

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COVID-19 ERA, AND BEYOND



How our changed world has accelerated the opportunity to revolutionize our work practices

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world, and some of the changes will be with us long after the virus is under control. It's forced different countries, disparate communities, and individuals to work together in new ways to tackle and overcome the threat to our way of life. It's changed the way we approach many of our day-to-day activities, like exercise, eating out, or simply going to the shops. And it's changed the way that professionals work, making the physical workplace irrelevant and catapulting remote collaboration to the fore.

It's been a crisis that has impacted the lives of millions of people all over the world. However, one of the great things about the human race is our ability to adapt, persevere and see opportunities in any environment. We do this by improving and building on what works well, and by changing or discarding what doesn't.

As businesses the world over have been forced to rapidly move their entire workforce to work-from-home environments, one of the most important opportunities is the realization that the modern workplace is not one place after all. In the wake of COVID-19, the chances of the workplace returning to "normal" are slight. Instead, business leaders should accept that the new normal is already here, and the task now is to make it work better for both employees and the business.

"...And it's changed the way that professionals work, making the physical workplace irrelevant and catapulting remote collaboration to the fore."

Lenovo



The destination hasn't changed, just the speed at which we got there

Before the pandemic, remote working was already a growing trend. A 2019 Owl Labs study¹ showed that the majority of U.S. workers were already seeing remote working as advantageous, with 80% of employees wanting to work from home at least some of the time. The top reasons for wanting to work remotely were:

- Better work-life balance
- Increased productivity/better focus
- No commute

49% of remote workers before the pandemic were already working more than one day per week outside of the office—including 30% who worked remotely full-time—and 82% reported they wanted to continue working remotely, or increase the amount they work out of the office.

Employees reported greater job satisfaction, with more than 80% of respondents in each case agreeing that remote working made them feel:

- Happier
- More trusted by their employer
- Better able to manage work/life conflicts
- Less stressed
- That their employer cares about them

The corollary is that 55% of remote workers said they would look for another job if the opportunity to work outside the office was withdrawn.

The benefits are not just for employees. An IWG study² saw 85% of respondents confirm that productivity has increased in their business as a result of greater flexibility and 65% saying a flexible workspace helps them reduce capex/opex, manage risk and consolidate their portfolio. The same report showed that 77% of businesses offering flexible working practices become more successful by enabling them to attract and retain top talent.

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¹<https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019>

²<http://assets.regus.com/pdfs/iwg-workplace-survey/iwg-workplace-survey-2019.pdf>

Technology is now the most crucial member of your team

In contrast to the strong but heavy, intractable foundations of a physical workplace, the new foundations on which organizations are built are its technology and systems.

Can you imagine this crisis before the cloud? Before the internet? The impact would have been unthinkable. Fortunately, cloud connectivity, smart devices, and modern collaboration and productivity tools were already making it possible for employees to do their jobs just as well, if not better, than they would on-site.

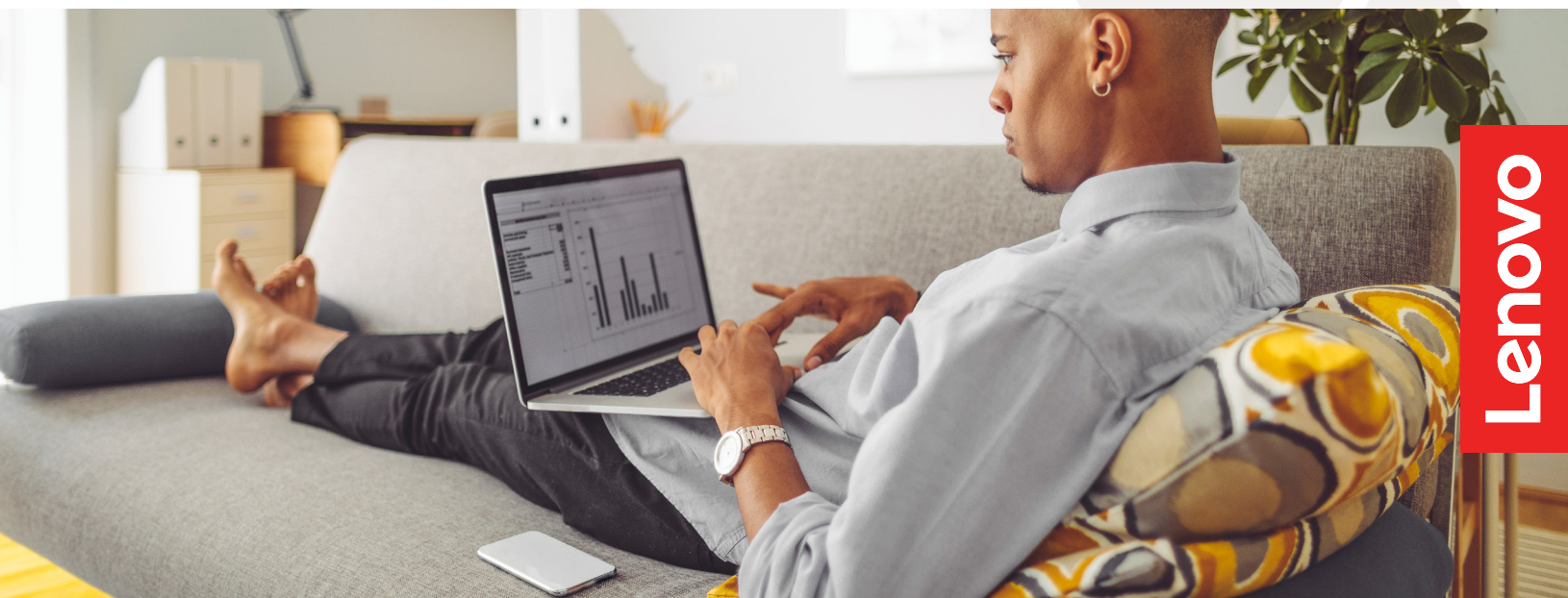
But in the rapid move to working from home, not all businesses are on top of their technology stack.

In a study by Valoir³ released in May 2020, which takes into account the impact of COVID-19, it was noted that majority of remote working employees are using a mixture of paid and free collaboration tools. They are also all spending on average 17 minutes per day managing remote technology issues. I'm sure we all recall the frustration of those moments where inadequate technology made productivity impossible. Unsurprisingly, employees agree, and are willing to vote with their feet, with 42% of respondents to the 2019 Owl Labs study⁴ stating they would quit their jobs over poor workplace technology.

Given that the home is the new workplace, this underlines the importance of successfully supporting teams with the right tools. Fortunately, in this age of digital transformation, remote working practices can be well supported by apps and services designed to help teams overcome physical distances, and to help workers communicate easily and collaborate effectively with each other.

³ <https://www.docdroid.net/vhPmngx/valoir-report-the-real-productivity-impact-of-remote-work-pdf>

⁴ <https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019>



Reach for the remote control

There is no difference in the principle of providing IT services on-site or remotely. The idea is still to empower staff to do the best job possible, and it remains the mantle of the employer to provide their staff with all the tools they need. In the office, there is a higher degree of control over variables such as internet speed and connectivity, data storage and network security. With each employee having their own internet connection, modem and home network, these aspects may be beyond the control of a central IT team. But IT can still regulate the bulk of the employees' technology experience, so it's important to focus on controlling what you can and presenting employees with a familiar and stable technology environment.

Employees reportedly self-selecting an assortment of collaboration tools can cause issues. Having your IT team managing employee experiences on a range of disparate third-party apps and services without adequate vendor support can be both frustrating and time consuming, as is integrating new third-party apps into workflows. In addition, the unsanctioned use of software and services outside of the control of IT is a perennial concern for network and data security. Finally, helping employees to adhere to coherent work processes and procedures is more difficult if everyone is using their own workflows and mix of software.

The answer for IT teams is to give the people what they want and leave employees with no reason to look outside the sanctioned IT environment.

Firstly, staff should still have access to the right hardware—laptops, screens and peripherals—to perform as they would from the office. Access to secure spaces to collaborate and store files centrally is equally critical, just as employees would have on a central office server. Providing a software stack that enables them to perform their core functions, as well as communicate and collaborate effectively, will also stop employees looking around for alternative software and services. Ensuring that the chosen software is reputable and has strong customer and user support is crucial too—so much depends on it. These days, cloud-based apps with enterprise-grade security can enable employees to work exactly as if they were in the office, with the same safeguards and protocols. With everyone using the same apps, services and processes, collaboration is easier, data and critical communications are not lost, and the management burden on IT is lifted.

But, not all software and tools are created equal in this universe of remote working tools.

Forbes, 2020⁵

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/cognitiveworld/2020/03/09/a-deep-dive-into-remote-work-for-our-future-of-work/#5e83753b1843>

Offer stability, familiarity, continuity and see your teams excel

In the Valoir study⁶, which encompasses results post the arrival of COVID-19, job-related concerns (job security/company viability) rated a full ten percentage points higher than the respondents' concerns about either becoming ill, or having a loved one become ill.

In this uncertain atmosphere, punctuated by frequent and unexpected changes, people will be craving familiarity and stability in everything they do, but especially in their work environments. They will need the support of business leaders, especially in the long term, and we will doubtless learn more about how to help people to be productive and efficient while working at a distance from each other.

But professionals have already shown that they are up to the challenge. In the same study, a productivity drop of just 1% was reported across the board for remote workers, compared with working in the office. Given that this takes into account all the extra challenges, like young children, home-schooling and the distractions of home comforts, it could be said that employees have really risen to the challenge. For the business, it's imperative that their IT capability rises up to meet them.

⁶<https://www.docdroid.net/vhPmnxg/valoir-report-the-real-productivity-impact-of-remote-work-pdf>

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empower your teams, visit
lenovooffers.com/ms365

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