

Supporting a dynamic workforce

Considerations for HR, Ops and IT

April 2021



Read the full research report here

Personalising the concept of work

Our latest research report – “Creating a dynamic workforce: Empowering employees for productivity and growth” – demonstrates how today’s employee expectations have been shaped by the pandemic.

Not just temporarily, but for the long term.

As the UK prepares to reopen, the research findings offer employers insights into how to reset the concepts of work, workspace and workforce.

The emergence of seven employee personas, that all need to be supported, has created the opportunity for a new dynamic workforce to be realised. Developing business strategies that use the knowledge of what each persona type needs to do their jobs well and how to respond as a business will be a market differentiator.

Creating a sustainable working environment is the key to boosting productivity and growth. This needs HR, IT and Ops to come together to create a cohesive action plan that enables individuals and teams to work their best.

All the insights point to three critical considerations for employers:

- 1 Offering the technology to boost productivity
 - 2 Putting people first
 - 3 Redefining your long-term strategies
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Offering the tech to boost productivity

The research tells us that performance can be improved when you are able to accommodate when and where employees work best.



Plan for a location-agnostic workforce

Enabling a dynamic workforce means ripping up the rulebook. Moving from an organisation-centric to an employee-centric mindset will mean thinking about what they need, not what was in place before the pandemic.

A virtual-first approach – sometimes referred to as a digital-first approach – will provide the platform for meeting people’s needs and scaling how those needs are met. Instead of office-only practices, hardware, and fixed-line connectivity options, you can equip employees to be productive whenever and wherever they work best. Whether that’s early in the morning or late in the afternoon, and be it from home, on the move or in the office.

The technology solutions you choose to offer should be available to everyone. This equal distribution means that all people can contribute effectively regardless of where they are working. In some situations, this is about the hardware and applications that employees need, and in other cases it is about the connectivity requirements to join video calls, use collaboration tools and cloud services.





Standardise the employee offer

By recognising that there are different personas of workers, you can provide a more homogenous experience. This could be in the form of a digital worker package that gives everyone the right devices, tools and security to access the systems they need in their own roles, while also simplifying deployment and in-life support.

One place to start is to map all the needs across three key areas:

Access

Which devices, connectivity, authentication, and business systems do people need to do their jobs?

Collaboration

Which cloud systems, video conferencing facilities and productivity apps will help people work more effectively?

Security

How can you protect system access, the flow of information in and out of the network and data privacy in multiple places?

Centralising the IT management, support and logistics will help standardise the core of what you offer your employees.



Rethink the workplace

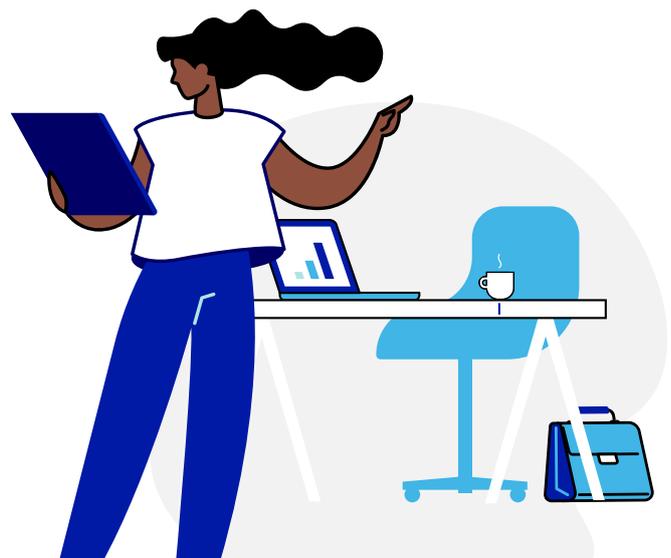
For those with existing office locations, another crucial factor is how to repurpose those spaces. Collaboration spaces. Quiet zones. Areas for socialising. These will all be determined by what people need when they do come into the office. If there is excess space in the building, could this be used for something else? For example, community facilities or business incubators for partner organisations.

If the central HQ is no longer a necessity – and the opportunity presents itself – perhaps smaller, regional satellite spaces could change the way the organisation works for the better. Rather than overemphasising a single location, employees could feel more closely connected to each other and the communities they live in by visiting local hubs. These will need similar technology setups to connect the spaces when required. This, however, doesn't mean reverting back to the dedicated regional office spaces of the past, but embracing coworking and serviced offices via third-party environments.

As we separate the act of work from the traditional office workplace, there are further opportunities for a more inclusive workforce. As the barriers related to commuting distances are removed, it allows recruitment of the best talent irrespective of location. It also enables

these roles to be extended to those with disabilities that restrict movement, as well as those whose availability sits outside normal working hours, such as carers and parents.

But it's not just about having the right technology in place. It's about how people use it and whether they are trained to use it to its full potential.



Putting people first

The research highlights some significant gaps in what people feel they get from work beyond a salary.

Most large enterprises (and plenty of smaller ones too) already measure employee wellbeing. But the connection between what people need to do their jobs and how they feel about those jobs are often separate considerations.



Look at how everything ties together

Technology and employee wellbeing are not mutually exclusive. So HR, IT and Operations need to work together more closely than ever before to create a working environments that is productive and fulfilling.

By aligning what people want with the tools they have available and the organisation's goals, you can create a picture of what needs

to be done. This map will help you identify gaps that need to be addressed with business, team and individual outcomes in mind.

Technology should never just be a line within a budget sheet. It is an enabler. It helps people get things done and is the foundation of the employee offering. In this sense, it is critical to improving productivity in any setting.



Offer the right training

When people know how to use the tools at their disposal then work just happens.

Sometimes this is about having the training to operate a particular device or use a particular solution. Sometimes it is about the etiquette required within the digital world, for example using the hands-up tool in online collaboration sessions or understanding how to run meetings that are a mixture of people in the office and people working remotely. This is particularly important for personas such as Career Starters who are at the beginning of their working lives and are learning on the job. But it's equally important for those who may be used to working a certain way or hold a position of seniority, like the Command & Controllers.





Embrace change

People's priorities change. They may start their careers as an Office Craver who wants to be in the office for the learning and social opportunities. They may move on to become a Mixer who values the ability to choose where they work due to their current lifestyle choice. Or they may become a Home Dweller who would be happier away from the office because it gives them more time for their family or hobbies.

Giving everyone access to the right things they need to do their jobs – regardless of their current work preference – will improve employee satisfaction. And productivity as a result. It also means people can change without any impact on their ability to contribute and output.

Helping leaders understand the personas will mean that the organisation can bring out the best in their people. By understanding them as individuals, you define a much more dynamic workforce, that is resilient, flexible, and adaptable. Leaders may need support to effectively manage these hybrid teams and mixture of on-premises and virtual employees. This includes skills development, mentoring and coaching as well as conversations about how to manage performance for a hybrid team. But it truly begins with the adoption of a culture and mindset across all levels within the organisation, one focused on output over presenteeism.



Redefining your long-term strategies

The research makes it clear that the workforce changes we have seen since March 2020 are here to stay.

Rather than continue the rapid actions taken to allow for business continuity, or even simply return to the way the business operated previously, this is an opportunity to change how we work. As it has been shown that the technology is already available to enable people to work the way they want, it is now time to plan for ways that organisations can reap the productivity rewards of flexible working in a long-term and sustainable manner.



Shift from a property strategy to a workspace strategy

Now that the office is unlikely to be the place where the majority of people work, should it be central to the way that work is re-designed? What about people's homes, shared spaces and public places? Looking at workspaces as a whole means less emphasis on the specific 'place' and more emphasis on the 'work'.

It's not about expensive new office re-fits. It's about flexibility. Connecting people with technology that can work anywhere is fundamental to this new way of thinking. Because it is the only way to ensure that every workspace is ready to help people be productive. From homes to quiet working areas to busy collaboration spaces.



Get the combination right

Offices will still have a vital role to play for some people within the dynamic workforce. So being able to support a mix of people in person and online will determine the technology and underlying infrastructure you choose.

Workspaces then become access points for people to be productive. If these access points are flexible, then the organisation can fit more around the people within the workforce rather than limiting individual personalities and creativity. This will support productivity in the immediate term. Help attract and retain staff. And provide the operational agility to adapt to future market opportunities.

Not forcing people to come into the office simply to use a particular system or meet a particular person will have an impact on sustainability targets too. Reducing unnecessary travel or office space will reduce the organisation's environmental footprint in terms of emissions and energy or water consumption.

No one has a crystal ball. But the research tells us a dynamic-working-focused roadmap that stimulates productivity across a broader set of dynamic workforce needs is a necessity. Taking this strategic approach to organisational agility will pay obvious dividends. And while not every business will be able to act on every consideration right now, many are already taking major steps in the right direction.

Moving forward

As you make your own plans, what will these key considerations mean for your HR, IT and Operations leaders?

Read on to understand some of the strategic starting points for rethinking work to boost productivity.



Strategic questions and considerations for HR

Meeting the needs of a dynamic workforce will require close cooperation with colleagues in IT and Operations. The following specific questions will help you prepare for working together on a roadmap to maintain productivity.



Addressing technology needs

- What tech do employees have today, how does that align with their ability to do their job or support employee satisfaction? What new tech do you need? How does this affect the department's IT spend?
- As flexibility and technology now needs to be a fundamental element of your employee offering, how do you need to change how you work together with your IT and Operational functions in creating this proposition? How will your employee offering compare to your competitors?
- Do you have the tools in place for digital contract signing, compliance monitoring and/or governance? Can you make your HR systems virtual in terms of accessing files or development plans?
- What skills and capabilities do you need for the future? How will your employee offering help retain and attract employees with the best skills, regardless of where they want to work?
 - Will you provide or subsidise equipment or expect employees to bring their own? Will everyone receive the same IT equipment, including peripherals like ergonomic chairs or laptop stands?
 - How will you manage the onboarding process for new starters remotely?
 - If a hybrid workplace is the default, what new 'perks' might you include in employee contracts? What will be your new expenses policy for flexible workers?





Strategic questions and considerations for HR



Meeting people's expectations

- Where did your people work before the pandemic and where do they want to work in the future?
- Should flexible working be the default option for all employees? How would this extra flexibility meet business goals? Will this have an impact on contracts? How will you support people in adapting to their new workplace?
- Will it give you access to a more diverse workforce, and if so, how could this contribute to your Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy?
 - Would this approach level up your workforce in terms of pay and location and if so, will this have a positive effect on output?
- How will you manage people's performance in line with business objectives instead of hours spent in the office? What will you need to change if people work flexibly? How will you communicate these changes in policies?
- Are there any specific skills gaps you need to address in terms of online working?
 - What are the etiquette rules for meetings when some people are in the office and others are not?
 - Do managers and Learning & Development staff have the skills to lead, train or support employees when they cannot meet them in person? Are they equipped to support the needs of the different workplace personas and hybrid teams?
- Do you track eNPS and does the feedback align with the expectations of each of the seven personas identified in the research?



Preparing for the long term

- What will you measure to demonstrate the positive impact of supporting a dynamic workforce?
- How will your approach to work set your organisation apart from others to attract and retain top talent?
- How will your approach underpin your organisation's sustainability objectives?
- What will you need to continue being a social safety net for some employees and provide them with the wellbeing support they need?
- What mentoring and coaching programmes will you have for new starters and how will you conduct regular check-ins when people work from home?
- Do your insurance policies cover you across home, hybrid and office working environments?



Need any help?

If you'd like to know how O₂ can help you respond to some of these questions, or want to set up a Future of Work workshop – contact your Account Manager or call us on 0800 955 5590.

Strategic questions and considerations for IT

IT underpins much of what is achieved elsewhere in the business. Answering the following questions will help you work with HR and Operations to ensure that all technology conversations are focused on keeping people happy and productive.



Addressing technology needs

- Does everyone currently have the devices, connectivity and tools to work, regardless of location?
- What are you using for:
 - Shared document systems?
 - Productivity apps?
 - Video conferencing facilities?
- In what ways can you develop a consistent technology package that also reduces IT management?
- How can you centrally provision hardware and software to make it easier to deploy and support different employees?
- What percentage of work devices do you manage and will this change over time?
- What connectivity options (if any) do you have beyond the office environment?
- What fixed or mobile connectivity options will you require for disparate employees?
- Do you have the right levels of secure access for devices, connectivity, authentication and applications?
- How will more flexible working affect your up/down link speeds to core systems and will you be able to flex these when required?
- How will you continue performing compliance and regulatory checks on data (sovereignty, GDPR requirements) as more people work away from the office?





Strategic questions and considerations for IT



Meeting people's expectations

- What are the needs from HR and Operations to support the new hybrid workforce?
- What are you currently doing to identify technology gaps (that may have been filled in by shadow IT) during the pandemic?
- Is there standardised, company-wide access to the tools people need to do their jobs?
- Which tools do you use to encourage creativity and stimulate new ways of thinking?
- What technology do your different workforce personas require to work where and when they want?
- Do your people have the tools they need to collaborate across multiple locations – like Microsoft Teams and Meeting Owl?
- What technology training do you offer to people and can this be delivered remotely?
- What can you do to remove the differences between the 'Haves' and the 'Have-nots'?
- How will you manage logistics to get the right devices to the right people in different geographies?



Preparing for the long term

- What is your plan for reducing the reliance on and cost of office-only hardware?
- Where are the opportunities to move on-premises systems to the cloud?
- Can you easily replace older, fixed ethernet and phone lines with wifi, mobile broadband and IP calling?
- What other legacy hardware can you remove to reduce maintenance costs and enable people to work in the office or at home seamlessly?
- Are there any other dependencies that you could remove or reduce as a result (e.g. fixed desks)?
- What new equipment will you need to make your offices ready for a dynamic workforce (e.g. large collaboration screens, desk and meeting room management systems)?



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Strategic questions and considerations for Operations

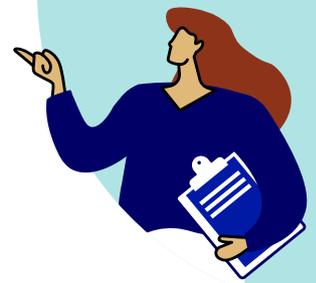
Delivering business outcomes relies on people and technology. Responding to the following questions about operational demands will support your conversations with colleagues in HR and IT about what is needed to create a more productive organisation.



Addressing technology needs

- How will you re-plan office spaces based on who will be in the office and when?
- What flexibility will you need to build in to accommodate times when more than the average number come into the office (e.g. for huddles or social events)?
- How much office space do you need and what is the split between desks, meeting rooms, quiet spaces, collaboration suites or social spaces?
- What technology will be required for people to work effectively in a mixed-use office?
- Will this be the same technology you provide to home workers?
- Can you achieve most of the reorganisation with inexpensive furniture and dividers rather than costly fit-outs?
- Will your office space (including facilities management, security and lighting/heating) be available for longer hours in the day to accommodate different persona’s working hours?
- Are there other ways to help people work nearer to home (e.g. access to third-party, managed offices)?





Strategic questions and considerations for Operations



Meeting people's expectations

- How will you standardise the work experience and operational expectations when people work in different places and at different hours?
- What assessments will you conduct to find out the right balance of desk space, collaboration space and socialising space?
- How will you manage space/desk/room allocations with a reduced office footprint and avoid overcrowding at unknown points in the future?
- How will you ramp up services when there is – briefly – an increased number of people coming into the office? What IT will you need to support this (e.g. demand-management booking systems)?
- Will you need IT support to be available for longer hours to match when different people are working and may experience issues?
- Will you need certain set requirements (i.e. hours in the day when everyone should be available)?



Preparing for the long term

- Will you have too much real estate after more people decide to work flexibly?
- When will you need to review your building lease contract(s)?
- What importance do you place on sustainability and the environmental footprint of the organisation in relation to office and travel energy and emissions?
- Are there workplace technologies – like AI service bots or intelligent assistants – that could support your people in performing simple tasks?
- How could you repurpose existing office space through community projects (e.g. working with other organisations to share excess space)?



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