Knowledge Management and the Impact of COVID-19

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As the countries around the world begin to ease the lockdown restrictions, executives at leading software and services organizations are reflecting on the lasting impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Greater use of cloud services accelerated digital transformation, a need for the latest and greatest technology and a generally stronger appreciation for knowledge management are among the key changes being seen. Below are the lessons learned from the novel coronavirus and how it has impacted the way public and private organizations worked internally and responded to customers, and the changes expected in a post-pandemic world.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant remote working phenomenon have provided a significant boost for knowledge management solutions across the world. With the remote working pattern emerging as a mainstream phenomenon, the need for knowledge management solutions is expected to increase going forwards. Even with the COVID-19 curve flattening, and mass vaccination programs still at a distance, most companies are expected to continue with the work-from-home model at least into the near future. The KM systems fit perfectly into the needs of an organization, which could be required to operate with employees of other departments in the absence of a relevant workforce (either due to layoff or COVID-19 related absenteeism). The pandemic also caused several companies to adopt cloud-based KM software that imparts flexibility to their businesses, while those with such technologies already in place would continue to have an edge other those transitioning later. The use of cloud-based knowledge management systems would help organizations create and share information in real-time with employees for better customer handling. In addition, the increasing amount of data being collected by organizations is expected to drive the demand for knowledge management solutions.

Trustworthy and Easy-to-find Information

Companies have learned a lesson that it is critical to provide precise and easily searchable information during uncertain times. Until the coronavirus is eradicated, companies should provide their best in abnormal or semi-normal situations. Knowledge management will play a critical role in delivering customer service during this challenging period. In organizations such as contact centers where premises are not designed as per social distancing norms, it has become mandatory for organizations to call a few percentages of their staff to maintain safety. Moreover, there might be chances that employees get infected or they have to take family care leaves, or the offshore offices of the company may get shut down due to local COVID-19 situations there. All such situations are forcing many businesses to rely on "gig" agents or employees from other departments who are not knowledgeable enough to be on the frontline. Therefore, providing the knowledge that is easy to find and know-how that can guide them through customer conversations is critical in making them successful. Businesses will also need to make sure their self-service systems can do more by powering them with the same knowledge and expertise.
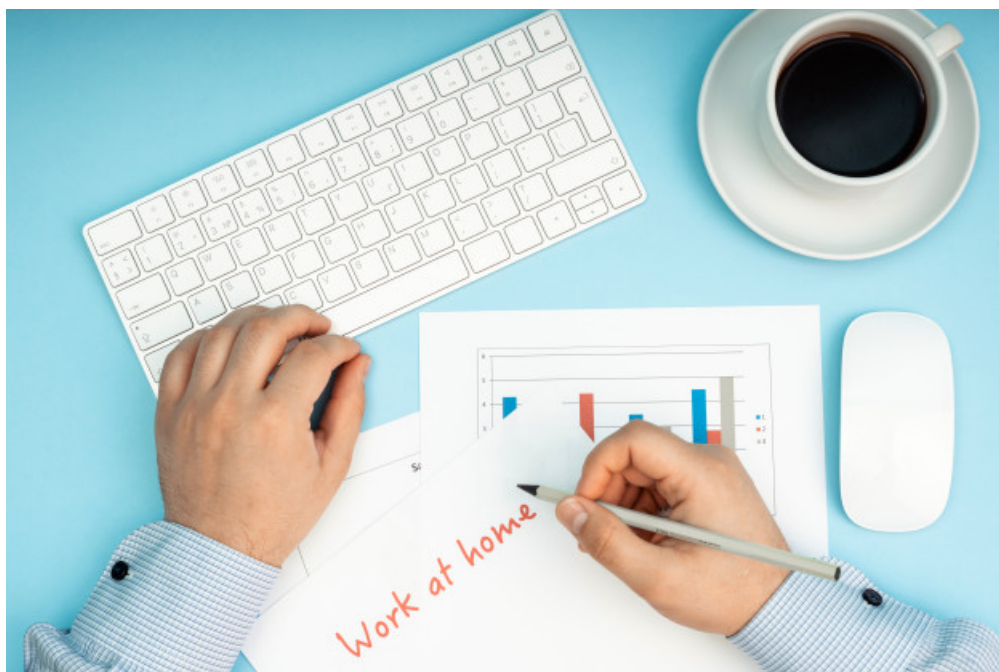
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Flexibility

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on customer engagement and the contact center, forcing many organizations to transition their agents to a **work-from-home model**. This shift will result in several changes in the post-pandemic world. Now, the "Cloud" is the king; The companies that are already using these services are definitely a step ahead of those who are not using them. A cloud-based knowledge-as-a-service such as PHPKB will be used more widely to push out information proactively through multiple channels in real-time to keep employees and customers informed and ensure consistency of message. Furthermore, with more agents working remotely, crowd-sourcing knowledge will become more important. Taking knowledge from a central repository and turning it into curated content will help agents find the information they need instead of asking a colleague who is no longer working in the same room. Once organizations realize that it is possible for contact centers to survive remotely, both from a technology and HR perspective, it's going to lead to a lot more flexibility in terms of working arrangements. It will lead to organizational changes as well, and these will persist beyond the pandemic.

Reliance on Knowledge Management for Consistent Information

The biggest challenge faced by organizations in adjusting to the "new normal" has been the shift to remote working on an unprecedented scale. This has led to an increasing need for knowledge management for two key needs. First, to help users

find the answers to customer questions quickly and easily to respond to interactions, and second, to help employees know how to undertake their jobs; for example, by providing centrally managed guides through knowledge base software on how to use the CRM or billing systems. These guides are not to cover the whole solutions but to serve as a reference for those settings, changes, or use cases that happen maybe weekly and are charging and not always remembered. These two use cases are increasingly important to provide consistent and accurate answers, as employees are working without the support network of close-by colleagues to ask when needed.

Digital Transformation

Organizations have adapted rapidly during the COVID-19 response, but not all the habits they have developed have been good ones. When it comes to digital transformation and knowledge management there are two major objectives, trying to get end-users to adopt new ways of working and creating a structured environment for maximum productivity and compliance.

Microsoft's Satya Nadella recently remarked that 2 years of digital transformation have happened in 2 months. Organizations and users that were on the fence have all adopted the cloud and new ways of working. They did not have a choice, but they are happy with it and will not revert back to the old ways. Cloud technologies can help mitigate short and long-term operational costs, make it easier for teams to share information and collaborate, especially when remote, and help arm businesses with the modern technology services needed in order to easier and more efficiently connect with customers and deliver the types of experiences customers will want, need, and expect in a post-pandemic world. But, on the negative side, while organizations might have shifted to the cloud, but not all of them have learned how to truly live in the cloud. Many have adopted non-enterprise, consumer communication, and/or collaboration platforms which leads to temporary, unstructured, and ungoverned processes. Making a shift is not a problem anymore due to free resources available, but now productivity and security are because most of the unauthenticated systems that organizations have opted for lack security and reliability. PHPKB SaaS Solution is highly reliable, secured, tested over time, and is suitable for any organization from small to large.

AI is an Essential Tool

Even before the pandemic disruption, organizations did not utilize productivity because employees wasted their crucial time in searching for reliable information and expertise. Employees need to source intel quickly and efficiently to continue doing the jobs they were hired and trained to do. Now, when more than 90% of the workforce in companies is working remotely, in different time zones; where sourcing answers and expertise has become a critical challenge.

AI has become an essential tool for any organization. With human-inspired AI, organizations can recognize and surface expertise, skills, and tacit knowledge that might not have been identifiable before. Business leaders can utilize AI to develop skill maps pinpointing where the organizational intelligence is strong and where development is needed based on their current and future strategies and, in times like today, developing real-time skill scenario models. No organization anticipated how

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quickly the adoption of remote working would have to accelerate this year. But by embracing AI technology and placing trust in teams, businesses have already made great strides in adapting.

True Self Service

Companies are shifting to chatbots for providing customer support services. On the surface, this seems to make sense; A bot cannot catch the coronavirus, a bot does not suffer from productivity loss, loneliness, or isolation. Unfortunately, this is not the case, Bots are not the savior for failing customer experience. Bots can be excellent pieces of software and some have a bright future, but they are no replacement for a contact center. Talking to a machine is not what a customer expects because bots usually give pre-programmed answers and generally lead to a frustrating customer experience. Rather, companies should focus on providing customers with a true self-service option with the help of an efficient knowledge base that showcases the latest updates and answers to commonly asked questions.

Marketing Must be Human

The pandemic came fast, and it changes lives overnight, yet the marketers that pivoted quickly to meet customers in their moment of anxiety, not to sell, but to support were the ones that resonated. The brands that really applied the concept of "the thought matters" will see long-term gains in the minds of their customers. The way this work gets done is also different. The "future of work" that we thought was at least 5-7 years away is here now and we have got to lean into it or else everything will break. Our new normal is that work will continue to be digital, disparate, and demanding. Of course, marketing is not getting any less demanding. The strain the pandemic put on marketing to shift was severe and marketers must adopt new strategies, planning cycles, and execution processes to keep up, and then eventually lead.

COVID-19 has shown the importance of innovation and technology to enable work flexibility regardless of physical location, and across multiple devices. In particular, intelligent automation, a central knowledge base, and cloud computing have been vital technologies in enhancing pandemic response across the private sector, governments, and healthcare agencies during the pandemic. They have helped enable business continuity, allowing citizens and frontline workers to access critical information in real-time, accelerating contact tracing, and expediting loan processing to help businesses stay afloat. As offices reopen, we will probably see businesses heavily rely on digital tools to manage safeguards such as staggered shifts, contact tracing, and health scoring. The current economic climate is also likely to accelerate digital transformation, as organizations automate manual processes to better manage a disparate workforce, optimize supply chains to handle disruptions and meet demand, and scale up remote customer support.

Post-Pandemic World: Acceleration of Knowledge Management

The COVID-19 has already made society accept the knowledge-sharing frameworks, remote work, empathetic design, and the importance of trust in co-creation and it working with these technologies has become a new normal.

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> The Pandemic has given an opportunity to start all over from a clean slate, taking a knowledge-intensive approach as opposed to one that is data-centric. This includes personalised as well as population-centric approaches to segmentation. Only through KM can we hope to transition to an individualised, student-centred education system, and an individualised, patient-centric healthcare system.
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> — Arthur Murray, CEO of Applied Knowledge Sciences, in Washington, DC.

The pandemic has disrupted healthcare and education greatly and the greatest opportunities will come from two areas. The E-learning would be promoted; Knowledge management and Learning will go 80% online and virtual. Face-to-face interactions will give way to digital interactions in various domains. The best trainers will be available to the workforce in the remotest corners of the world.

As per Balaji Iyer of Grant Thornton, many organizations have now implemented collaboration technologies, and this will pave the way for a more fluid knowledge-sharing experience. The future working world is going to be remote and super cost-conscious because knowledge-sharing culture and tools will be in front and center. **The two technologies that are going to be the future of every organization are collaboration tools and a knowledge base system**. He also points to the embedding of critical knowledge components in business processes as a way of reducing delivery costs.

Harnessing all realms of knowledge within and outside an organization is going to be important for survival and success. Globally distributed teams working out of offices, living rooms, and cafes need to collaborate via virtual spaces. There is an acceptance of the productivity of work from home, balanced with the need for periodic physical interactions and leveraging relationships for workplace productivity.

The world is in a century where knowledge is the main asset for the success of people and organizations. Therefore, every opportunity is a good one for accelerating knowledge management. The COVID-19 crisis has created a need for almost all industries to accelerate the transformation to Digital for communication and content sharing.

All this will necessitate the existence of a sound knowledge base with machine learning capabilities and extensive use of collaboration technologies.

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