

- It is important to keep in mind when building the action plan that we can learn from the positive aspects and opportunities that each crisis brings.
    - It is a unique opportunity to do all the things that due to the frenetic day to day, we have put aside awaiting the right moment.
    - We can focus deeper on strategic aspects of the company.
    - It is an opportunity to acquire new skills and explore options and opportunities for personal growth and development of our workers and collaborators.

BE PREPARED

- The leadership role of higher managers and directors is fundamental to design an emergency plan to be able to keep the company functional when the epidemy hits your zone. Pay special attention to all the external measures taken by authorities in order to reduce the spread of the virus.

- It is necessary to assign the appropriate means and financial resources to implement the emergency plan. Think for example of the need to provide IT means to the people working on remote.

- How well prepared are we to face a situation of having the work force working from their home?
    - Think about the systems and protocols you have in place at your company for sharing and protecting digital information. Do we have a virtual server? What about its capacity?
    - Keep in mind the backup process of the information
    - A key aspect is to have a professional technician to be ready to support the company and people on remote working during the crisis.

- Analyze the pertinence of having a Virtual Private Network (VPN) due to the volume and nature of the information you manage.

- Important to verify that our workers and collaborators have all the technical means to work from home. They must have unlimited access to speed and reliable internet provider.

DAY TO DAY ON REMOTE WORK

- There is no need to change entirely your way of working, it is important to keep certain routines previously stablished. For example, the staff update of Mondays morning or the management meeting of Tuesdays. Change the way to do it but the dynamics should remain.

- This new reality of remote working needs clear communication protocols and guidelines
    - Permanent contact is key. Give some structure but let aside the formalities and stressful attitudes. Don't add extra weight to the situation.
    - A shared calendar where everybody can visualize important datelines and meetings.
    - People should know timings to contact each other.

- We need to have modern technological tools for better follow up of projects, activities and individual responsibilities.
    - Verify that free versions of those tools are still enough to cope with your current needs. Otherwise, find the appropriate plan.
    - When searching for the right applications to use, keep in mind the complexity, confidentiality and security of the information you manage and transmit.
        - Professional options are more recommended (Microsoft, Google, Slack, Trello, Asana and so on)
        - There are new options of programs/platforms where you can integrate many applications you are already using. Monday.com is one of them.
    - "Social" tools such as WhatsApp, Instagram should be use only for private, personal use. Never for professional purposes.

- It is possible that we are in front of a unique opportunity to rethink the way we have been working. Don´t miss this moment and question dogmas your company has and start exploring new ways to interact and do things. It is time to be more agile, have more autonomy and collaboration inside our organization.

INDIVIDUAL ASPECTS

Nowadays there are plenty of essays given advice to people working remotely, here we want to put down only few of them that we consider key in times of Covid-19.

- High probabilities that we will be soon sharing time and space with our partners (possibly working on remote as well) and kids (due to the closure of schools).

    - It is crucial to establish a schedule to conciliate working time, home activities and kids.
    - With organization and planning we can reduce the perception of chaos and crowdedness.
    - Our children also need time, attention and organization.

- Arranging a physical space to serve as "office desk" will be very helpful.

- Create rituals and time slots for your working activities and share them with your colleagues and supervisors. They should know when you are available to receive a call or answer some emails. Establishing a daily priority list is also a good tip.

- Behave and dress as you were in your office surrounded by colleagues. Don't eat in front of your computer; do your working breaks as usual; aim to keep a contact with colleagues not only for work related aspects.

- Find some leisure activities for you and your family: watch series and movies on digital platforms; indoor physical activities (fitness, yoga, meditation, etc); write; read; study; learn something new.

- When you feel overwhelmed by working from home in the middle of exceptional circumstances of this epidemic, ask for help.
  In the same line, be attentive for signals of stress around you (family, colleagues) and help them to reach help if necessary.

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