

TJ: Hi, I am TJ. We are back with season 2 and in this episode, we are going to talk about how some enterprises all around the world, already are or can take certain steps to be able to come out stronger from these series of disruptions.

To help us identify and understand the important building blocks of an enterprise strategy that focuses on being more resilient and adaptive, our guest is Rakshit Ghura, the Vice President and Global Practice Head for Digital Workplace Services at HCL Technologies.

With more than 15 years of experience of delivering cutting edge digital workplace solutions to some of the biggest companies in the world, he is entrusted by many industry leaders to guide them in designing workplace strategies to meet the current and future challenges.

Welcome, Rakshit.

Rakshit: Hi, TJ.

TJ: Thank you for joining us again.

Rakshit: Thank you very much for having me on again. I hope all our listeners are healthy and well.

TJ: The last time we were here, recording our first episode, I remember you putting a lot of stress on why organizations should focus on being more fluid with the ability to be more adaptive, to embrace changes that we were bound to see in the future. We recorded that episode in February this year and the events that followed made your views more and more relevant. No one could have foreseen this. What are your views on this?

Rakshit: Yes, well the future came early. We have had the technology to cope with and absorb such disruptions in business for some time now. So, it basically narrowed down to whether you factored in those essential blocks into your technology ecosystem blueprint in your last digital workplace transformation undertaking. Some of our customers were very well positioned to meet these challenges head on while others were in the process of getting there. The recent events have acted as a catalyst for those transformations.

Irrespective of the preparedness, accelerated assessment followed by immediate action was essential.

From provisioning laptops for remote working to procuring adequate VPN licenses and maintaining service levels, companies across industries have faced myriad challenges while ensuring business continuity during the pandemic. The crisis has highlighted operational and technological gaps in existing business continuity plans. The approach to risk management and business continuity planning, especially when it concerns emerging risks, needs a makeover to enable business resilience.

TJ: Agreed. We have seen many changes in the way we work now and most of them are here to stay. You work very closely with your customers in devising their digital workplace or the future of work initiatives. According to you, going forward, what are the top focus points that should find a place in every adaptive digital workplace strategy?

Rakshit: As global lockdowns are lifted and enterprises prepare to adjust to the “next normal,” it is essential that CXOs adopt a prudent roadmap towards building a safe and productive work environment for their employees and ensuring superior business continuity if a crisis were to strike in the near future. In a recent poll of 100 CIOs, forty-four percent said their executive teams believed business would return to normal within 12 months. For that to materialize and for the ‘normal’ to sustain, preparedness would be critical.

Without going into details, if I must highlight the top 5 strategies, they will be the following.

- Creating a robust remote working environment
- Driving business outcomes in a gig economy
- Ensuring resilience with overhauled business continuity plans
- Adopting Sensors and IoT in the physical workspace
- Accelerating digital transformation initiatives to enhance employee experience

TJ: Interestingly, the first two strategies focus primarily on being able to engage and enable the talent irrespective of the traditional boundaries of geography and work culture. Could you kindly elaborate on this?

Rakshit: An organization's business outcome will be directly proportional to its ability to design and deliver targeted, continuous reskilling programs to empower the workforce with new ways of working.

With remote working here to stay for the foreseeable future, employers need to equip their workforce with the skills and tools necessary to stay productive and drive significant business outcomes. From communication to collaboration and adaptability, employees need to be empowered to achieve their professional goals while realizing their KRAs and delivering an exceptional customer experience.

Talent management is about to be transformed with work from home being accepted as the "next normal." Executives are looking to onboard technology-savvy talent with the right set of skills and not feel restricted by parameters such as geography. Not only does that emphasize newfound access to talent, it presents a sustainable way for companies to scale their workforce up and down based on the workload and skills required to deliver products and services. However, to benefit from this agile talent model, CIOs will have to adapt their IT infrastructure to allow for remote access and virtual collaboration, deploy new-age HR systems that facilitate rapid onboarding and offboarding, and invest in implementing robust cybersecurity controls. Digital enablement is a pre-requisite for leveraging gig workers, which is apparent from the growth of the gig economy in the last five years.

TJ: Moving towards business continuity plans and physical workspaces, you believe that an overhaul and IoTization focused transformation is the answer. How can companies move start taking steps towards this?

Rakshit: Adopting future-proof, flexible and continuously evolving BCP to prevent business interruption and customer dissatisfaction during a crisis in the future will be the key in ensuring that the overall technological eco-system is resilient enough to handle future jolts. The last pandemic that shocked the global business environment was the H1N1 virus, and ten years on, business continuity plans had not evolved to avert a similar crisis. To make matters worse, managing business continuity and pandemic plans has become highly complex with enterprises becoming more global with employees and customers in multiple geographies. Going forward, companies should develop all-encompassing pandemic preparedness plans with critical processes, roles and supporting tools that can be activated as the pandemic unfolds.

This includes preparing the physical workspaces for the returning workforce after this pandemic and for any such future disruptions. We promote widespread use of sensor technology and a centralized dashboard to identify symptomatic patients, detect PPE non-compliance, manage occupancy and employee density, and more. From wearables to track employee health to analyzing CCTV video feeds in real-time for ensuring people are wearing face covers, IoT has made it possible to augment pandemic risk management in a more effective and streamlined manner.

TJ: As you mentioned, digital transformation has now accelerated and is moving towards making sure the remote workforce is adequately equipped to retain and increase productivity. What are some quick tips to excel in this exercise?

Rakshit: Deploy user-friendly collaboration tools, bolster cyber security posture, and empower the remote worker with the right digital tools. There is consensus that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation timelines to 6-12 months from the usual 5-year roadmap.

With social distancing in daily lives touted to be the "next normal," connectivity will be a key highlight in most digitalization roadmaps. CXOs need to focus on modernizing the core to enable remote access to business-critical applications while ensuring superior data security, build a digital and virtual workplace, and adopt a cloud-first approach.

By switching to a cloud-based operating model, implementing AI-driven cybersecurity monitoring solution, and automating repetitive manual front and back-office business processes, CXOs can empower a future-ready workforce to tackle black swan events better.

TJ: Everyone has a different perspective of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected their businesses. For the ones who see this as an opportunity to revamp structures and capitalize on this opportunity, what would be your advice to them?

Rakshit: Some of us were prepared and some of us were not. But all of us were caught off-guard by the magnitude and the suddenness of the recent challenges.

All failure is failure to adapt. That is why I keep insisting that being adaptive in terms of how you deliver productivity enabling solutions to your resources is of utmost importance. Adaptability and action create opportunity.

The opportunity is here to be fluid. To transform and build not only functional environments but intuitive, adaptive and humanized ecosystems. It is high time that we need to understand that if technology is the HOW of change, people are the WHY. Digital transformation strategies must go beyond technology and focus on human insights to make sure we are not just busy integrating services or technologies but integrating experiences.

We helped our customers in achieving considerable success in their efforts to mitigate business disruption. The HCL Fluid Workplace Solution Pack and the SafeSense contactless workplace solutions bring these ideas to life.

TJ: Absolutely. We will make sure we put the links in the description where our audience can go and get more information of these solution packs. When we come back after very short break, Rakshit will face the rapid-fire round.

Welcome back everyone. Rakshit, you are familiar with the rapid-fire round. Are you ready?

Rakshit: Sure!

TJ: When offices open up, given a choice, out of 10 working days, how many days would you prefer to work from home?

Rakshit: That is a great question TJ. I would like to work 8 days out of 10 from home. I will prefer going to office only once a week, especially for meeting my team and for meeting my customers. That is the plan.

TJ: Which is your fitness regimen of choice? – Strength training or cardio?

Rakshit: I'm not a strength-training person, so my preference is always cardio. I think rather than building muscles, I should be focusing on decreasing body fat.

TJ: Are you looking forward to the Apple iPhone 12 launch?

Rakshit: So I recently bought the Apple iPhone 11. Maybe my initial plan would have been to skip it but considering that Apple iPhone 12 is going to feature 5G connectivity and they're also talking about LiDAR scanners, I might end up buying the iPhone 12

TJ: Video conferencing tool of choice - Zoom or MS Teams?

Rakshit: TJ, I don't think it's a question of either or. Maybe we'll need both from an organizational perspective. When it comes to internal collaboration and working with the team, my preference is always Microsoft Teams But when it comes to talking to the customers or talking to the partners, that is where I think Zoom scores better. They still have one the best user interface and user experience.

TJ: Do you miss travelling?

Rakshit: In my role, I have been travelling almost 15 days a month for the last 15 years. So definitely, I miss travelling a lot.

TJ: A place where you would like to travel with your family when it is safe to do so?

Rakshit: I am looking forward to a trip to Spain. I really like beaches and Spain has some very good food as well as cultural heritage to offer.

Thank you very much, Rakshit. As always, a wisdom packed session. As the current situation evolves, we hope we get to talk to you again soon for more guidance.

Rakshit: Thanks again for having me. Looking forward to your next invite. Stay safe everyone.

TJ: I thank our listeners for joining in. We want to hear from you. We need your feedback and suggestions for future topics. The contact information is available in the description. Comment, share, recommend and subscribe. See you all in the next one.