



## Freedom to Work

By Niharika Chaturvedi

What are you doing in the office right now? No, not specifically, as no doubt you are reading this stimulating article. What I'm asking is why are you physically in the office? If the answer to this question is "the company expects me to" you're clearly working for the wrong company and its time for a change.

The past decade has seen phenomenal advancements in technology from availability of systems on cloud, seamless information sharing through productivity suites and openness to embrace these technologies that has led most organisations to evolve and transform not just digitally but culturally as well. As such, professionals now need to be given freedom to work and the benefits for employee and employer alike are clear...

### Work-Life Balance

Here there is good and bad news. The bad is that all staff are now connected to the office by a digital umbilical cord, even when travelling, at home, at dinner with the family, on holiday, even in the bathroom should you feel the need. What is surprising though is that the main drivers to be in-touch with the office are driven by the employees themselves, not the employer. Being constantly 'online' seems to play in to our subconsciousness of being committed and indispensable. However, the good news is that being connected means that you no longer need to sit soullessly in your cubicle answering emails and calls when you could be somewhere much more pleasant.

### Hours

With the advent of technology at our fingertips, the days of replying to emails only the next morning has passed, even if it's not expected, people get things done on the go. We attend to work that needs to be done no matter where we are and thus, the boundary of an office building should stop defining the time we spend working. 9am to 6pm, 40-hour weeks and 25 days of annual leave should take an exit from our employment contracts and give way to a true representation of today's corporate culture. Work when you want to and measure me on my results, not my hours.

### Location

A lot can be accomplished without having to visit a physical office. It's not about working from home anymore – that has existed for a long time – It's about working from where you are, be it home, a cafe, while babysitting your child at playground, at an airport or in the daily commute. It's also about working when it's the best time for you, early morning, or after your children are asleep, or after your gym session post lunch. It's about breaking the boundaries that we call an office and experiencing true freedom – freedom to work, when you want and where you want.

### Commuting

An activity which used to be 'dead time' is now filled with smart-devices and better connectivity. This not only means commuting can become an extension to the office, but it also means you can revise your travel time to align with your personal needs, rather than to meet the demands of the boss. No need to be packed in the rush hour commute, start early, finish early, it's up to you.

### Space

We all used to have a desk, it then became a hot-desk. Now we are all desk free. We can work anywhere at any time. A typical week no longer extends from Monday 8am to Friday 6pm. The new way of working is Monday in the office; Tuesday at a client; Wednesday co-working, Thursday home; Friday with the team. Your work is now safe in the cloud which you can access anytime any place. Great news for your company too, especially in cities such as Singapore where office space (and hence cost) is at an absolute premium. Staff like freedom; Companies like saving space. The classic win-win scenario.

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### **Creativity**

A passionate and driven professional often finds themselves delivering and working towards their goals beyond the limitation of their working hours. Thus, it's about time many of such corporates who are still living in the dark welcome the light of mobility and trust. You need to attract professional talent that thinks and breathes innovation and passion 24x7, not just limited to showcasing in front of the management during office hours. The freedom to be able to get clicking and ticking when your creative juices start flowing helps to capture the best moments of the talent you have hired.

### **Talent**

There is a general perception that this is what the millennials would want. But it's the generations before millennials, often those parenting, who value the freedom to work more. Breaking the boundaries of an office and of management's minds around work hours could be one of the answers to the shortage of talent created by parents all over the world leaving workforce because they had no choice. The only two options available to them used to be a 9-5 career or a stay at home parent. If they came back to work part-time, they would miss out on career progression, not because they don't have the capability, but because they are looked upon as not committed enough. It's an era where flexible work does not need to be defined by the hours you clock in the office but the tasks you have achieved staying out.

### **Action**

A few years ago, Yahoo and more recently IBM cut down on work from home and remote work policy, which led to upheaval in the tech community and in the following years, the same industry has now seen larger than ever proportions of remote work trends

coming in. We all know what happened to Yahoo after the measures were taken to "bring the people together". IBM is under pressure to turn around the business however this would be the most ill-timed policy by an organisation that is contradicting its own research on productivity of remote and work from home policies. On the other hand, organisations like Juniper Networks and Accenture are introducing new concepts like doing away with annual performance appraisals and Netflix and Virgin both have zero counting of annual leave policy. Citrix promotes work from anywhere and actively gives location freedom to employees.

### **Trust**

Building trust within your team is key to creating this culture, thus empowering the individuals to take accountability is the starting point. Many experts agree that trust is perhaps the most important element of a synergistic, harmonious and efficient work environment. Trust is built by knowing who you work with, knowing what makes them tick, what brings them to work, what gets them out of bed and what they aspire to do in their life. Investing in your talent and training young managers to invest in their subordinates will create a circle of trust that relieves the organization of stringent policies to regulate people.

### **And So...**

It's time to change. There are no longer technological or social barriers. The only difficulty with implementing a Freedom to Work is often one of trust. Here at Olofsson & Company we embraced a freedom to work from day 1 and the results are astounding. Empower your teams to take accountability is the starting point. Professionals do their best work when it doesn't feel like work.

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