COVID-19 and Remote Working Trends for Persons with Disabilities

Mada Center

Considering the way we work and learn now, and how our methods have drastically changed, the year 2020 will be long remembered as the COVID-19 year. Many workers were forced to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, and students in many countries resorted to remote learning. Millions of people have stayed at home and worked or studied remotely.

How do we continue to connect in a time when face-to-face meetings are impossible? Remote work and remote video conferences are technologies that have flourished due to the global pandemic. Remote work, home office, Work from Home, telework are some of the terms used in describing environments in which people are not physically present in the employer's office. The concept works primarily for work and tasks involving plenty of screen activities. In many countries, the advance of digitization and the move to a more knowledge-based economy have made it more realistic to work and learn remotely.

The ability to work from home is an accommodation that the disability community has long demanded for. The answer was always: "No,", but this has changed now. The advantages of working from home are obvious, some of them include higher productivity, lower costs, and greater flexibility. The pandemic upturn can bring long-term benefits for many workers, particularly workers with disabilities.

One billion individuals, 15% of the world's population, have some sort of disability, and many of them need to work remotely. The trip to work may be overstretched or inaccessible. Accessible bathrooms and paths may not be available in the office. And for persons with a variety of disabilities, the workplace environment may cause physical and mental stress.

Digital workplaces and school settings provide an obvious advantage of creating more equal opportunities for a diverse community, as they overcome obstacles caused by distance, connectivity, strict timetables, and many more difficulties. It also seems to be the perfect solution to all of the diversity and inclusion issues that organizations have been dealing with for years. PWDs have already suffered from unreliable, time-consuming, or pricey trips to work, and the rapid adoption of remote work can possibly turn out to be a huge turning point of inclusion for them.

Flexibility is vital for persons with physical or mental disabilities that make it more difficult for them to function in typical workplaces, as well as for those who are caring for young children or older persons. Reducing travel time and efforts is useful for all staff and can be extremely helpful for people with mobility impairments who find it difficult or expensive to travel outside their homes.

Many students with disabilities have experienced positive results when they switched to remote learning. Students with limited mobility don't need to care about traveling to and from schools anymore. Students with neurological or mental disorders, particularly those with anxiety or post-traumatic stress should not need to bother with communicating with peers or being in public.

Accessibility

Digital accessibility is key to the sustainability of any campaign on diversity and inclusion. The abrupt change to the remote working and learning world has demonstrated the value of accessibility as never before. Therefore, accessibility at the workplace and schools, be it physical or virtual, should no longer be an option but a necessity. Ensuring ICT accessibility will help PWDs perform better, providing a truly inclusive environment.

Procuring accessible technology

Technology plays a critical role in the digital classroom and work environment. Video conferencing systems, instant messaging applications, cloud computing, etc. have become common ways to communicate with staff and students. But not every tool is accessible to PWD, which is why organizations must make sure to acquire software and IT products that are accessible to PWDs so that they can function and learn seamlessly.

Reasonable Accommodation

Organizations must provide reasonable accommodation for various kinds of disabilities. As soon as a PWD gets on board, required changes and assistance needed in their setting must be provided, which will enable them to complete their work smoothly.

In conclusion, for people with disabilities, working or learning from home has proven its positive effect, and it's also ideal for working parents or people with caregiving responsibilities. Working from a home office would be the best reasonable accommodation for PWDs. To fit their needs, people can plan their work or learning as they want and make the surrounding environment more comfortable for them. This leads to greater productivity and satisfaction.