Remote Working and the Human Experience

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR WORKFORCE

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A new world and a new opportunity

For many organisations, their journey towards the future of work has been accelerated, having adopted radically different working practices virtually overnight. This move towards remote working at scale has brought about many challenges for leaders, from technology infrastructure and security to the adoption of new ways of working and the introduction of new ways to support and engage employees.

Alongside these challenges is an opportunity for organisations. As we adjust to this new norm in how work can be done, there is now a moment for employers to connect with their people, to create a brilliant employee experience and to fundamentally disrupt institutional culture. As employers consider productivity, evidence is emerging that remote working can in fact be harnessed to drive efficiencies and create a workforce that is more fluid, skilled and adept at adapting to change.

This means smart leaders are already looking beyond merely facilitating a workforce to work remotely, towards building an agile, resilient workforce of the future.
Adapting to the now
Enabling, supporting and managing your workforce
How we operate as a workforce is changing rapidly. More so than any other function, technology has felt the pressure of this transition. The pace with which technology has been deployed and new ways of working adopted has dispelled long-held beliefs by leaders around their employees’ ability to adapt to change and reskill.

Equally, business leaders have had to grapple with the implications of new technology being quickly made available. Due consideration needs to now be given, not just to the enabling technology required, but also to building a sustainable, secure and long-term technology strategy that is fit to adapt as our working patterns respond to a new world.
What is required to create a digital workplace?

**CORE DIGITAL WORKPLACE**

- **Hardware & Workspace**
  - Provide employees with the devices and access to be productive remotely. Accelerate device (and peripheral) deployments and scale virtual environments such as Citrix for increased demand.

- **Collaboration Tools**
  - Explore and select the right collaboration tools for your business, with due consideration for staff and customer needs. Rapidly deploy and scale, prioritising the employees who need it most.

**TECHNOLOGY ENABLERS**

- **Network Connectivity**
  - Enable reliable and secure remote network connectivity to employees and seamless integration with customers and partners. This includes enhancing enterprise and home broadband solutions.

- **Adaptive Security**
  - Ensure that users are educated for remote working risks, e.g. phishing, unsanctioned tools. End user devices, network and collaboration tools will each need the right security, rapidly adapted for a mobile workforce.

**BUSINESS ENABLERS**

- **Business Continuity**
  - Enhance business continuity plans to consider the implications of mass absences and travel restrictions on business as usual. Assess critical systems availability for continuity of services.

- **Manage The Change**
  - Support your people to effectively adopt remote working, activate a communications plan to provide policy guidance, and enable workplace champions for a reimagined employee experience.
# The digital workplace: Making it happen

## KEY QUESTIONS

### Hardware & workspace
- How to scale my existing VDI solution?
- How to rapidly provision devices for people who need them?
- How to create a seamless work experience from anywhere?

### Collaboration Tools
- How to scale my existing collaboration solution?
- How to introduce a new collaboration solution from scratch?
- How to federate my collaboration solution with partners or customers?

### Network connectivity
- How to scale enterprise remote access capacity?
- How to ensure remote access for employees where requirements have not been defined yet?
- How to support employees facing connectivity limitations when working remotely?

### Adaptive security
- Are people trained on security risks associated with working remotely?
- Are my virtual desktop or collaboration solutions secure?
- Is my remote access solution both scalable and secure?

### Business Continuity
- How to ensure minimal impact to business, employees and customers?
- How to ensure business continuity plans are fit for purpose in light of these unprecedented shocks?
- How to ensure my systems are resilient to support my business in the new environment?

### Manage the Change
- How to enable employees who have never worked from home to work efficiently?
- How to maintain a community feel with stunted social interaction?
- How to sustain these changes and achieve good results in the longer term?

## SOLUTION COMPONENTS

### Device Enablement & Accelerate Mobility
- Prioritise enabling workers who require tools to support and directly drive the business and give them the hardware and systems access they need.

### Virtual Desktops
- Implement or expand VDI solutions such as Citrix, Microsoft or VMWare that offer virtualised workspaces that can extend across boundaries - allowing secure access to remote applications and data.

### Adopt & Expand Collaboration
- Exponential expansion of demand for collaboration tools requires dramatically improved experience through increased features as it becomes increasingly business critical.

### External Enablement
- Assess current virtual meeting capabilities and deploy services for seamless interaction with partners, suppliers and customers, as required.

### Enterprise & Virtual Private Network (VPN) capacity
- Rapidly complement your traditional VPN technology with new cloud remote access solutions to improve worker experience and performance.

### Remote & Home Networking
- Provide guidance to employees about broadband connectivity options and optimisation support. Consider subsidising higher bandwidth and Quality of Service (QoS) solutions.

### Secure Digital Workplace
- Ensure new end user devices and collaboration solutions are deployed following a consistent approach, with potential higher risk features initially disabled by default.

### Secure Mindset
- Quickly educate users on potential risks of remote work including phishing or use of unsanctioned SaaS applications for collaboration.

### Business Continuity Planning
- Incorporate pandemic planning into your business continuity plans. Run full scale human and department-based continuity tests.

### Monitor & Assess
- Continuously analyse intelligence from leading health institutions, such as the WHO, governments and other NGOs. Activate crisis management processes and task forces as necessary.

### Communications & Change Management
- Launch an employee education campaign, complete with user stories and relevant examples, to encourage adoption of the new digital workspace.

### Radical Transparency
- Prepare your leaders to be empathetic and available to their teams. Use broadcast video to discuss the situation and actions being taken to protect your people and enable them to work.
Technology is a key component of remote working. With the vast landscape of different tools available, careful consideration should be given to the selection process.

This document will help to outline the practical steps you should take to get started.
Each company’s collaboration needs will differ – consider the capabilities most relevant to your organisation to maximise productivity and engagement in a sustainable and secure remote working environment.

Technology: The right collaboration tools
Finding what works well for your company requires careful consideration to select the right combination of tools for collaboration and task execution.

46% of people who never worked from home previously now plan to work from home more often in the future.¹

85% of businesses confirm that productivity has increased in their company because of greater flexibility.²

Outlining what kind of work your company does is the first step in identifying the tools that are right for you. Think carefully about this and how it might change in a more remote environment.

Training and upskilling will be an important part of building and scaling a remote workforce. It is wise to consider the effort required to train your workforce in advance of tool selection.

Budget and licencing fees will also help define the scope of tools that are the right fit for your company. Investment in the right tools should create efficiencies and improve the way work gets done.
Collaboration tools: Consider the functional capability criteria to help you make the right choices

While each organisation will have its own unique considerations, here are some of the key decision factors when selecting the right tools.

01 Audience
Who and what volume of people will need to use the tool, internally and externally? Will customers be required to have the same system in order to interact?

02 Interaction
How will participants communicate and share content with each other? Will sessions need to be recorded for reference at a later date (e.g. training videos)?

03 Mobile Capability
Can the tool be used and supported easily on-the-go to facilitate agile ways of working?

04 Functionality
What features are really important; phone or video calls, desktop sharing, instant messaging, whiteboard and group breakout sessions, as well as customer support and survey functions?

05 Cybersecurity
How can you ensure the security of customer and people data on the systems and tools you use, wherever they are used from?

82% of employees say they expect digital to transform their work.¹

69% of employees who do not usually work from home report that they can easily collaborate with colleagues.²

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Putting in place the technology to enable remote working is the first step. Equally important for leaders is thinking about how new ways of working empower your workforce, drive efficiencies and, critically, reinforce your values. As people adapt to this new world of work, creating a culture of trust and experimentation is key to helping them thrive.
There are number of key actions that leaders can take to help their people address remote working now and prepare for the future.

1. **Be compassionate and caring**
   - Elevate your most people-orientated executives to be visible leaders
   - Tell stories about how it feels as a leader right now
   - Be honest and listen to your people and their needs
   - Think carefully about the language that you use
   - Create a way for you to regularly measure the mood of your workforce

2. **Empower and support your workforce**
   - Invite your workforce to tell you about customer needs
   - Empower the frontline of your workforce to serve customers in a way that works
   - Create a fluid way of capturing insights so that you can be agile
   - Support your middle management with the practical implication of managing performance and productivity remotely
   - Create a culture of unity between your remote and on-site workforce

3. **Communicate regularly and experiment**
   - Commit to having a collective message and make sure that all leaders are on message
   - Have a cadence to your communications that is fit for purpose within your organisation and be open to changing that cadence
   - Experiment with ways of communicating - use visuals and tell stories that resonate and inspire your workforce
   - Use digital tools to enable two way communications within your organisation

4. **Ensure work activities are linked to purpose**
   - Remote working over a long period of time can be resource-intensive for employees. It is important to re-evaluate work and activities that really matter and prioritise within your workforce accordingly
   - Use the right collaboration tools to ensure that core business activities are progressed
   - Work with your HR team to determine how to measure outcomes rather than activities

5. **Think about the practical needs of your people**
   - Work closely with your HR team to rapidly revisit how you enable remote working
   - Think about the employee experience and invite your workforce to inform policies and processes
   - Set and communicate policies (e.g. remote and flexible working, workplace health and safety) that will help guide and reassure employees
   - Support the setup of home offices for your workforce
As people adapt to working remotely, it is important that employers bear in mind that, for many, home is seen as a restorative place. Mixing work and home activities together can have an impact on wellbeing. Employers therefore need to consider how they plan to look after their people’s mental, physical and relational needs, all of which can be challenged in a remote working environment.

20% of employees working remotely report loneliness. Isolation can have a significant negative impact on physical and mental health.

18% of remote workers report struggling to unplug from work, impacting their engagement and productivity.
As employers look to manage remote working on a sustained basis, it’s important to think about a holistic approach for supporting employees.

This approach should be considered across knowledge and information sharing, reskilling and creating a sense of connectedness and fun. Leadership have an important role to play in ‘walking the virtual walk’ and need to participate and be seen. This holistic approach might entail:

1. **Looking after the practical needs of your people and consider how you can support them.**
   
   It is important that you understand the needs of your people and give them the opportunity to share their preferences around remote working and their ability to operate productively. Where possible, help and support them with structural things they might need, whether that be home office equipment or flexible working practices. For example, consider scheduling meetings for 50 minutes rather than an hour to allow people to move around between calls.

2. **Developing a communications hub, where all relevant information can be easily accessed.**
   
   Here’s where employers might store all company policies and guides and supports. For instance, include guides on:
   
   - Managing Your Day
   - Managing Your Space
   - Looking After Yourself and Others
   - Managing Effective Virtual Meetings
   - Managing Performance and a Remote Team
   - Using Collaboration Tools

3. **Investing in reskilling your people and empower your workforce with the training they need.**
   
   Leaders need to equip their people to be able to do every element of their job remotely. Activities like workshop facilitation and design thinking will require becoming adept at using new collaboration tools. For employees whose core role is to manage relationships, negotiate, influence and sell will also need support on doing that successfully in a remote environment. Use the business needs and desired outcomes to inform your learning approach.

4. **Making sure your people stay connected to each other and create a sense of fun.**
   
   Let your people come together from different parts of your business to create and drive out a number of initiatives that celebrate individual and team successes. Consider competitions, quizzes and spotlights on achievements, both professional and personal – anything that creates an opportunity for people to get to know each other and connect around topics that aren’t just about work. Let people get creative!

To support our workforce, Accenture Ireland developed Let’s Get Virtual, Virtual to help keep our people together, whilst apart. It involves a multi-pronged communication campaign to provide practical information and learning interventions – to help the workforce adjust to working remotely and to look after themselves and others.

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Planning for the future
What’s next for your organisation?
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The world of work has changed rapidly. In times of crisis and uncertainty, the immediate focus of organisations will be on the short term challenges of business disruption and transitioning to remote working.

Now, more than ever, there is a moment for leaders to harness the value of employee experience and capitalise on the momentum within their workforce. Smart leaders will use this as an opportunity to reconsider their people strategy and to understand the impact of remote working in terms of their organisation’s operating model, ways of working and decision making, new skills and capabilities and redefined cultural norms.

The metrics, data and outputs from this time provide valuable insights into the health of your business and your ability to meet the needs of your workforce, offerings and customers.
Action Plan for leaders

Understanding how your organisation responds to disruption provides an insight into your ability to operate in the future. Leaders should use this checklist to self-assess and understand how to support their organisation and their people along the road to recovery and beyond.

1. Examine your organisational requirements – has what you need to operate as an organisation changed?
2. Explore your organisation agility – were you able to redeploy and reskill your workforce at scale? What technology enablers do you need to continue to progress and/or accelerate?
3. Review your people strategy – what skills do you need to invest in? What “new work” has been created and what are the future needs of the business? Do certain business areas and teams need more support than others to adapt to new norms?
4. Explore the needs of your people – have these needs changed and how will you support them? What experiences have you created for your employees? How can they be enhanced?
5. Reflect on your governance and decision-making structures – were you able to make decisions faster and with greater agility? What efficiencies can be leveraged through remote working?
6. Examine the workforce data and analytics available within your organisation – are you able extract valuable actionable insights to support decision making and understand the ability of your people to be their most effective as they work remotely?
7. Review your policies and process
The next **100 days** for your organisation

**LISTEN & REFLECT**

ON DATA & INSIGHTS

- Really listen to the needs, views and experiences of your people
- Capture how the behaviours and requirements of your customers have changed
- Interrogate data, analytics and metrics across your organisation. Define your big data gaps
- Reflect on the adequacy of your physical office space and current property footprint
- Capture learnings from the crisis and engage within your industry and ecosystem to understand emerging employer trends

**UNDERSTAND**

WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED ABOUT YOUR WORKFORCE

- Assess the effectiveness of your digital capabilities in supporting remote working
- Evaluate your productivity and efficiencies during the transition to remote working
- Assess where your organisation was and was not successful in deploying remote working
- Define the new skills required to work remotely and the demand for new skills
- Review your policies and processes around remote working
- Examine governance structures and the pace of decision making with your organisation

**DESCRIBE**

THE FUTURE DIRECTION FOR YOUR ORGANISATION

- Be bold – re-examine your vision and purpose as an organisation
- Review your operating model and digital capabilities in light of these learnings
- Define any organisational changes required and the enablers required to support this
- Utilise workforce analytics to determine how better to deploy the skills you need to the activities you need
- Articulate how remote working will form part of your employee value proposition
- Align your leadership team around these changes
The world of work has changed dramatically.

How organisations navigate their workforces over the coming months will be critical – not just for the sake of their employees – but to ensure their business can quickly adapt and respond to market needs. Many organisations were starting to explore enabling greater flexibility for their workforces, but were struggling with how to make this promise a reality. These same organisations are now learning that, by harnessing the power of the right technology and digital tools, they can create brilliant employee experiences that drive better business outcomes.

Crises like the one we’re currently facing provide us a crucial moment of reflection and experimentation. It creates the opportunity for employers to build on the rapid pace of change and to reposition the workforce so that your business emerges stronger.
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References


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