

HOW TO PLAN YOUR ORGANIZATION'S NEW FLEXIBLE TECH LANDSCAPE

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As the world learns how to live alongside Covid-19, much of the corporate sector faces a second shift in practices. In a relatively short amount of time, it's moved from being fully office-based to fully remote. Now, after listening to employees and learning from the experience of the last year or so, many businesses are preparing for and adapting to a new model of office/remote/hybrid working.

Technology is at the heart of this shift, and it's going to mean that organizations will once again need to review their current IT portfolios, plans and procedures to ensure they can be adaptable enough to support staff moving between locations — but with the safeguards in place to ensure the company's data remains secure.

In my position as CEO of a software development house, I've seen how lessons from one sector can benefit another. For example, digital strategy has been a big conversation for the education sector over the last couple of years (which I write more about in my forthcoming book, [My Secret #EdTech Diary](#)). Schools have been reviewing and streamlining the growing number of education solutions they operate to form evidence-based, strategic and sustainable plans for the future — so when the world threw them the curveball of the pandemic, they were arguably better placed than previously to adjust to their new circumstances.

Some of the considerations that worked well for schools during these reviews are equally as useful to corporate organizations. It's a matter of researching, strategizing and aligning new solutions so that they can achieve a real impact across the business.

Review existing technology

Auditing a company's technology is a mammoth task, but, done well, it will sweep away lots of redundant legacy tech and associated processes — instead, providing a clean, streamlined base to work from. So, knowing the specifications of IT assets, their location and how often they are used is a great starting point. From here, decide which devices are to be upgraded, updated, repurposed or retired. Work out which solutions, processes and tech-related procedures currently work

well - and which ones do not. Where it's uncertain, ask the question: would anyone notice if it were gone?

Security will need to be the cornerstone of any new technology setup for hybrid working, rather than added as a bolt-on afterward. Data will need to be fully protected regardless of the work location of any employee, so ensuring that security and encryption measures are considered from the start will reinforce their importance as discussions progress.

However, in the new hybrid working landscape, it's not just a matter of providing the technology to get the job done. With any restructure or review of technology, a creative and forward-thinking company will debate how new developments can aid them in additional areas, such as ensuring easy connection, looking after employees' well-being, better visibility and communication (not just across teams but the entire business), saving time, money and more.

On a technical level, IT managers will also think about choosing device-agnostic solutions, making data more accessible by using cloud storage where appropriate and providing flexible tools for employees to use wherever they are.

Get input from everyone

For new technology plans to be successful, there needs to be a broad discussion with input from everyone at every level of the business who uses technology in their day-to-day work. That's right. Staff representatives from every area need to be involved, with barriers of hierarchy removed to give people the agency to contribute their thoughts and experiences.

Managers can't just assume that because the job is getting done that some aspects of the tech currently being used aren't a major headache. If staff can see a better way than, say, using a convoluted process in Windows 7, then let them say so — without repercussions — and be open and receptive to their views and ideas. Greater staff involvement will pay off as it may highlight issues that can be solved quickly, allow employees to feel that their contributions are valued and give them ownership of the changes that inevitably lie ahead.

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Don't skip the training

A critical strand of any organization's technology refresh must be to incorporate time for training. Left to their own devices, virtually no employee will be able to find time to learn how to get the most out of any hardware or software. So training time must be provided by the company to maximize its investment and for staff to achieve familiarity with the technology.

It's no longer enough to simply know what to click on to make things work; the objective for any organization's smart use of technology needs to extend to an investment in its staff, to help them realize the full potential of the tech they use — and to apply it creatively. This way, the business can look to achieve a real impact in areas such as production, communication, logistics, administration and so on.

Of course, training costs money. And just as a benchmark to consider, schools I have worked with on digital strategy found that allocating similar budgets to both the purchase of technology and the provision of professional training was the right balance to be effective. This is useful information for businesses. Seeing those costs laid out on paper can be off-putting, but it's a false economy to skip it. By doing so, you risk reducing both the impact and potential benefits that any new systems can deliver.

Conclusion

By keeping everyone informed, the lines of communication open, reviewing existing technology and making evidence-based decisions on new solutions, business leaders can be confident that they are making the right choices as they form their digital strategies and ensuring that they are investing in scalable tech that will flex, regardless of the twists and turns their new working landscape may take. Because, as we've just learned, the future is never set in stone.

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