

QR Gupta, CEO, Havells

What is the future of conventional ideas of 'work' and the 'workplace' as we know it?

In the last ten years, [the way] business [is done] has changed quite a lot. [Previously] access to information was barred, but today it is easily accessible due to [better] internal communication and the internet. [Today] there is no concept of letter writing or checking the *daak* every day. Information can be shared with everyone [quickly via technology], something that has evolved over the past 10 years and will continue to at a very fast pace.

With [rapidly] increasing communication and the world becoming smaller thanks to video conferencing and better means of connecting, [the access will improve and] will actually be at the speed of light. Companies will have to depend more on idea generation and innovation [to stay ahead].

I think [the idea of] the workplace is already changing quite a lot. [Today] you work from anywhere you are—whether at home or in your car. [But this attitude] will have to change at some point in time. When you work too much then there is [always the fear of] lack of productivity. Earlier people used to work 10-12 hours [a day] but they were constrained to a [physical] work environment which was the office or the direct marketplace. [But today, people] work on their iPhone, iPad, Blackberry or laptop. These virtual offices might be more of a concept for the future. But this means that not only are working hours increasing tremendously but also that productivity might be reducing. People in the future might want to strike a balance between their personal [and professional lives].

Given the rampant invasion of technology in learning and education, what do you think is the future of human interaction and personal mentorship?

Maybe it's more of a traditional mindset, but I believe that face-to-face interaction can never be replaced by a conference or video call. Though we may claim that our travel might reduce or expensive meetings can be avoided [thanks to technology], there is still no substitute to human interaction.

For example, when I have to interview a person for a job, I find the best way possible to meet the person rather than conduct a video conference call. We have also felt that even if it is a large strategy meeting, of 20 or 30 people, you can't take away the benefit of having a physical one. So, whether for mentorship or strategy [planning], face-to-face interaction will still be needed.

Ten years from now, in your opinion, what will be (i) the most overrated and overused management principle that will lose its relevance.

It is difficult to say because even though many management principles proliferate, over time they start looking redundant or wrong. Even with concepts like focus or diversification, it's very difficult to say whether these will lose relevance in the next ten years or not. However, things that are fundamental to any major business can never become redundant. Jargon will come and go, but you can never take away the fact that a business needs factors such as enterprise, innovation, customer proximity, customer understanding, etc.

(ii) the single most important thing that a manager will need to know, in order to succeed.

People management is something that is important today and will be 10 years from now. A manager has to be a people's person first, the rest of the things are just [learnable] skills.