

Work near home infrastructure for Kerala

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I will start with work from home. It has been there for quite some time, but the difference is that the work from home facility was offered by very few companies and was offered to very few people. Techno Park had plan for constructing a building, and we had surveyed on the demand for space. We had a lot of the discussions with many industry leaders, who stated that work from home will become popular in the coming years, which has to be taken into account. Covid 19 made these changes happen all of a sudden. We postponed our decision to have our own building.

Most of the IT companies in Kerala are working from the IT parks set up by the government. There are three major IT parks- Techno Park, Info Park and Cyber Park, accommodating about 900 companies employing more than 110,000 employees. Due to the pandemic, most of the people are now working from home and only 5 to 10 per cent are working from the offices. We were expecting that by early 2021 most of the people will be back to office. But the pandemic threat still exists and the IT companies have postponed decision on working from office.

The productivity of work from home has been reported to be very good by almost all the companies. Apart from productivity, some of the companies are also saving many of the other expenses like transportation costs, administrative costs, etc. And some other companies have scaled down their rented office spaces as they are not using the complete space now.

But there are certain concerns also starting from the issue of infrastructure at homes to the connectivity issues, issues of working overtime, issues resulting non- socialization of people, etc. One of the main concerns which has been raised by the companies is in developing the organizational culture and the organizational values. Normally these are developed when

people come to the office, they interact with others, they collaborate with each other, they create a bonding, they also learn from the seniors, and so on. But in the virtual environment when we you are working from home, these do not happen and it is very difficult to imbibe the culture and value among the employees.

Dr. Santosh was saying that 44 per cent will be working from home even after COVID 19 is controlled. But there are various research / studies conducted on this and the general consensus is that between 70 to 90 per cent of the people will be coming to office, once the situation is under control and the remaining people will be working from home. Demand for huge campuses may not be there in the short term, especially in the case of IT.

But then it is going to be the hybrid mode of working in the future, as we discussed, some of the employees will be working from home or other places and some of the employees will be working from their offices. This may be on rotation basis also.

The industries are now hesitant to commit for long term investments. They are looking for minimal commitments in the short term, till the COVID scare is over. They're also looking for space on demand so that they can upscale/ downscale the space availability as per the requirement. This will be of immense help to industry as they have to pay only for their usage.

This is the same situation where we migrated from own / dedicated infrastructure to the cloud infrastructure. For the dedicated infrastructure, we had to pay the cost up front, for the whole infrastructure. Even if you are using the infrastructure for possibly a day or an hour, you need to pay for the whole infrastructure and the infrastructure will be with you whether you are using it or not.

The cloud facility offered the flexibility for user community to procure resources as per demand without any upfront commitment and the flexibility of paying as per usage. I think this is coming in the physical infrastructure space also, these days. Now the industry is looking for flexibility of usage, such that space may be utilized by any of their employees as per the requirement. They also want to use the facility temporarily or for a longer period as the demand rises. They also will need the facilities like conference rooms, training facility other services on demand.

The new age employees are looking for facilities where they can walk to work, so that they are not far away from the comfort of their home, and they also don't have to worry about

issues of commuting to their workplaces. They also are looking for proximity to all the amenities so that they can walk to buy and the time for commuting can be saved.

The traditional jobs have been regular, full time or part time. But in gig economy, people can take variety of short-term jobs and projects. Indian freelancer market is expected to grow to US dollars 20 to \$30 billion by 2025. Work from home may not be suitable for many because of the issues that I said earlier.

Interestingly, companies are turning to tier two and tier three cities for their expansion, which was never the case before. Earlier, many of the companies were looking for places like Bangalore and Hyderabad and the tier two and tier three cities were not in their plan, which has changed now. It is also understood that majority of the freelancers in India are from tier two and tier three cities.

In the Kerala context, there is abundant talent available. Because of the reverse migration, from many of the foreign countries, mainly from the Middle East countries, there has been a jump in skilled and high skilled human resource. There is a big push for digital economy, as we have seen in the recent budget. A skill mission is planned, for meeting the requirements of the knowledge economy.

The work near home facility is a proposal for interconnected centers distributed across Kerala. All centers are connected to the cloud and these we will offer flexible workspaces to organizations as well as individuals. Definitely this will strengthen the freelance ecosystem in Kerala, because the freelancers may not be comfortable to work from home for various reasons as explained above. If they get a space where they can work with sufficient security, sufficient safety, with high level of connectivity, definitely, this could be the place where the freelance workers can operate from.

This will attract employment to Kerala, as employee can work from anywhere in the new mode of working. So, a Keralite staying in Kerala can get work anywhere in the world, yet still work from Kerala. With the support of proper infrastructure, Kerala can be a centre for freelancers working for organisations anywhere in the world. For organisations, this gives the option to scout for the best talent and they can optimize the cost for human resources.

The facilities proposed to be available in these centers may be available from other coworking centers also. But what makes it unique to the Work Near Home concept in Kerala is the service support which will be offered to the users, especially the freelancers and startups. They will need lot of support in legal assistance, taxation and filing, company

registration, consulting, among others. These services will be offered to the users as a central facility.

We plan the WNH centres to be small modules, so that occupancy and return on investment can be ensured in minimal time. We have identified that 5000 square feet is the minimum space which would be economically viable. This can seat around 60 to 70 people. As demand grows, this can be replicated in other places in the same town. We had a lot of designs from the Indian Institute of Interior Designers. We are planning to go for all digital operations so that this can be scaled up at minimal time based on demand to anywhere.

We had the first level demand assessment through two sources. We conducted a survey among the IT companies, where we asked them which are the cities they would like to have smaller facilities like this. We also had feedback from individuals working outside Kerala to see what kind of environment they are looking for and which cities they prefer. We have created the heat map of demand across Kerala. We start with the cities of higher demand and then go to the next cities in that order.

We are convinced that this is going to be the infrastructure facility for the current and future generations, working in the knowledge economy. This will definitely help in giving a boost to the industry, stimulating the growth, creating employment and for cost optimization for the users.