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Malaysian businesses say flexible working to become a norm: HSBC survey

Malaysian businesses were left in a state of unpreparedness as the Covid-19 pandemic began earlier this year. In fact, this unpredictability continues today as businesses start preparing for new ways of working amid the growing number of Covid-19 cases. It is no wonder then, that more than three-quarters (79%) of Malaysian businesses identified some form of flexible working as becoming standard for their business moving forward – higher than the global average of 69% all markets.

This was one of the findings from [HSBC Navigator “Resilience: Building Back Better”](#), a survey that measures the pulse of businesses as they adapt to current challenges, and highlights the steps they have taken to be resilient in the future. The report surveyed 2,604 companies across 14 markets globally, including 200 firms from Malaysia.

Embracing the new norm

Based on the first half of 2020, Malaysian businesses believe that with the adoption of technology and changes in the ways of working, new norms will be established requiring new thinking and greater agility.

The most notable of this was more virtual internal and external meetings (62%) and working-from-home (45%). In fact, there has been unparalleled uptake for Zoom since the Covid-19 crisis began, given the higher demand for distributed, face-to-face interactions. Additionally, collaboration has grown exponentially as people integrated Zoom into their work, learning, and personal lives.

“The Covid-19 crisis is accelerating change at a rate we have not witnessed before. To remain competitive, businesses need to adapt quickly to new ways of working,” said **Stuart Milne, Chief Executive Officer, HSBC Malaysia**. “It is good to see from our survey that innovation and the adoption of the latest technology are top priorities for Malaysian businesses as they are the major enablers of future success.”

Technology a key enabler

When it comes to technology as an enabler, Malaysian businesses foresee that technology will increase the incidence of flexible working arrangements (79%) and virtual meetings (62%) over the next 2 years.

It is without a doubt that virtual meetings/ collaboration tools will become standard ways of working in the next 1-2 years (59%), even as they were seen as most vital during the first half of the year (56%).

“More and more businesses in Malaysia are turning to technology to enable their employees to work flexibly. The survey shows that 95% of businesses agree or strongly agree that in times of adversity, application of technology can enhance how they work,” said Stuart.

“Many companies, including HSBC, are reviewing occupancy requirements in the light of increased use of flexible working. Business will benefit through lower costs and more distributed risks while employees will benefit through an improved quality of life. We all need to learn how to apply flexible working practices in the most productive way. What’s certain is that flexible working is now firmly embedded in business practices and that this is a permanent, rather than a temporary, change.”

Employee engagement a priority

In light of this level of this change and the impact on individual employees, it is probably unsurprising that a high proportion of Malaysian businesses identify aspects of the workforce, particularly employee morale (32%) as a barrier to future resilience.

“Malaysian businesses should also prioritise employee mental and physical health and well-being, and equip their employees with the ability to adapt to their new working environment. They must quickly bring employees up to speed on new ways of working as Malaysia makes this transition,” added Stuart.

“The Covid-19 pandemic is still far from over. If companies are to thrive in this environment, their leaders must remain agile, make changes to how they operate and accelerate their transformation plans. If we collectively can do so, the future is bright,” concluded Stuart.

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Note to editors: **HSBC Navigator**

The Navigator survey is conducted on behalf of HSBC by Kantar. It is compiled from responses by decision-makers at 2,604 businesses, ranging from small and mid-market firms to large corporations, across a broad range of sectors. The respondents hold influence over their company’s strategic direction and represent a broad range of roles: including c-suite, finance, procurement, supply chain, sales and marketing. A total of 14 markets were surveyed between 28 April and 12 May 2020.

- Americas: Canada, Mexico, USA
- Asia Pacific: Australia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Mainland China, Malaysia, Singapore
- Europe: France, Germany, UK
- MENA: UAE

Results have been weighted to be representative of each market’s international trade volume (World Trade Organisation data for 2017-2018).

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