The great screen test

WORKING FROM HOME

Teleconferencing apps have helped keep the world working during the pandemic. Here's how to make the best of them

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Work is where you make it

With businesses gearing up for a return to some kind of office-based normality, Francis Andrews looks at how the rules have completely changed when it comes to the nine-to-five

When the government announced in March last year that the country would be going into lockdown, few would have imagined how long the ruling would be in place for. The language used at the time was severe – a marker of the urgency of the pandemic – but the hoped-for timeframe was short. Perhaps it'd last just a few weeks. At worst, a few months. Soon enough, the country would be back on its feet – and back at work.

A year on, some 60 per cent of us were still working from home. Various measures had been eased, but the landscape remained far from normal. People had set up de facto offices at home – they'd bought the desk chair, the monitor; established exercise regimes and lunchtime walking routes. In short, they'd invested in making this new reality as manageable as possible.

But with an end now in sight, employees will soon likely be returning en masse to the office in some form. Home offices will be converted back to the spare bedroom, and the bookcase, displaced by a tiny desk and chair, will be returned to its rightful place in the corner of the living room.

Yet this return to work presents a potential problem for businesses, for employees have grown used to structuring their own environments. To be sure, it created problems of its own: diminished work-life balance, longer hours, a feeling of confinement. Yet just as remote workers had invested in making home working manageable, companies must now invest in making office working enjoyable. But how?

Official business

Perhaps it begins with a simple question: what purpose does the office now serve? Until a year ago, it had been the locus for all business activity. Staff turned up in the morning and left at the end of the day. All meetings were held there, and all work – or nearly all of it – was done at a desk within. It accommodated nearly all professional, and quite a bit of social, interaction.

But we now know that it needn't hold such a central place in working life. Even with a national workforce atomised by the pandemic and the majority of interaction done via online video, email and messaging platforms, individuals can still be productive. Indeed, a number of surveys have pointed to the fact that a majority of employees feel they can be even more productive working from home.

Such findings have led some companies to re-evaluate the premium they place on full-time office working. Not only has Google, for instance, pushed back the planned return-to-the-office

date until September this year, but it has mooted the idea of experimenting with a flexible working week in which some employees – those that are not in heavy customer-facing or collaborative roles – come into the office for only three days.

Social functions

Google's vision rests on a realisation driven home by the pandemic: that the main purpose of the office is for professional interaction, but that not all work requires this. The three days that employees will be in the office are being billed as "collaboration days", when the meetings and the brainstorming happens. Otherwise, they are left to get on with their work, free from the distractions that an office brings. Innovation can still happen – indeed, if productivity increased for many people during lockdown, then it suggests that a flexible working week may well spur creativity and drive, rather than limit it.

The hybrid working model is likely to become commonplace in the future. But it poses problems. Employees of some companies trialling it may prefer to work from home, yet hold positions that make this difficult. Will they be compensated in some other way? And how will companies that enforce a flexible working week accommodate requests from employees to work from rented office spaces, rather than home?

Present tense

One survey from WeWork/Workplace Intelligence found that 64 per cent of employees would pay for access to an office space. Three quarters of executives also said they would provide home workers with a stipend to help with the costs of that. The logic runs that if companies can downsize their own offices and manage the volume of employees on any one day, there will be surplus capital that

can go towards improving employee wellbeing. Indeed, it may be that, because of the pandemic, an emphasis on this becomes the key indicator of a company's ability to attract loyal, high-quality workers, and so many are likely to be focusing more attention on that.

Other concerns loom, however. Office working ensured clarity over whether employees were present; remote working makes this difficult. It's little surprise that the market for software to monitor whether employees were at their home desks has boomed. In one case early last year, Barclays staff fought back against management, and the bank was forced to stop its use of spyware.

But thanks to the pandemic, there is also now greater resistance to the culture of presenteeism, whereby workers feel compelled to show up even when sick. RAND Europe found that the main drivers of presenteeism are poor financial wellbeing, stress and poor sleep and mental health. In 2019, it estimated that more than 30 work days were lost per employee as a result of presenteeism.

The new deal

The past year has reshaped working priorities at both the individual and the business level. It has provided a window into an alternative way of working, and upended our understanding of how productivity and wellbeing can be optimised via different modes of working. Many people have struggled at home, and will look forward to the return; others will feel the opposite. A hybrid working model may well set new standards for enjoyable, fruitful work, and give employees what the office so often denies: a degree of flexibility and control over their lives such that they feel greater ownership of their working week, and greater satisfaction within and outside of the nine to five.

> *"Many people have struggled at home and will look forward to a return to offices; others will feel the opposite. A hybrid working model may well set new standards"*

The future of broadcast graphics is virtual

As businesses consider making remote working a permanent fixture, for the broadcast industry, Zoom calls are not quite going to cut it.

Social distancing and travel restrictions call for a decrease in the number of crew on site. At the same time, the growth of over-the-top (OTT) media services such as Netflix has spiked demand for engaging broadcast productions across multiple platforms.

Fighting for eyes on the screen, broadcast production companies are turning to extended reality, or xR, to make their shows really stand out.

Unreality bites

xR refers to photorealistic real-time images generated by powerful graphics engines, such as Unreal Engine, that are projected onto LED screens surrounding the scene. Camera tracking technology means the virtual scenes change based on camera movements – making the environment fully immersive.

Actors, presenters or journalists no longer have to guess where virtual elements are in the scene like they had to do with green screens. They can even present data interactively with real-time 3D visualisations, such as

simulating weather conditions in weather reporting segments.

disguise, a company pushing the boundaries in xR, integrates graphics engines, LED technology and camera tracking into a single workflow.

A new type of TV show

Producing engaging TV shows with fewer people on site is now possible. In the 2020 Junior Eurovision Song Contest, Wizja Multimedia used disguise xR workflows with augmented reality to "beam" contestants into the same space, even though each performed from their home country. disguise xR workflows have also been used on a number of other shows and productions, including the 2020 US Open and the 2020 MTV Music Video Awards.

The possibilities of xR go beyond creating virtual environments. disguise's cluster rendering capabilities enable graphics on screen to be rendered at any scale without compromising on quality. The future for broadcast production is, much like the graphics, unreal.

The changing future of contingent work

The expectations of workers and their employers have changed following the pandemic. We have seen an end to the office-based, nine-to-five five-day week as the default way of working: neither workers nor employers want this as an exclusive option anymore. The stresses caused by the pandemic have reminded employers that, to get the best from their workers, they need to be mindful of employee wellbeing.

These changes equally affect an external workforce that has become an inextricable part of the workforce mix. Employers are looking to them as a way of recruiting at pace as economies expand after the pandemic. They also seek the flexibility that contingent workers provide in case further pandemic control measures come into play.

At the same time, specialist and skilled workers, who had a taste of flexibility during the pandemic, are increasingly choosing contingent work because it enables them to maintain their lifestyle and prioritise the most rewarding work opportunities. Inevitably, this is driving up competition for the best talent.

A new approach

We believe that a radically new approach is needed given these changes in the market for contingent workers. Employers must take a wider perspective with increased focus on the quality, productivity and output of their teams. It is time to think differently about how work gets done within your organisation.

So how should employers change their approach if they are to succeed in attracting the best contingent talent?

Focus on people, not roles

Employers must move to a genuine focus on people, and understand the support, systems and processes that will enable them to attract the best talent. Part of this will involve a drive for greater diversity in the workforce. Diverse workforces are generally happier workforces and have been proven to deliver benefits in terms of productivity and innovation.

Unfortunately, in the past the contingent workforce has not always been treated with the same thought and care as regular employees. Today, with greater competition for talent, employers must recognise that contingent workers need to be treated better; that respect, flexibility, opportunity and belonging are just as important to them as money.

Use data and technology

Data underpins much of recruitment and powers the digital talent technologies that enable good management, visibility and better quality of service. Critical services such as onboarding, time management and payment of an on-demand workforce become far easier with appropriate automation.

Direct-sourcing technologies are another useful tool. These enable the identification, assessment and engagement of talent from a pool of candidates. For instance, The Mom Project connects experienced women to employers looking for senior executives who want to work on a part-time basis.

Strengthen the employer brand

Employers must think carefully about their employer value proposition (EVP). When competing for global talent, the EVP plays a critical role in persuading somebody halfway across the world to choose them. The EVP must be aspirational, authentic and credible, and highlight opportunities around autonomy, innovation, career progression and status to foster real candidate attraction.

Crafting a strong EVP requires realism, planning and a genuine desire to improve outcomes. None of this is simple, but the benefits are very real. According to research by Gartner, organisations that effectively deliver on their EVP can reduce the compensation premium by 50 per cent.

Succeeding in the new world

With a rise in contingent working, issues once reserved for traditional employees, such as career progression, diversity and employer branding, must be considered for the extended workforce. This requires a service which can combine technology and process, partnership opportunities with new recruitment channels, and advice from credible, experienced professionals, to form a bespoke solution built around customers' needs.

As well as increasing access to the global talent market using new digital channels, employers need to adopt emerging technologies that drive quality and efficiency, and which support scaling. Technology is only part of the equation: employers must also recognise the need for a more people-centred approach to recruitment that will enable them to succeed in an increasingly competitive contingent employee environment.

INDUSTRY VIEW

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Why healthier headspaces are better for business

Even before the pandemic, businesses were starting to realise that looking after their employees' mental health wasn't just the right thing but the profitable thing to do. Nick Martindale talks to some of them

When lockdown hit in March 2020, accounting software firm Xledger realised making sure its staff were able to cope mentally would be a priority. "Lockdown rituals included having morning check-ins three times a week, two of which were chair-based yoga sessions," says Mark Pullen, CEO. "We made sure to check in with everyone as individuals too: we use 15Five, which is a tool employees complete on a weekly basis to feed back on how they are feeling and how their week has been."

Xledger attempted to keep morale up through virtual pub quizzes, wine tasting and painting workshops. "We also sent lockdown presents to employees' homes, which included marshmallow-toasting kits, sweetie jars, brownies, cocktails and curry-making kits," says Pullen.

The issue of mental health was already rising up the business agenda before the pandemic hit, but there's no doubt the past year, with rising levels of stress, periods of furlough, illness and grief, have made it even more critical, to both businesses and employees. Research by Gartner found 29 per cent of employees say they are depressed as a result of Covid-19, with 31 per cent saying they are stressed. The charity Mind, meanwhile, has outlined five areas which it believes will leave a long-term impact on the nation: social isolation, increasing anxiety, bereavement and grief, financial insecurity and work-related stress.

Getting the balance right

Yet a large amount of the stress people are under can be attributed to their work, says Professor Sir Cary Cooper, author of *Wellbeing At Work*. "Extensive research suggests the main causes are how people are managed, a long-hours culture, lack of work/life balance or flexibility at work, lack of employee autonomy and control over their job, and job insecurity," he says.

Dr Rebecca Holt, co-founder and director of Working Mindset, says organisations need to develop a mental health plan to outline how they intend to tackle the issue. "This should include plans to address the work-related causes of mental health problems, how work/life balance will be supported and [providing] clear guidance for managers, as well as establishing what support will be offered to those experiencing poor mental health," she says. "It is critical that employers have clear guidelines, appropriate training and ongoing support in place for line managers so that they feel empowered, equipped and safe to have conversations about mental health. They also need to know they will in turn be supported."

This is the approach Cactus Communications has taken. "Managers and business partners are trained to identify the signs of such issues and address these through a series of interventions ranging from one-to-one conversations to making arrangements for professional counselling and therapy," says Yashmi Pujara, chief human resources officer. "We also orient leaders in practising mindfulness and encouraging people to discuss their emotions."

Just before the pandemic hit, Santander introduced a Wellbeing Hub providing information for staff on looking after their mental wellbeing when working at home,

> *"Pre-Covid, the UK was tied with Italy at the bottom of the G7 on productivity per capita. Enhancing mental wellbeing at work is likely to help improve this."*
> *– Cary Cooper*

wellbeing webinars and a direct link to its employee assistance programme. "We also introduced access for all colleagues to a live text chat with qualified psychologists and worked with our existing wellbeing partner, Gympass, to launch a Gympass Hub with a range of recorded sessions, available free," says Damien Shieber, head of culture and experience and a member of the Business in the Community wellbeing leadership team.

There's an app for that…

Drainage repair firm Lanes Group, part of Thames Water, has made use of an app which allows staff to report how they are feeling at the start of every shift. "If they respond by clicking the 'unhappy' or 'very unhappy' buttons, they are offered the option of speaking to our in-house wellbeing practitioner," says Debi Bell, head of HR services. Since it was introduced, the number of colleagues who have reported feeling unhappy or very unhappy has fallen from 8 per cent to just over 1 per cent, she adds.

Business software firm Advanced used the pandemic as a chance to change the culture of the firm, putting a greater emphasis on flexible working and allowing staff greater control over how and where they work as restrictions ease. "I have announced that I'm doing the school run each day where usually I'd have used a breakfast club for my children instead," says Alex Arundale, chief people officer. The company has also introduced a range of initiatives in response to the pandemic, she adds, including bereavement and general life counselling, yoga classes, digital detox support and encouraged 'away time' from desks.

Aside from the moral responsibility an employer has to ensure staff don't suffer as a result of their jobs, there is a sound business case for investing in better mental health. "Evidence suggests this will translate to the bottom line," says Cooper. w"Pre-Covid, the UK was tied at the bottom of the G7 with Italy on productivity per capita and 17th in the G20 – enhancing mental wellbeing at work is likely to help improve this."

Employers also have a legal duty of care to ensure the mental wellbeing of their workforce, says Daniel Stander, an employment lawyer at international law firm Vedder Price. "A breach of health and safety is a criminal offence with potential liability for both individuals and employers," he points out. "This potentially means unlimited fines as well as imprisonment for individuals and disqualification of directors. There is also the potential for civil liability."

Research by MetLife UK, meanwhile, found that more than half of employees (54 per cent) are considering leaving their job in the next 18 months. The same survey also found that 39 per cent of employees would stay with their current employer if their boss showed more regard for their mental wellbeing.

For Amanda Cran, senior consultant at HR consultancy Buck, the business case is simple. "If employees feel their overall wellbeing is not important, employers risk losing their greatest talent," she says. "Without an attractive wellbeing and benefits programme, you are unlikely to attract the best talent and your reputation may suffer as one that is not considered to be a great place to work." As the economy starts to pick up again, that could be devastating for businesses. ▪

Taking action: ways to support your employees' mental health

Get your own house in order

Employers need to identify any workplace issues that could be contributing to ill health, says Charles Alberts, head of health management at Aon. "Start with a stress risk assessment to understand what the key issues are for your employees – be that workloads, relationships or a range of other common causes," he says. It's vital to create an open and supportive culture where issues can be dealt with early on, he adds, including boosting employees' own knowledge of how to manage stress and providing training to line managers.

Make sure people take time out

Ensuring people have time to switch off is essential, says Lawrence Mohiuddine, managing director, EMEA, of workplace design firm Unispace. "Giving people more thinking time, making meetings matter more and stopping calls outside of an employee's standard working hours – whatever that looks like for that individual – will give people choice and empowerment to disconnect," he says. "People need time to reflect and switch off to be productive, whether that's in the office or at home."

Remember the little things

Random acts of kindness can go a long way, says Joanna Swash, group CEO of call-answering service Moneypenny. "Kindness goes a long way," she says. "It doesn't cost a penny, but its effect is endless. Remember all the little things like birthdays, work anniversaries and Easter, with snacks and meals including different dietary requirement options. These smaller acts do not go unnoticed."
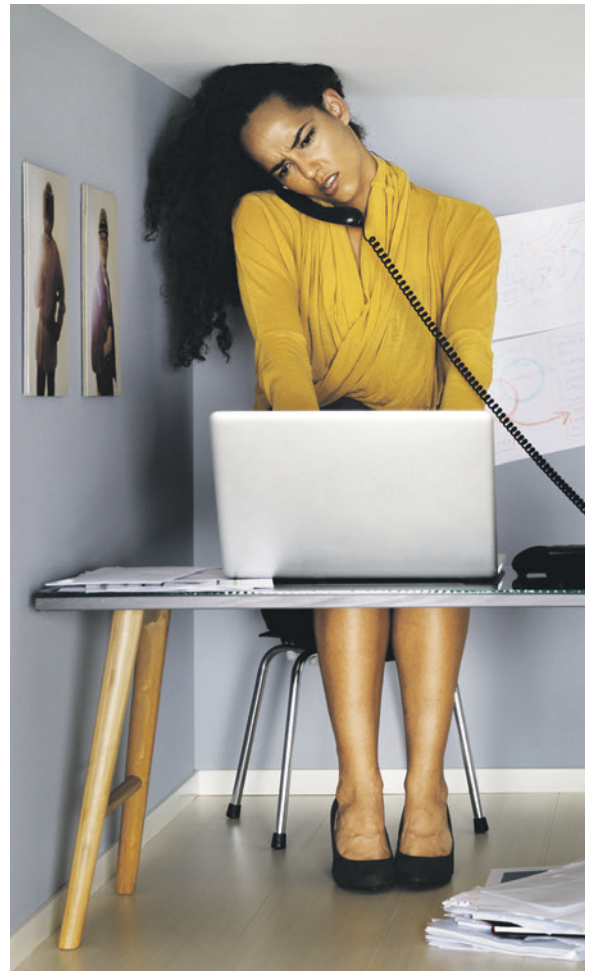
Draw on independent support

To achieve the right balance between keeping staff healthy without being overly intrusive, employers must be able to direct staff to external sources of help, says Robert Ordever, managing director of workplace culture firm O.C. Tanner Europe. "Many services allow employee support, independently and confidentially, such as employee assistance programmes, occupational health professionals and mental health first-aiders," he says.

You are here, your data is there, threats are everywhere: solving data protection

Cyber-crime is on the rise. In our digital-first world, distributed workplaces and remote work routines are creating new security vulnerabilities. But how are enterprises responding to the increased threat landscape?

The 2021 Global Encryption Trends Study aims to answer this question and more by examining how and why enterprises deploy encryption. While IT professionals ranked protection of customer information as the most important reason for encryption, the study found customer information ranks fifth on the list of information that enterprises do encrypt. Instead, other data types ranked higher, such as financial records, payment-related data, employee/HR data and intellectual property. That means enterprises are leaving customer data vulnerable, even though they believe it's the number one reason to deploy encryption.

Clearly, there is a disconnect between perceived threats and the realities of deploying encryption when it comes to prioritising customer data. To regain consumer trust, organisations need to align their intention to protect customer data with their actions. Brands that fail to protect their customers' personal information inevitably place their reputations at risk.

The study reveals that encryption use continues to rise, with 50 per cent of organisations applying an overall encryption strategy consistently, while 37 per cent report a limited encryption strategy. Managing encryption is a pain point for many enterprises today.

The pandemic has put even more pressure on organisations to apply increased attention to their encryption solutions to protect against both internal and external threats. Whether it's painful or not, enterprises will only benefit from prioritising their encryption and key management solutions – especially if it means helping their customers feel more secure, and decreasing risk to their business.

It's encouraging that customer data protection is such a high priority for organisations, but there is clearly work to be done in turning that priority into a reality.

INDUSTRY VIEW
Read the full report at entrust.com/ go/2021-GETS-Report

Supporting employee health and wellbeing during good times and bad

More than 85 per cent of employees around the world report a decline in their overall wellbeing since the start of the pandemic, according to a recent Harvard Business Review survey. Many cite a decline in their mental health, loss of connection with others, and increased work demands.

Without a clear approach to health and wellbeing, organisations are often unable to unlock the high levels of engagement and productivity that allow them to drive successful change and transformation in the face of shifting economic circumstances.

Below are actions you can take to show employees you're listening.

Ask for feedback
Someone working remotely with a young family may have different concerns to a nurse working night-shifts. One might be concerned about their mental health due to a lack of clarity around goals, while the other could be struggling with poor physical health. Ask for feedback so you can better understand your employees' needs.

Take meaningful action
If employees say they are working longer hours and spend too long in meetings, you could introduce a policy that specifies one meeting-free day each week. Taking action will show employees that their feedback results in tangible outcomes, leading to more honest feedback that you can use to drive higher engagement.
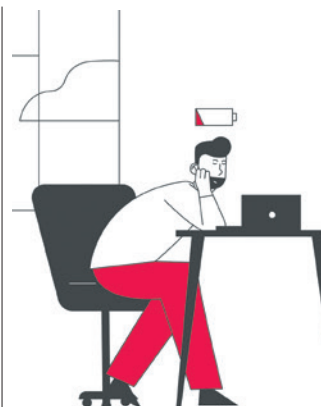
Model healthy behaviours
You may have introduced an unlimited holiday policy that lets employees prioritise their mental health, for example. But unless senior leaders embody the desired behaviour and champion the policy, it's unlikely to be adopted throughout the business.

Make it part of your culture
To support the ongoing health and wellbeing of your people, organisational values need to reflect the kinds of behaviours that support good mental, physical and financial health.

As employees become more familiar with your values and see them modelled in the way people act within the organisation, they will begin to embody those values.

When it comes to employee health and wellbeing, prevention is always more effective than a cure. To ensure success, organisations need to provide ongoing support for employee health and wellbeing, and ensure it is woven into their organisational culture.

INDUSTRY VIEW
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https://bit.ly/3u9UDAe

The great screen test

Teleconferencing has become ubiquitous during the pandemic – with varying degrees of success. Paul Bray looks at how different businesses have learned how to turn on, tune in and not drop out...

"You don't need to leave your room," wrote Franz Kafka. "Just sit at your table and listen."

Most of us have done this all too often over the past year, as video conferencing and communications technology such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams has replaced the traditional face-to-face meetings and water cooler moments.

For some the experience has been liberating: no wasted hours commuting or flying to meetings. For an unfortunate few, technical glitches have exposed them to public ridicule in sagas Kafka himself could have penned: The Lawyer Who Turned Into A Cat; The Politician Who Found He Was Naked.

But many have just felt a little flat, as the promised white heat of technology has seemed more like a grey drizzle, sapping their energy and leaving an uneasy impression that things could have gone better if only they had known how.

Remote control

The first step on the road to enlightenment, believes Antonie Knoppers, adjunct faculty member at Rotterdam School of Management, is to acknowledge that remote meetings are essentially different.

"Various things are 'unnatural'. Everyone is made to stare at each other. This 'hyper gaze' can be exhausting and even unnerving. Then there's the 'mirror effect', the distraction of seeing ourselves on screen. This, combined with the effort of making non-verbal communication more explicit (all the thumbs-ups, vigorous nodding and waving goodbye), plus surreptitious multitasking such as checking emails, makes for quite a

"Various things are 'unnatural' [in remote meetings]. Everyone is made to stare at each other. This 'hyper-gaze' can be exhausting. Then there's the 'mirror effect', the distraction of seeing ourselves on screen" – Antonie Knoppers, Rotterdam School of Management

different experience, and quite different challenges for communicators."

It therefore pays to employ a little psychology. "People can get virtual meeting fatigue when numerous remote calls are scheduled back-to-back, so they need a few minutes between calls to mentally recover," says Magnus Falk, CIO advisor at Zoom. "And booking meetings in the late morning or early afternoon provides more chance for employees to check emails at the beginning and end of the day instead of during calls."

"You need to make an effort to replace the 'relationship building' time that often happens naturally in a face-to-face meeting, such as walking to the meeting room or going for a drink or a coffee afterwards," adds Tom Arbuthnot, principal solutions architect at unified communications consultancy Modality.

Dress for success

Slobbing out is inadvisable, professionally and personally. "I'm a huge believer in dressing up for Zoom," says Emma Maslen, vice president of cyber-security firm Ping Identity. "Our shop windows are always open and it's important to look our best – not only for our audience but for ourselves. If you see yourself during a Zoom call it's important that you look good to feel good."

Other non-verbal cues can be equally important. "Slouching or using a monotonous voice will significantly impact the way others perceive you – and there's a great danger of slouching when we're hunched over our laptops," says Knoppers. "The right posture is not only better for your back, but also has a huge impact on whether you exude confidence and instil trust."

Because of the limitations of video conferencing, we may actually need to work twice as hard to ensure our body language is picked up – making our voice tone and facial expressions a little more "stagey", and ensuring any gestures we make are in camera shot.

Knoppers advises positioning the camera at eye level, otherwise you will appear like an ogre looking down, or a mouse looking up. "And if you're working on two screens, put the webcam on the main screen. Many people spend entire meetings looking sideways at their other screen. It's like being in a conference room and talking to the wall."

Homeworkers should not be afraid of showing a domestic background. "We get a peek into your home, which can bring out aspects of you and your personality that we wouldn't otherwise see," says Knoppers. "This can help boost engagement and keep remote teams connected. You need to avoid an overly distracting or messy background, but it does need depth (a plain white wall isn't good), and

Tele addicts: top teleconferencing tips

Don't rely on your laptop's camera and microphone. Invest in a quality external webcam and a headset or USB speakerphone. *Tom Arbuthnot, Modality*

Headsets and video bars with AI-based active noise cancelling can reduce or remove background noises such as keyboard tapping, office chatter or children playing. *Paul Clark, EMEA managing director, Poly*

Consider standardising on a single, familiar software platform, preferably including not just video conferencing but the ability to share documents; prepare before the meeting and follow up afterwards. *Matthieu Silbermann, chief product officer, Powell Software*

Poor sound is far more disruptive than poor video. Some conferencing solutions can identify bandwidth issues and prioritise audio over visual quality. *Richard Roberts, Mitel*

Iffy internet connections can be problematic, especially when presenting. Try turning off the camera, and streaming slides from a central server instead of using live screen sharing. *Richard Goring, BrightCarbon*

Don't assume participants from outside the company will have acceptable equipment. For really important meetings, ship them a decent camera, video encoder and external microphone. *Marc Risby, CTO, Boxer Systems*

Lip-reading can be tricky over video, so consider using automatic captioning and other visual cues within video conferencing software to ensure remote meetings remain inclusive. *Chintan Patel, chief technologist UK&I, Cisco*

Remote working can have serious security implications, so businesses need clear cyber-security policies which should be communicated to all staff and reinforced by regular risk assessments. *Andrew Duncan, UK CEO, Infosys Consulting*

some colour (plants work very well)."

Heard mentality

However, the full video experience is not always necessary, argues Knoppers. "It's advisable to have some audio-only meetings during the day. We seem to have forgotten that the telephone still exists, and research has proven that moving around can greatly help creativity and productivity."

"I like the idea of HSBC's 'no Zoom Fridays'," says Maslen. "This takes the pressure off teams to get non-meeting work done."

Keeping the attention of a live audience can be hard enough, but in remote meetings the problems are compounded. "People are easily distracted by email, instant messages or even surfing the web," says Chris Dyer, a remote working expert and CEO of PeopleG2. "Try to incorporate activities that compel participants to engage and contribute, such as fun games, or asking each person for an update on their area of responsibility."

"It's harder to present in a remote meeting because you get no verbal feedback, and it's harder to listen because you can end up staring at a small screen where not much happens," says Richard Goring, director of presentation design agency BrightCarbon. "One solution is to have highly visual, animated slides that keep people engaged, which also helps you feel confident and present more effectively."

Meet market

The basics of good meeting management should not be ignored. "A lot of the things people do badly in remote meetings are the same things they do badly in person," says Goring. "So all that best practice around agendas, minutes, etcetera, remains as valid."

"We advise people to be much more clear and explicit about the process of a remote meeting," says Knoppers. "That means establishing the agenda and goals, who talks, when and for how long, and whether or not people use their cameras, or stay on mute by default."

A sure way to undermine the effectiveness of a meeting is to fail to respect attendees' time, believes Dyer. "Most meetings shouldn't last longer than an hour, and the organiser/moderator should keep things on track, including starting on time. If possible, end five minutes early: as a gift of time, it's small, but as a message of respect, it's huge."

The role of the chairman or moderator is key, according to Frank Weishaupt, CEO of meeting hardware manufacturer Owl Labs. "They'll make sure all participants have the opportunity to

contribute, especially remote team members who might otherwise find it difficult to speak up."

Technically correct

As some staff return to their offices post-lockdown, "hybrid" meetings combining in-person and remote participants will become a particular challenge. Is the office meeting room technology compatible with the apps on homeworkers' laptops? Can remote participants clearly see and hear who is speaking, and be seen and heard themselves? Are there different dress codes for in-person and remote staff?

But, if properly managed, hybrid meetings can create a positive symbiosis between present and remote workers. "In-office participants are more likely to continue the conversation among themselves after remote attendees have dialled off, while the remote attendees are more likely to take immediate action," says Richard Roberts, vice president for Northern Europe at telecoms company Mitel. "So both groups work together to support the meeting's ultimate goals of making decisions and carrying them out."

Technology features can also help make remote and hybrid meetings more effective and efficient. "These include editable transcription, AI-driven meeting summary tools, online recordings that can be shared with absent members, and real-time interaction with to-do lists to capture the status of actions as they arise," says Falk.

Another simple value-add technology is chat. "In a face-to-face meeting, chatting while someone else is presenting would be rude," says Goring. "But in a remote meeting it can keep people engaged. If they need some small clarification, someone in the audience can answer and nobody gets distracted."

So although meeting remotely may be different from face-to-face, with the right approach and judicious use of technology, it doesn't have to be worse. BR

Collaborate and grow: how Ariba benefits supply chain planning and performance

According to the World Economic Forum, Covid-19's impact on major economies has already been four times worse than that of the 2008 global financial crisis. So, finding ways to improve performance by working better with data and digital tools will be key to finding efficiencies and maximising your competitive edge.

In March last year, a McKinsey article warned organisations to take urgent action within their supply chains, to build resilience and guard against future shocks. Improved planning, transparency and supplier optimisation were cited as key factors, especially given the complexity challenges of multiple supply chains. Today, we believe that these remain essential issues that need addressing, not just to deal with the constraints of the ongoing pandemic but for the benefit of supply chain health regardless.

To that end, we have identified the Ariba network as a key platform for supply chains to plan and build resilience, while improving transparency and performance. Below we have outlined five challenges where Ariba can help supply chains plan, collaborate and grow.

Managing contract coverage commitments

Ariba enables you to digitise the supply chain and mission-critical business processes, supported across the extended enterprise with one single source of live information.

Forecast procurement spend visibility

Achieve end-to-end forecasting, demand planning, allocation, and execution across the business by bridging the communication gap between sales and marketing, customer service, procurement and supply.

Mitigating risk by optimising working capital

Optimise capital by increasing the transparency of forecasts, supply availability, orders, shipments, quality and goods receipts. This can also reduce latency and lead times.

Striking the right buy/move balance

Accurate forecasting and planning is key to building a resilient, efficient supply chain capable of withstanding shocks and ensuring continuity of supply.

Making your extended supplier network visible

All complex demand planning, material requirements planning (MRP), and associated changes remain in the companies' ERP and planning system, but they can be digitally shared with suppliers, live and in real time.

INDUSTRY VIEW

To find out more about how Olivehorse helps customers improve their supply chain or to book a discovery session, please contact Olivehorse at https://olivehorse.com/contact

Building a culture of excellence

Covid-19 has had a transformative effect on the world of work. Enterprises must now prepare to navigate a period of sustained unpredictability

Over the past year, a new work ecosystem has emerged, placing greater demands on our ability to think creatively, act with agility and respond quickly to change and crisis. While this ecosystem has been evolving for some time, the full-spectrum disarray caused by the pandemic has accelerated the need for many organisations to develop resilience and a culture of excellence that will ensure their future relevance.

Take the media sector as an example. Well before the pandemic, the industry was hit by substantial shifts in the way we consume news, access video content and more, with legacy outlets forced to compete with more dynamic social media platforms. The need for agility was already apparent. Those that survived understood two things early on: preparation for sharp and unexpected deviations from the usual path is key to survival, and companies who want to retain a driven workforce must ensure the work is meaningful. Enterprises that embedded this understanding and created a culture of excellence are those that have been able to excel during the pandemic.

Beyond VUCA
We have long operated in a world of rapid change defined as "VUCA" – volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – but those times have passed. Three new characteristics and qualities have come to embody the modern era for business: shock, sensing and speed. As such, we have seen the evolution of what we at Project Management Institute (PMI) call gymnastic enterprises.

Crisis management had once been rooted in reactiveness – what an enterprise could do to limit the damage after a crisis hit. Gymnastic enterprises, however, do things differently. They know they cannot plan for every eventuality, and that waiting until the storm has passed before executing a clean-up operation is risky and costly. Rather, they are nimble from the outset and skilled in a range of approaches that can be deployed depending on the size and shape of the problem they are addressing.

Central to the success of gymnastic enterprises is their ability to empower changemakers to bring about this necessary evolution, as explored in our 2021 *Pulse of the Profession®* report. As such, employees are trained and upskilled to master different ways of working and evolve their persona to demonstrate their power skills – collaborative leadership, emotional intelligence, an innovative mindset and empathy for both employees and customers. Airbnb's Employee Experience department has made strides in this area, offering employees input into the design of its offices, breaking them up into small teams that foreground commercial agility and flexibility, all in line with its core values of benevolence, transparency and optimism.

These qualities are essential to build a culture of excellence in the new work ecosystem, and it will take strategic transformation of many enterprises to embed these practices and mindsets. Enterprises that can execute such transformations are twice as likely to invest in developing internal talent and equip these individuals with the resources they need in a rapidly changing work environment.

Driving the emergence of The Project Economy
The future of work will increasingly centre on executing projects. Meanwhile, careers will revolve around a portfolio of projects rather than a bulleted list of static job responsibilities. The global economy needs 25 million new project professionals by 2030, according to PMI's Talent Gap report.

After months of upgrading and modernising our foundations – including our Organizational Transformation Series, new agile certifications with Disciplined Agile, PMI Citizen Developer and Wicked Problem Solving – PMI is well positioned to serve changemakers as the global "go-to" place for all things project-related. If enterprises are to undergo the transformation necessary to ensure they turn crises into opportunities, they must:

• Understand that strategic transformation is not about small changes, but a quantum leap in operational and/or cultural evolution

• Develop gymnastic operating models that ensure they can respond effectively to uncertainty

• Upskill and reskill changemakers with the right tools and technologies so they can drive transformation efforts from within the enterprise

These are the results of PMI's unique insight into the new work ecosystem, and our conviction – born from years of studying how upheaval impacts business operations – is that, if approached carefully, crises provide opportunities for those willing to undergo transformation.

INDUSTRY VIEW
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The biggest post-pandemic threat to businesses? A lack of people strategy

More than a year of working under the shadow of Covid-19 has given employees a renewed voice – and employers would do well to listen to them

Over the past year, many businesses have been in crisis mode, dealing with urgent new tasks and concerns. And for some the focus on fire-fighting has caused other areas, such as their people strategy, to fall to the wayside.

But negligence can come at a cost – and businesses that don't prioritise their people strategy risk paying the price for their actions later, in the form of a costly talent exodus, damaged employer brand and a productivity drought.

In our latest research we surveyed 500 HR decision makers and 2,000 employees in the UK and Ireland. We set out to explore the cost of poor people strategy during the pandemic and assess the actions businesses can take to mitigate the risks of mass resignation in the near future. Here's what we found.

A talent exodus is on the horizon

Our new research reveals that, having navigated a myriad of market and operational challenges over the past year, businesses could be sleepwalking towards a talent exodus – with nearly one in four employees looking to change roles in the near future.

Although some employers are aware this exodus is on the way – with nearly half of HR decision makers worried staff will leave once the job market improves – they might not be taking the necessary steps to prevent people leaving. Only a quarter of HR decision makers are reporting that talent retention is a priority for their organisation over the next 12 months.

Not only does this mean businesses risk losing their valuable talent at a time when they will depend upon it most – hampering productivity and performance, and tarnishing employer brand – but it could take a significant toll on profit margins too. Overall, the cost of additional staff turnover in the UK and Ireland over the next 12 months could cost the economy an estimated £16.958 billion – equating to £10,076 per business – and up to £5.807 billion for SMEs alone.

But what's triggering this exodus? While there are various factors at play, the research uncovered a worrying disconnect between employers' perception of what will encourage their staff to leave and employees' reality, highlighting a lack of understanding of staff's problems and priorities today.

Crucially, while HR decision makers are right to speculate that a pay freeze or cut and a worsening work-life balance could cause workers to look elsewhere, they underestimate the pushing power of a toxic workplace culture. Toxic workplace culture is a major push factor, with 21 per cent of employees saying this would encourage them to look for a new job if it were to happen in the next six months.

We also found that a lack of awareness among employers of how their company's handling of the pandemic has been perceived could be contributing to a lack of loyalty among employees. HR decision makers are more than twice as likely as employees to rate their business's support for career development as "good", and around a quarter are more likely to see its support for work/life balance and mental/physical wellbeing in a positive light. Moreover, they are also significantly more likely to overestimate how successfully their organisation has managed company culture, resourcing and internal communications.
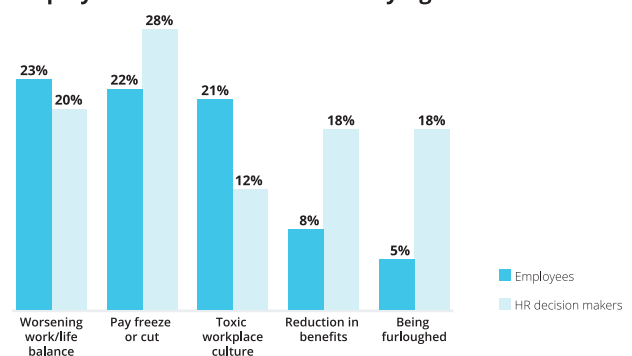
It's clear that many employers are worryingly out of touch with their employees' priorities and concerns. And, if businesses fail to identify this disconnect and address any issues at hand – such as burnout or a lack of appreciation – this could prompt people to leave and put their employer brand on the line.

£16.958 billion

Overall potential cost of a talent exodus to **UK and Irish economies**

Resignation reasons: differing views of employers and employees demonstrate an underlying disconnect

Reason	Employees	HR decision makers
Worsening work/life balance	23%	20%
Pay freeze or cut	22%	28%
Toxic workplace culture	21%	12%
Reduction in benefits	8%	18%
Being furloughed	5%	18%

A looming productivity drought

Employers aren't just overestimating how well their organisation has handled the pandemic – they're overestimating their team's productivity too. While three in ten employees (31 per cent) say the pandemic has made them more productive at work, this is notably different to what HR professionals believe they have seen, with more than half (52 per cent) saying they have noticed an increase in employee productivity.

Unaware of the reality of how employees are feeling, this optimism could pose a risk: if employers don't recognise that employees feel less productive, they're less likely to take steps to address it – and this could cost them in the long run.

And it's not just how employers and employees rate productivity where there's a mismatch – they are also at odds over the reasons behind productivity losses. Indeed, HR decision makers are more likely to believe that external factors are driving poor productivity, such as distractions or managing childcare, whereas employees are most likely to attribute productivity loss to factors related to their work, such as low motivation and morale, or burnout.

It's crucial that employers address these issues sooner rather than later if they're to prevent a looming productivity drought. With 83 per cent of employees saying a good workplace culture helps people to be more productive, it's clear that getting people strategy right is key to solving the productivity puzzle.

People strategy as a crucial priority

Behind every great business is a great team. And a great team requires a brilliant HR function – which is why an effective people strategy is so important.

But, shockingly, 39 per cent of HR decision makers don't cite people strategy as a top priority

46%

*say the **HR function lacks the data and insights** it needs to support the business in the best way possible*

at their business. This figure should be 0 per cent – especially when good people strategy goes hand in hand with productivity. The research found that, of those HR decision makers that reported an increase in productivity during the pandemic, 67 per cent said people strategy is a priority at their business – demonstrating that successful firms invest in their people.

Evidently people strategy is integral to productivity and performance, driving business success and, in turn, the economy, and this necessitates that HR becomes more strategic still. But in order to fulfil this strategic function, HR teams need more support. Half of HR decision makers still wish HR had a bigger reach and influence within the business, while 46 per cent say the HR function lacks the data and insights it needs to support the business in the best way possible.

Where do we go from here?

People are a business's greatest asset. So when people strategy is not well planned or thought out – or its impact is overestimated – this comes at a cost to the people and the business too.

With the potential to provoke a cascade of negative outcomes, such as poor staff retention, damaged employer brand and poor productivity, this could ultimately cause a significant impact to a business's bottom line. And for businesses that haven't prioritised their people during the pandemic, any detrimental impact may not become apparent until it's too late.

But there's still a chance to turn the tide. By prioritising their people and taking a more strategic approach to people management, employers can drive their business performance as well as the wider economy. And as many employers prepare to open offices again, it's critical they involve their employees in what the future of work in their company should look like, and listen to their concerns, to avoid yet more disconnection.

Small and medium-sized businesses have suffered grievously during the Covid pandemic. Lacking the depth of pocket, breadth of interests and extent of continuity planning of larger companies, many have had a torrid time, with owners often spending their own savings or taking second jobs just to keep the business afloat.

But smaller firms do have one invaluable advantage over larger rivals: agility. While the corporate CEO is straining at the helm of the oil tanker, the SME skipper can reset every sail and disappear over the horizon.

Risky business

"By nature, entrepreneurs are risk takers and the most agile of the workforce, traits that lend themselves well to difficult economic times," says LJ Silverman, head of the LSE Generate entrepreneurs' programme at the London School of Economics. "Customer tastes and preferences have changed at staggering speed over the past 18 months, and radical innovation is required to keep up. SMEs are usually a catalyst for this, so there's often a spotlight on them to kickstart the economy and adapt quickly to new ways of working."

"One of the positive things during the pandemic was seeing so many SMEs successfully adapt and pivot their businesses," says Victoria Price, UK&I private client services leader at EY. "For some, this required changing their operating model, such as adopting home delivery or online platforms. Others had to embrace a fundamental shift in products and services, [such as] the distilleries and breweries who switched to manufacturing hand sanitiser."

New routes to business

Even in the hardest-hit sectors, SMEs have found new routes to market, often online. Pre-Covid, field and retail marketing agency Gekko majored on training shop-floor staff, so lockdown was a hammer blow. CEO Daniel Todaro's response was to go virtual.

Staying afloat in the storm of the century

The past year has seen many firms suffer – but small enterprises have proved surprisingly resilient. Paul Bray looks at SMEs that have been nimble and innovative enough to sidestep the pandemic potholes

"We moved at pace to pivot and develop new digital services, including a digital learning management system for retail sales teams. We'd been strategising this for a while, but the pandemic forced us to rapidly speed up development. The upshot is we've been able to train many more staff, and created a valued new service [to] complement our in-store activity. So in meeting the needs of the evolved channel, we've helped diversify our business offering."

International exhibitions and events company Ignition watched in horror when Covid hit, as planned events were cancelled, and revenues shrivelled. But it soon realised that clients wanted to meet their customers as much as ever, if only they could find the means.

"We immediately put a plan in place to create a digital exhibit and event offer," says CEO Samantha Rowe. "Our creative and project management teams had to upskill immediately, working nights and weekends, and by June 2020 we'd delivered our first virtual exhibit."

The firm has now recruited a specialist digital team and beefed up its business development capability. "As live events are still on hold, we've expanded our digital offer into areas outside live events to ensure additional revenue," says Rowe. "We hope this will help ensure the longevity of the business should the pandemic continue, and plug short-term gaps until live projects return."

Out of the ashes

If realignment is not enough, there is always resurrection. Despite cutting costs and trying new revenue streams, YogaBellies, a franchise business for yoga instructors, just could not make ends meet during the pandemic. So founder Cheryl MacDonald closed down the franchise business and moved to a licence-only model.

"We also went back to the drawing board and came up with Empower by YogaBellies, a 300-hour course that helps you transform your life through yoga.

"Ultimately we're starting again from scratch. But we still have the power of the brand and our loyal customers and teachers, plus a brand-new course that will build on our previous knowledge. We've learned that you need to be ready to pivot your entire business model, assess the options and the market, and be able to make tough decisions."

Which, of course, is just where the best entrepreneurs excel. ∎

Covid-19 has brought about a workplace revolution. We've witnessed the biggest and fastest shift in working practices in working culture and technology in recent memory.

If 2020 was the year the world and workplace went into lockdown, 2021 is the year to reopen – and reinvent – office working. With 57 per cent of employees we recently surveyed agreeing that meeting rooms will be crucial, businesses need to act fast to satisfy these needs. To set returning employees up for success, companies need to invest in collaboration technologies that allow for innovative combinations of video, smart-screen touch and messaging apps and establish a fully functioning blended hybrid workspace that's fit for the future.

Strengthening collaboration

In the early stages of the pandemic, businesses were solely focused on survival and ensuring work could continue in a remote setting. With virtually no warning, remote working came with its fair share of challenges. Many struggled to get to grips with foreign technology and had to do so alone without the face-to-face support of IT teams.

Our survey found that 49 per cent of employees felt that remote collaboration did not come naturally. As a result, key collaboration features such as polling, breakout rooms and other brainstorming techniques – which could have led to higher-quality meetings – were not fully utilised. This year, with the end of the pandemic in sight, employees are starting to make the most of the technology and are relying on their workplaces to be well equipped: an overwhelming 88 per cent of our respondents are expecting office technology to make meetings better as they transition back. As a result, better quality collaboration is taking place and the focus now is meaningful engagement and adapting this to include within the office.

The evolved office

Businesses are turning their attention to the challenges this new era of collaboration brings, and how they can ensure workers feel comfortable using this technology. Questions about whether standard meeting rooms will be used for spontaneous and ad-hoc hybrid collaborations are being raised and whether employees can use their own devices in any room; indeed, 71 per cent of our respondents prefer to host office-based video calls from their own laptops. Video conferencing solutions will be a vital component, with 77 per cent of respondents believing meeting rooms need to be equipped with this technology. Employers will need to meet the expectations of their employees to make for a seamless and enhanced experience. One size no longer fits all, and the best businesses will be those that allow for employee choice and device preference as they reconnect and collaborate within the organisation.

The focus is very much on creating hybrid meeting environments that enable people to focus on the discussion. It will no longer be acceptable for remote participants to feel left out of proceedings; technology must bridge the gap, providing a more immersive experience for remote participants through superior quality visual and sound offerings.

The focus in 2021 will be on employee engagement and inspiring teams since this will become the biggest tool in maintaining productivity – critical for keeping profit levels high.

Securing the future

With employees returning to the office there's an expectation that they'll be able to continue to use the conferencing solutions they are most comfortable with, and the onus is on businesses to give them the flexibility and tools they need to be successful.

The good news is that upgrading your meetings is now much more cost-effective. Flexible wireless conferencing solutions such as Barco ClickShare are providing vendor-agnostic, scalable (as they work with existing AV systems) and intuitive solutions that are increasing employee productivity and flexibility. They enable employees to seamlessly move from one meeting environment or conferencing platform (such as Zoom, Webex or MS Teams) to another without sacrificing valuable time or results. "Bringing Your Own Meeting" (BYOM) to the table is something 71 per cent of employees would prefer.

The challenge for businesses will be to provide the freedom of remote working without sacrificing human connection. Significant investment in advanced collaboration technology, however, will foster the connectivity and engagement needed to satisfy and motivate all parties.

A post-pandemic world has given businesses the opportunity to realise the potential of this new hybrid working environment and new collaborative tools will support a workforce to achieve their full potential.

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Experience our Clickshare wireless conferencing and presentation models at no cost at https://www.barco.com/en/clickshare/try-and-buy

Ready to get back to the office?

New research from Barco highlights changing employee tech expectations