

# When a Crisis Decides Your Work from Home Policy

A geopolitical crisis in Southeast Asia forced governments to implement flexible work policies, reigniting the debate between full office returns and employee flexibility. Companies that had already embraced hybrid models navigated the disruption effectively, demonstrating the business case for adaptable work structures and highlighting the need for HR to build resilience into future policies.

*By Avi Liran, Author and Keynote Speaker specialised in creating Delightful EX and CX*



*Illustration: Remote work during a crisis-driven policy shift in Southeast Asia*

At least three governments across Southeast Asia have done in a matter of days what HR teams have been debating for years.

Triggered by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and Iranian strikes on oil and gas plants, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand all issued directives promoting flexible work and shorter workweeks. The Philippines extended flexible work recommendations from the government to private businesses.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has called this crisis the largest supply disruption in the history of global oil markets. Asia buys more than 80% of the crude that transits the Strait of Hormuz. When shipments halt, reserves across the region bleed fast. Vietnam has fewer than 20 days of reserves.

***Nobody conducted an engagement survey. The choice was made by economic necessity. If a geopolitical shock can rewrite the work model within days, should companies reassess their full return to work?***

This is a recurring pattern. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Germany's climate minister Robert Habeck said every kilometer not driven helps. The companies that came through those disruptions without missing a beat had already built the infrastructure to work differently.

## Some Asian Companies Are Ready

Three companies stand out as the clearest benchmarks.

### DBS Bank

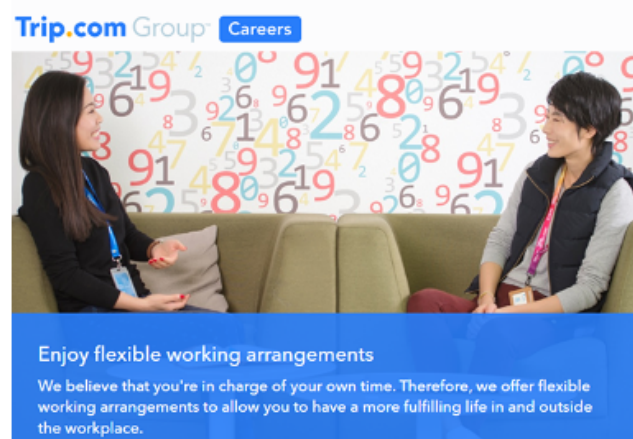
Permanent right to work remotely up to 40% of time. Rebuilt offices as JoySpaces — activity-based environments designed with employee input. AI-powered iGrow platform personalises development paths. 8,000+ employees upskilled in data, digital, and leadership.

### Fujitsu Japan

80,000 employees moved to primarily remote work. Office footprint cut by half, rebuilt as functional hubs. Structured in-person touchpoints introduced for senior-junior interaction and onboarding on the office floor.

### Trip.com

3+2 hybrid model since 2022: remote every Wednesday and Friday. Based on a 6-month RCT with 1,600+ employees. Hybrid workers equally productive, equally promoted, and resignations fell 33%. In-office days reserved for collaboration and mentoring.



## The Personal Development Dilemma

One of the big concerns of flexible work is that junior employees miss out on development. Here is how these three companies solved it.

**DBS** built career development into the infrastructure of its hybrid model from day one, launching structured learning roadmaps tied to specific skills and committing to upskilling more than 8,000 employees in data, digital, and leadership.

**Fujitsu** redesigned its remaining offices specifically to serve the functions that remote work cannot. Training programmes, including new employee onboarding, were moved onto the office floor, creating conditions for cross-generational exposure.

**Jennifer Cao and her team at Trip.com** structured in-office days (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday) around collaboration, mentoring, and team interaction, and protected remote days (Wednesday, Friday) for focused individual work. A January 2026 global hybrid work analysis cited Trip.com's randomised trial as the strongest available evidence that hybrid workers show no difference across nine performance review categories.

## The Business Case: What the 2025 and 2026 Data Says

The numbers are consistent and compelling.



The cost of rigid RTO is measurable. A Baylor University study of over three million tech and finance professionals found that RTO mandates trigger a 13 to 14% spike in abnormal turnover, with female employees nearly three times more likely to leave than male colleagues. That makes rigid RTO a diversity and inclusion risk, not just an operational one.

A KPMG survey found that 25% of executives admitted they hoped RTO mandates would trigger voluntary departures — a restructuring strategy dressed as a culture initiative.

### What HR Leaders Can Do Now

The current energy crisis is a stress test your hybrid policy either passes or fails. Six actions HR leaders can take before the next disruption arrives.

OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE	
1	<b>Audit by task, not by title.</b> Map activities requiring physical presence (onboarding, mentoring, creative sprints) vs. deep focus (analysis, writing, coding). Design schedules around task needs, not habit.
2	<b>Make in-office days purposeful.</b> Reserve in-person days for collaboration, mentoring, and cross-generational interaction. When employees know why they come in, attendance takes care of itself.
CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE	
3	<b>Redesign the office as a destination.</b> DBS's JoySpaces and Fujitsu's hubs show the office must be the best place to do work only the office can do.
4	<b>Build visibility structures for remote employees.</b> 55% of employees report managers view in-office workers as more trustworthy (Owl Labs 2025). Counter with outcome-based reviews and deliberate sponsorship of remote talent.
STRATEGIC CONTINUITY	
5	<b>Measure outcomes, not attendance.</b> Only 1 in 3 executives believes RTO had meaningful positive impact on productivity (Atlassian). Badge swipes are not a proxy for performance.
6	<b>Write a crisis clause into your hybrid policy.</b> Define how your model scales to full remote during supply shocks or health emergencies. Companies with this in place did not miss a beat in March 2026.

The Strait of Hormuz will eventually reopen and hopefully peace will come. But what we have learned from the pandemic is that the next crisis will not announce itself.

Most RTO mandates come from the C-suite, not HR, which raises the question: will senior leaders give HR the strategic weight to redesign a work model that serves the business and survives the next disruption?

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***The lesson from DBS, Fujitsu, and Trip.com is clear: a hybrid model designed with intention, built for resilience, and measured by outcomes gives leadership the culture it wants and employees the flexibility they need.***

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**About the author:**

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