



SAIMAS NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE EDITOR

This is our 2nd Newsletter for this year since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some areas business and government have resumed working fulltime yet it is still not business as usual and we will continue with the Newsletter for the rest of the year.

Since the previous Newsletter there have been numerous virtual workshops that were attended by myself and some of my team members, including one on working remotely which is published in this Newsletter.

Another interesting virtual meeting was held with the Department of Public Service and Administration, called the OD and JE Forum, where the discussion was mainly about the immediate suspension of the Job Evaluation Tool, namely Evaluate. The Chairperson indicated that the licence had expired and there is no longer access to the tool nor the database of evaluated posts. From now on Departments need to benchmark posts

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against each other and send the outcome to the DPSA for final approval. It was further indicated that JE panels should still be held whereby the benchmarks must be used as the input document. I suppose we should rename the panels to Benchmark Panels. Watch out for the next newsletter that will feature an article on Benchmarking

Hope you enjoy the snippets that have been sourced.

Keep Safe

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Opinions expressed in articles in this Newsletter does not necessarily reflect the views of the South Africa Institute of Management Services (SAIMAS)

WEBINAR – WORKING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS (WORKSHOP CONDUCTED OVER THE INTERNET) ON 20 AUGUST 2020

By

Dr John Eliastam from Smartchoices



This was the first virtual workshop that was hosted by SAIMAS. The workshop was presented by John Eliastam. With reference to the President's State of Nation Address, he emphasised that in order to reduce transmission of the COVID 19 virus we need to reduce gatherings. Businesses were closed and encouraged to adopt a work-from-home strategy where possible. The webinar's purpose was to communicate on how to work remotely during the Covid- 19 pandemic and even perhaps to continue working in this manner.

Virtual teams are used where team members are geographically spread across the country or even in other countries and they have limited face-to-face contact. They work interdependently using electronic communication media to achieve common goals.

John presented on the advantages and disadvantages of virtual teams, as well as the challenges of working in virtual teams. He provided solutions to the challenges and tools

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that can be used while working virtually including practices that teams should adopt to manage virtual teams.

Advantages of virtual teams:

1. The ability to assemble teams that maximise functional expertise by including professionals who are geographically dispersed;
2. Enabling continuous 24/7 productivity by using different time zones to their advantage.
3. Cost reduction through less travelling, no need to relocate newly appointed staff and general overhead expenditures.
4. Sharing knowledge across geographic boundaries and organisational units and sites; and
5. Increase in productivity and team performance.

Disadvantages of virtual teams and how to manage them:

1. **Communication and collaboration difficulties:**

People don't interact and share knowledge on digital platforms at the same time, which results in delays or communication being missed. Platforms often get overwhelmed with multiple themes of conversation that are taking place at the same time from multiple contributors.

To enable clear and effective communication leaders should foster a culture of communication in which they must lead by example by giving regular updates and establishing structured daily check-ins with their team and to be clear on how team members should communicate. Leaders should also clarify expectations and outputs

2. **Potentially lower team engagement by team members;**

Lack of everyday non- verbal communication - Virtual employees can go days without contact, leading to feelings of frustration and opportunities for misunderstanding.

Leaders should use videos for the important or high-stake conversations so they can get as close as possible and have face-to-face communication and they must make sure they always ask how employees are doing on that day, what's going well, or where they need more support. Video calls are one of the best ways to maximise efficiency because they do recreate the routine office feeling which remote teams are missing out on.

3. **Difficulties in creating trust and shared responsibility among team members;**

Having effective and productive meetings - people tend to focus on other duties and not concentrate on meetings.

Here are some ground rules that leaders must enforce in their teams:

- Set expectations up front; reinforce expectations at each meeting and ensure they are interactive between the leader and employees;
- Always use an agenda;
- Ask questions frequently;
- Limit monologues — no more than three sentences before asking for an interaction;
- Verify and validate that everyone heard you or another team member who is speaking;
- Pay attention to who has talked and the topics that are discussed; call on quiet participants;
- Send long explanations out ahead of time in writing;
- Foster communication before, during, and after meetings;
- Employ project management tools to promote shared understanding of deadlines, assigned tasks, progress, and responsibility.

4. **Isolation and distractions in a home environment;**

Biases in electronic communication- Bias in electronic communication is divided into three (3) aspects which are Burned Bridge Bias, Squeaky Wheel Bias and Sinister Attribution Bias.

- Burned Bridge Bias -This is the tendency for people to engage in risky interpersonal behaviour in an electronic medium that they would not consider face to face;
- Squeaky Wheel Bias - This is a tendency that people show when they communicate via an "impoverished" medium like telephone, email or instant messaging;
- Sinister Attribution Bias - People do behave in less appropriate ways when communicating electronically and this increases the chances that they will do something that upsets or offends the team - and the team will attribute it to sinister motives on their part.

- Leaders should always assume **positive intent** that co-workers are operating to the best of their ability and are acting with the best interest of the company and their colleagues in mind.

5. **High levels of social distance between members;**

Trust - Trust is based on the belief that team members are dependable and meeting the team expectations by delivering what they promise, which is seen as highly important in virtual teams as trust will be established by repeatedly setting expectations and delivering results that meet or exceed those expectations.

- Leaders should focus on results and avoid assumptions and they must build and maintain trust. When employees trust their managers and believe they're working toward a shared vision, collaboration and engagement happen naturally.

6. **Challenges in monitoring and managing virtual teams.**

Productivity (or working too hard) – Low productivity is an obvious risk when employees work outside of a traditional office. In an environment without day-to-day oversight, some team members may not use their time wisely.

- Leaders should establish shared goals and ensure accountability within their teams.

7. **Social isolation-** Loneliness is one of the most common complaints about remote work, with employees missing the informal social interaction of an office setting.

- The easiest way to establish some basic social interaction is to leave some time at the beginning of team calls just for non-work items and to be intentional about relationships.

8. **Remote work can de-humanise** – computer screens somehow de-sensitise us, making us less considerate of others.

- Leaders should be nice to their team and lower standards of productivity.

9. **Lack of access to information-** Newly remote workers are often surprised by the added time and effort needed to locate information from co-workers. Even getting

answers to what seem like simple questions can feel like a large obstacle to a worker based at home.

- Leaders should provide resources to their team members, make sure their team has the technology it needs to get the work done.

10. **Distractions at home-** Even in normal circumstances family and home demands can impinge on remote work; managers should expect these distractions to be greater during unplanned work from home.

Tools that can be used to make remote working easier, are:

1. Web and video conferencing: Google Meet, Zoom, Cisco Webex
2. Collaboration and prototyping: Invision, Marvel, Adobe XD Scheduling: Calendly, Doodle
3. Workflow automation: Zapier, Microsoft Flow, Monday

Leaders should choose the best tool for t because not every tool is going to be a good fit for your team. Team practices must be put in place that need to become part of their daily and weekly routines. Teams should always have clearly defined goals and should encourage one another.

Leaders should establish and enforce team expectations - such as no multi-tasking, proper video usage, everyone must be engaged. Leaders must set up a reward system to keep the team motivated and this way identify team members that can take on more responsibility.

Leaders should use coaching tactics rather than micro-managing to improve performance and provide encouragement and emotional support, they must manage conflict, team expectations and performance between team members. The focus should be on outcomes not activities, there must be flexibility and processes must be redefined when necessary to keep the processes flowing.



We are excited to announce that due to the current uncertainty around the course of the Covid-19 virus pandemic over the next few months, we have decided to go forward with four webinars for 2020/21. There will be no cost for SAIMAS members joining the webinars and you can book the dates below in your diary. As a valued member of SAIMAS you will receive invites two weeks before each webinar.

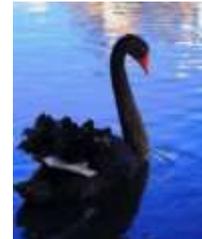
- **Working in Virtual Teams** - Thursday, the 20th of August 2020 (held already)

- *Managing organisational efficiency during times of crises* – Friday, the 9th of October.
- *Bouncing back: Navigating disruption and developing resilience* – Thursday, the 19th of November 2020
- *Importance of change management for efficient virtual operations* – Friday, 29th of January 2021

Book your dairy to attend the rest of the virtual workshops!

DID YOU KNOW?

BLACK SWAN EVENT



They are extremely rare. They have severe in consequence. They are extremely hard to predict.

There are three criteria that characterise a black swan event.

The Finance professor, writer and former Wall Street trader, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, first popularized the term in 2001, later authoring *The Black Swan* in 2007— well before the Global Financial Crisis, which he considered to be a classic Black Swan (Taleb capitalises the term).

The first recorded use of the term 'black swan' was in the second century. The Roman poet Juvenal's reference in his *Satire VI* to something impossibly rare, 'very much like a black swan'. At the time and for the next 1,500 years, swans were all assumed to be white, as no black swans had ever been sighted. This changed in 1697 when Dutch explorers encountered black swans in western Australia (the black swan features on the flag of Western Australia).

Taleb himself becomes irritated when the COVID-19 pandemic is referred to as a Black Swan. He says that a Black Swan was never intended to be 'a cliché for any bad thing that surprises us', and he considers the pandemic, or at least its trajectory, to have been predictable.

Robot Bodyguard

The King of Bahrain arrived in Dubai with his Robot bodyguard. Making the 4th Industrial Revolution a reality. The Robot can speak 6 languages. It can rescue the king from mobs

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by picking him up and carrying him away. The Robot can physically fight, chase and shoot. It is armed with an electric tezer, an undisclosed 360 degrees camera system and a set of infrared cameras. There are 3 hidden machine guns with enough ammunition to fight 1050 men and a laser guided sniper machine gun. It also carries the king's medications and water. This robot bodyguard will only cost you about US \$7.4 million.

You can watch the video on www.youtube.com

King of Bahrain with his Robot BodyGuard in Dubai, UAE ...www.youtube.com › watch Aug 13, 2020.

Exercise your Brain and participate in the games

Just like your *body needs regular exercise- so does your brain. According to the Brain Foundation 'unused parts of the brain stop working'* but 'practicing skills leads to better performance'. Various studies have found that physical exercise may protect you against cognitive (intellectual) decline.

How about trying the following activities?

1. Think back to what clothes you wore two days ago - shorts, pants, skirt, dress, shoes, tie? What colour were they?
2. Solve this problem (without a calculator!): $7 + 12 + 6 - 8$
3. Use your less dominant hand to write your name, then try writing it with the same hand backwards.
4. Rearrange the following letters to make a sentence: hte wco upmejd veor eth omon.
5. What did you have for dinner last Saturday?
6. Think of a number between 1 and 10. Multiply it by 3, add 7 and subtract 4.

Physical activities

1. Aim to fit in 30 minutes of physical activity on most, preferably all, days.
2. If you are feeling stressed, go for a walk.
3. Grab a partner and throw a tennis ball to each other using your less dominant hand.
4. Try some interval training (bursts of high-intensity exercise such as sprinting, followed by active recovery - i.e. walking).
5. If you are a desk-bound worker, set a reminder on your computer to have short movement breaks often. (walk through your building's corridors and greet people you have not seen in while)

6. Head outside with a colleague at lunchtime for a brisk walk.
7. Skip in front of your television during ad breaks. (wear exercise shoes to protect your knees)

Other ways to keep your brain healthy

1. Challenge yourself try something new and unfamiliar like learning a new language, a musical instrument, or a new sport.
2. Read a book and try to follow the news of the day.