World Online Networking Day 2023 shows power of convergence

World Online Networking Day, celebrated today (30 October), presents a unique opportunity for individuals and organisations to tap into the power of online networks, fostering new relationships and reinforcing existing ones. Seugnet Van den Berg, executive director of Bizmod and Bizmod Development (BizDev), emphasises the need to contemplate the changing dynamics of remote and hybrid work. She notes that the worldwide transition towards remote work has necessitated swift adaptations by organisations.

Source: Supplied

Despite both workforces operating under a robust hybrid model, the findings of a BizDev study offer insightful data on employee preferences and challenges. These insights illuminate effective online networking strategies and strike a balance between virtual and face-to-face work relationships.

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Parusha Partab 30 Oct 2023

Experience levels matter. The experience in hybrid or remote work varied among employees at both organisations. While most of the employees in the more traditional workforce had substantial prior experience in hybrid or remote settings, the younger workforce was more diverse, with some having substantial experience and others having never worked remotely before. This diversity highlights the need for tailored support.

Embracing remote work. Employees at both companies generally appreciate remote work, however they express it differently. The older millennial and Gen X employees emphasise the productivity benefits and absence of commuting. Sentiments were more evenly divided among the younger employees. While some enjoy the flexibility of remote work, others have stressed the need for more co-work face to face days to foster connectedness.

The significance of co-workdays. In office days are seen by the more traditional workforce as opportunities for team collaboration and getting feedback on current projects. The younger workforce enjoys the social aspect, and the team interaction is highly regarded.

Face-to-face meetings Generally viewed positively by the more traditional workforce and are seen as conducive to discussions and encouraging banter. The younger workforces' opinions vary with some finding virtual meetings more efficient and others appreciating in-person interactions for collaborative work.

Leveraging digital tools. Both companies rely on similar tools like MS Teams and Mural for online work, however the ICT company utilises a broader range of digital collaboration tools.

Identifying challenges. Connectivity remains a common challenge for both organisations, with power issues reported as the ICT company's main bugbear. The older millennial and Gen Z employees mention sharing home space when children return from school a unique challenge.

Meeting formats preferences. In both organisations, employees find in-person meetings and social interactions very helpful. However, the ICT company places slightly more importance on online meetings and online socials, suggesting a greater reliance on virtual interactions.

Personal preferences influence remote work. Having children and the desire for less travel significantly influence remote working preferences in both companies. Additionally, the more traditional workforce employees express a preference for less exposure to office politics, while the ICT company's employees mention taking care of personal emergencies.

Striking the right balance. Both companies prefer a mostly virtual set up with occasional in-person meetings, emphasising the importance of maintaining a connected team environment.

Professional growth opportunities. Employees from both companies view remote work positively in terms of professional growth, with the traditional workforce employees more inclined to believe it facilitates upskilling and networking during in-person sessions.

Companies can't use cookie cutter approach

"The research findings illustrate the evolving landscape of remote work amongst professional services. While remote work has been embraced by employees in both companies, unique characteristics such as prior remote work experience and preferences, shape their perceptions," says Van den Berg.

"Recognising these differences, tailoring remote work strategies, and finding the right balance between virtual and in-person interactions is crucial for enhancing job satisfaction and fostering professional growth in the dynamic world of remote work."

Regardless of the company size, workforce age and model used, the following is clear: to achieve a successful online working model, companies can't use a cookie cutter approach. It needs to be customised for the organisation and constantly tweaked and improved. It is a process not an end state.

Online working has changed the way we framework away from the organisational perspective towards the personal perspective. If the way of working in an organisation doesn't fit with what is required in an employee's personal life, then they look elsewhere. It is much more about what works for them than what works for the company.

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