

Redefining how we work in a changed world

We are only a few of weeks into the crisis, and what is already clear is that for many sectors of the economy the way that people work is going to change for ever, and in ways that we have not yet anticipated.

Temps de lecture : minute

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For the last 20 years, the adoption of technology has transformed how we work and there has been a gradual shift to more remote working. While some, typically smaller and usually technology-focused businesses, had already gone virtual, this has been the exception rather than the norm.

The strong tie between a physical place and our role in society has been part of our culture for thousands of years; going out to the fields, the market square and the workshop have tied a physical location to our role in society for as long as there has been society. That has now changed as businesses have had no choice but to carry on their business with no, or at best, extremely limited access to their physical estate. The impact on how we work, and even what we define as 'work' is likely to be profound.

While it is too early to be sure of the long-term impact of this it is already possible to see some trends emerging that will shape how we work once some sense of normality returns.

Digital by Default

“My view is that post the current crisis most businesses (including many retailers) are likely to adopt a ‘Digital by Default’ model which assumes that workers will be based remotely and that the default position is that meetings, discussions, 1:1’s and individual tasks will be undertaken online.” Ed Parker, Senior Manager

Organisational culture has already changed. Individuals will expect increased flexibility and will not want to return to the routine of the daily commute. Businesses will want to ensure that a future ‘lockdown’ will have minimal impact on the business as usual. At the same time, employees will want to feel a greater sense of shared purpose. A sense of community is likely to be critical to increasing productivity and retaining staff.

Leadership teams will have to think carefully about how to ensure that all members of the workforce feel included and that a culture of remote working does not translate into a weakening of the psychological contract

Creating a sense of belonging

Physical meetings will become highly valued, and we can expect to see an increase in organisations holding whole company conferences to create a maintain a sense of belonging for a fragmented and physically disconnected workforce. Office design will be increasingly focused on

brand value and creating space for collaboration. Organisations will seek short term use of large 'branded' spaces where they can bring staff and/or clients together to create a sense of belonging.

This shift in culture and expectations will have a significant impact on the IT requirements of the organisation. The adoption of online collaboration tools will become ubiquitous. Online will become the default format for internal, and possibly more significantly external meetings.

The fundamental shift in IT

There are more fundamental shifts to IT that will need to underpin the future of work:

1. The use of cloud technologies will be essential to a future where everyone can work from anywhere: Over the next two years, we can expect a sustained focus to eliminate the use of legacy applications as 'cloud-first' is replaced by 'only cloud' (This includes call centre and customer-facing staff).
2. The use of IoT is likely to grow exponentially: Especially in relation to the remote monitoring and management of physical assets so that ultimately functions such as building security, customer contact and facilities management can be managed and delivered remotely.
3. Information security will become a major concern: The concept of perimeter security will become effectively redundant as the focus shifts to user authentication. Greater use will be made of multi-factor authentication and we would expect to see a growth in models that extend 'trusted users' beyond the traditional organisational boundaries.

There will be some clear benefits from these shifts – real estate costs will reduce; staff will be more productive, and the environmental impact of business will be reduced. The challenge for business leaders is to ensure that these benefits do not come at the cost of staff feeling less engaged and disconnected from a shared purpose at work.

Ed Parker, Senior Manager at Wavestone has over 20 years experience leading technology innovation, business design and digital transformation to deliver results, specialising in transformational change, business architecture and IT strategy assignments. He has a burning passion for inclusion and adaptive leadership.

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