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With the mandated guidance to support social distancing as a necessary preventive measure to halt the spread of the dangerous coronavirus, HR teams have been literally forced to modify their new hire onboarding approach in order to align it to the new normal. As always, technology is coming to the rescue and playing a pivotal role in this transformation.

E-Joining in the Era of
Social Distancing

J oining a new organisation, irrespective of whether it is the employee's first job or not is an occasion that brings about a complex mix of emotions, including, but not limited to excitement, anxiety, hope, and trepidation.

Therefore, over the years, the corporate world has realised the importance of executing a word-class onboarding program - a program that welcomes all new hires into the organisation with efficiency, personalisation and most importantly, warmth.

The aim of such a program is to smoothly onboard the new hires into the organisation and assimilate them into the corporate family seamlessly, setting them up for success with the right information and tools. It extends to connecting these new hires to their immediate network of colleagues, bosses and internal stakeholders.

The stress, quite correctly, has been on ensuring that a very 'human' approach is deployed. An approach in which someone, usually from the HR department, is at the office gates to welcome the new hire and stays connected in the manner of a

'buddy' or 'Point of Contact' for the initial period of the onboarding. This individual assists with all the formalities including documentation, familiarisation with the organisation's primary policies, procurement of electronic assets such as laptops and email addresses, and introducing the new hire to critical colleagues.

With the mandated guidance to support social distancing as a necessary preventive measure to halt the spread of the dangerous coronavirus, HR teams have been literally forced to modify their new hire onboarding approach in order to align it to the new normal. As always, technology is coming to the rescue and playing a pivotal role in this transformation. While in some cases, organisations are rapidly using a bits-and-pieces approach using existing tools they possess, many are also leveraging the new age HR-Tech platforms that are available today to support the 'hire to retire' cycle.

Let's look at the various components of the new hire onboarding or joining experience that are being transformed to suit the current disruption in business processes and speed up the process of recovery that is so essential to get the economy back on track.

1. Online Documentation & Verification

As per Krish Hanumanthan, Founder of AceNgage, a premier consulting firm focusing on employee retention, this is the area that corporate India is looking at very closely. Traditionally, company officials have been used to having new hires report into their offices with all their paperwork to complete the joining process. Now, with tech-based systems, employees are encouraged to do so from the comfort of their homes. This extends to filling up mandatory Government required documentation and digital signing of NDAs, leading to complete background verification and employee ID generation.

2. BYOD Framework

Organisations are also encouraging the use of personal devices for office work. Besides assisting in social distancing, a 'Bring Your Own Device' Policy can have multiple benefits - it can help organisations reduce their capital investments and employees get to work on devices that they are most accustomed to. Some organisations, such as the India captive of a global insurance major which runs the shared services centre, has delivered company laptops to the homes of new hires since data privacy is of immense criticality in their business.

3. Organisation Familiarisation

With most large organisations already using central repositories of company information such as organisation charts and policies, this is a component of the onboarding program that is very easily executed to suit the remote working requirement, through the use of appropriate system access rights and logins. The more progressive organisations have adapted these for the 21st century - modules have been gamified, mundane PowerPoint slides have been junked and bite-sized videos ranging from shared leadership insights to the company dress code have been deployed.

4. E-Introductions & Online Trainings

Companies are leveraging video conferencing tools to set up the initial meetups of new hires with colleagues and important stakeholders. With the robust back-end architecture to suit

connects all the way from one-to-one to many-to-many, the age of video conferencing is upon us. Besides using these platforms for meetings, organisations across the board are also using them to provide training to new hires and existing employees, ensuring that even the most dangerous of all viruses is not able to stop business continuity.

While a number of organisations have transfigured any one or all of the above-mentioned components on onboarding, the truth is that with the emergence of social distancing and the 'lockdown' in many parts of the world, hiring has become the first casualty with many organisations having deferred their hiring plans as they try and make sense of how the coronavirus pandemic will play out. While this is clearly a conservative and more operationally comfortable approach to take, a number of organisations also realize that it may not be the most optimum approach in the longer-term.

In a service dominated economy like India, possessing the right talent within your boundary walls is often your primary competitive advantage. Leaving your grip on this 'human resource' is giving a window of opportunity to your nimble competitors to take advantage of and create the possibility of extended damage to your business. Add to this, the likelihood of the harm that could be caused to your employer brand in our socially connected world by just one disgruntled hire whose joining is deferred or worse still, offer revoked. Hence, moving in this direction and taking steps to facilitate e-joining in the era of social distancing, is not only the safer and smarter thing to do, it is the more ethical thing to do as well. ∎

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About the Author:
Vikas Dua is an accomplished HR and recruitment professional with over 15 years of experience in the field, having worked with both start-ups and large corporations like Wipro, Concentrix and Startek Aegis, driving hiring in the APAC region. Currently, he is Chief HR Mentor at Attayn. co—a disruptive HR Tech firm working on enhancing and democratizing knowledge sharing in the academic space. Vikas is also a TEDx speaker, and a Vlogger and Blogger on HR practices, sharing his learnings under his self-designed 'HR in my HeaRt' brand umbrella

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