



June 26, 2020

# For Companies in Malaysia, a Virtual Workforce is Prompting New Leadership Models and Ways of Measuring Productivity

---

*During a recent webcast in Malaysia with Propay Partners, our experts discussed how business leaders are rethinking workforce models in the wake of a more virtual workforce.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught many businesses in Malaysia (as well as across the globe) how to cope during a crisis by abandoning traditional organisational behaviours, revamping their employee value proposition and communicating more openly with employees.

To further understand how companies are managing a more remote workforce and preparing for the future of work, Aon and Propay Partners co-hosted a webinar on May 19 with the theme, *What if...Working from home is the 'New Normal'?* Speakers included Rohit Nambiar, CEO of AXA AFFIN Life Malaysia, Rahul Chawla, director in the Human Capital Solutions practice at Aon, and Manish Mehta, business director at Propay Partners.

In his opening remarks, Mehta, who moderated the discussion, drew attention to this never-experienced phenomena that is altering the way we live, work and function. “Until a few months ago, none of us would have thought that we would be holding a webinar like this and on this topic. This time there's no playbook to take cues from or predict what might happen next,” he said.

## A Once-in-a-Lifetime Opportunity

While the current crisis has no playbook to follow, Rahul noted that there is vast opportunity amid uncertainty. “There is no doubt that this is an unprecedented crisis, but it is also one that offers unprecedented opportunity.” Rahul went on to explain how his team has been reviewing how companies responded, recovered and found opportunities in previous crises over the past two decades across the globe — from the Dot-com bubble at the turn of the millennium to the SARS epidemic in 2003 to the 2008-09 Great Recession. “Companies today have a rare opportunity to rethink the way they conduct business because society has been so upended.”

With an eye to the future, organisations must reimagine their compensation philosophies and embrace the reality that virtual working arrangements are here to stay, Rahul said. However, it appears the majority of companies are still focused on responding to the crisis in the near-term and not yet thinking about longer-term opportunities. Around two thirds of nearly 200 survey participants in Malaysia say they aren't planning to make long-term restructuring changes in their workforce operations. That's according to [Aon's 3rd COVID-19 pulse survey](#), conducted in late April to 1 May. "Companies risk letting this opportunity slip by. What it also shows is that these organisations assume that everything is going to be the same once they get back to their offices," Rahul said.

## Bridging Crisis Management with Empathy

Crisis management needs empathy in both execution and outlook, noted Rohit, who was awarded the Young Leader of the Year at the Asia Insurance Industry Awards in 2019. For example, many employees are working from home while also caring for younger children or elderly parents during this time. "It is vital for us to provide ways to help those who are less vocal and may need new avenues of engagement," he said. The first step is to ensure employees have access to effective technology for remote work, allowing them to be as productive as possible given the personal and professional priorities they may be facing.

During this time of uncertainty, business leaders have an even bigger obligation to remain transparent in their communications with employees about evolving company policies. For example, businesses extending work-from-home policies beyond local requirements can't assume employees understand why that decision is being made — or even that employees will be happy with that decision.

One lesson many firms have already learned from the pandemic is that their human capital is essential. "For a long time, companies have been advancing technology, products, processes, but at the end of the day, it's people," said Rohit. "I believe that the world will be a Pre-COVID and Post-COVID world. Many industries are not used to taking risky decisions. Now, nobody has a choice."

"The whole concept of tracking employees and measuring them is a very outdated philosophy in performance management," said Rohit. "What matters are the objectives that the managers set and how employees receive them." Leaders need to ask themselves if employees know the answers to questions like *How is my performance measured?* and *What happens if I don't meet expectations?*

## Looking Ahead

Even as this crisis looms for an unknown period of time and many companies 'test the waters' with new workforce models, Rohit warns that it isn't a good idea to run before learning to walk in the current context.

"Some banks are shutting their branches and going digital. But what do you do in a rural kampung (village) in Malaysia, where going to the bank is part of people's lifestyle?" he questioned. "A lot of things are changing, getting automated, going digital, and people's jobs are transforming in the process. But with every new development, you have to be careful that you don't overcorrect."

For questions about the topics discussed in this article, please reach out to one of the authors or write to [rewards-solutions@aon.com](mailto:rewards-solutions@aon.com).

To read more articles on how rewards professionals are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, please [click here](#).

*COVID-19 Disclaimer: This document has been provided as an informational resource for Aon clients and business partners. It is intended to provide general guidance on potential exposures, and is not intended to provide medical advice or address medical concerns or specific risk circumstances. Due to the dynamic nature of infectious diseases, Aon cannot be held liable for the guidance provided. We strongly encourage visitors to seek additional safety, medical and epidemiologic information from credible sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization. As regards insurance coverage questions, whether coverage applies or a policy will respond to any risk or circumstance is subject to the specific terms and conditions of the insurance policies and contracts at issue and underwriter determinations.*

*General Disclaimer: The information contained in this article and the statements expressed herein are of a general nature and not intended to address the circumstances of any particular individual or entity. Although we endeavor to provide accurate and timely information and use sources we consider reliable, there can be no guarantee that such information is accurate as of the date it is received or that it will continue to be accurate in the future. No one should act on such information without the appropriate professional advice after a thorough examination of the particular situation.*

## Author Contact Information

### **Rahul Chawla**

Director, Rewards Solutions  
Aon  
+65 9710 1675  
[rahul.chawla.2@aon.com](mailto:rahul.chawla.2@aon.com)

### **Manish Mehta**

Business Director  
Propay Partners  
+60 3766 56688  
[manish@propaypartners.com](mailto:manish@propaypartners.com)

## About Rewards Solutions

The Rewards Solutions practice at Aon empowers business leaders to reimagine their approach to rewards in the digital age through a powerful mix of data, analytics and advisory capabilities. Our colleagues support clients across a full spectrum of needs, including compensation benchmarking, pay and workforce modeling, and expert insights on rewards strategy and plan design. To learn more, visit: [rewards.aon.com](https://rewards.aon.com).

## About Aon

Aon plc (NYSE:AON) is a leading global professional services firm providing a broad range of risk, retirement and health solutions. Our 50,000 colleagues in 120 countries empower results for clients by using proprietary data and analytics to deliver insights that reduce volatility and improve performance. For further information, please visit [aon.com](https://aon.com).

This article provides general information for reference purposes only. Readers should not use this article as a replacement for legal, tax, accounting or consulting advice that is specific to the facts and circumstances of their business. We encourage readers to consult with appropriate advisors before acting on any of the information contained in this article.

The contents of this article may not be reused, reprinted or redistributed without the expressed written consent of Aon. To use information in this article, please [write to our team](#).

## About Propay Partners

Propay Partners is a Malaysia-based payroll and compliance management firm that helps global multinationals expand their business in SEA while also augmenting their local workforce. They see payroll and HR services as a strategic game-changer that will redefine the way industries operate in the future. Their thought leadership reflects their voice on human capital management trends, payroll technology, foreign labour regulation, gender diversity, pay parity and secure cloud and HR integration. For further information, please visit Propay Partners at [propaypartners.com](https://propaypartners.com).

©2020 Aon plc. All rights reserved