

COMPUTACENTER PERSPECTIVES

NO.3 MAR 2021

MAKING HYBRID WORK

There can be no doubt that the future of work is “hybrid”. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, the ‘future of work’ topic is less theory and conjecture, and more the definition of pragmatic and actionable plans for the period ahead.

Several organisations have already declared what their initial stance will be. Some organisations are seeking to reduce their office footprint to realise cost savings, some looking to retain the benefits of remote working with increased flexibility and productivity. There is also what appears to be a minority who are focussed on a wholesale return to former ways of working with plans for the vast majority of their workforce to return to workplaces.

This decision is clearly individual to each organisation, and whilst decisions need to be made imminently and plans invoked, we suggest that it will be in the months and years ahead that we truly understand the new balance that is formed.

This paper gives Computacenter’s practical experience and advice for the future of work, focussing on office environment and users – a hybrid world that needs to cater for a balance of user preference and organisational need.

TOP LEVEL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

There are several key points that many organisations will be considering at the current moment in time.

These include:

- Which people or employee groups are required to return to the workplace and which of those can continue work effectively remotely? What choice or discretion should be afforded to specific user groups or personas?
- When should these decisions be applied? The government has implemented a clear roadmap of target dates for the end of the social restrictions we face, but how should this influence the timing for businesses to amend the current ways of working?
- How should the return to the workplace be managed? What additional rules, procedures and best practices are required in order to make this transition equitable and effective for all users affected?
- How do you learn from what has happened in the past 12 months? There are benefits to be harnessed for the business and the user, and downsides to be managed and mitigated moving forwards. How will you capture and define this?

DETAILED RETURN TO WORK PLANNING

This issue is broad and complex. It is emotive. Whilst people in many instances will be instructed as to what their future working arrangements will be, it is down to individuals to consider how they transition from a way of working that whilst initially uncomfortable, has become their normality.

Organisations, forced to adapt quickly to ensure business continuity, now face considerations about how they instigate a return to something more like “normal” in the face of many unknowns from both a business and government policy perspective.

The future of work is hybrid. It is important for all that the future world of work is:

- **Inclusive:** ensuring the experience of those remote from the office is the same as those within the office
- **Equitable:** ensuring fair opportunities to people regardless of where and how they are working
- **Balanced:** ensuring the balance between productivity and health and wellbeing is sustainable and managed

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Our approach to considering this topic spans four areas.

PEOPLE

How do you identify the most appropriate way of working for different employee groups [personas]?

How do you realise any ways of working benefits from the past 12 months?

What consideration is made to user health and wellbeing in plans for returning to work?

What consideration is made for different demographics of users, many of whom do not have appropriate home working environments for the current situation to be sustainable in the long term?

How do you establish a ways of working "charter" for a future operating mode that is hybrid - recognising the need for the future hybrid workplace to be "inclusive"?

TECHNOLOGY

How do you modernise your technology footprint to cater for remote/hybrid working as a norm - e.g. VPN connectivity and desktop management solutions?

How should networking and connectivity within the office be provided, to maximise flexibility and agility for a variety of use cases?

How can technology support business drivers to improve efficiency and reduce cost - such as through automation?

How can emerging technology transform ways of working - such as rich collaboration technologies or augmented/virtual reality solutions?

IT SERVICE AND SUPPORT

How do you provide effective support to users, whether they are in the office or at home?

How can modern technology opportunities such as cloud management simplify technology provisioning and support across a distributed environment?

How and where should user support be provided in the future? In the office? At home? In the community?

What is the scope or demarcation of support services to users working at home or other locations?

WORKSPACES

How do you calculate the amount of office space required for future ways of working?

How does office space evolve to support the different needs and requirements of the future hybrid workforce?

How does your office location strategy impact or support access to talent and skills?

How do you leverage technology and capabilities to ensure that future workspaces are safe, hygienic and inclusive - providing a positive working experience?

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10 CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING FOR HYBRID WAYS OF WORKING

To whatever extent desired or dictated by each organisation, the second half of 2021 is likely to see significant numbers of people return to a traditional office environment. Here we aim to provide practical guidance on key considerations to be explored to ensure that activity is a success:

TOPIC 1: OPTIMISE YOUR BUILDING SPACE (WORKSPACES)

CONSIDERATION

Changes in building occupancy and usage in the aftermath of the pandemic looks to be the most significant theme emerging.

For many organisations the office will cease to be “where you go to work” but rather will become an environment where people meet to collaborate and work together.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Consider the number, shape and style of meeting rooms/spaces within your office.
- How can your space be reimagined for a more collaborative nature of work rather than desk-based working?
- Is your core IT infrastructure enabled for collaboration – such as WiFi connectivity, digital screens and collaboration platforms that includes remote recipients?

TOPIC 2: REDEFINE DESK SPACE (WORKSPACES/TECHNOLOGY)

CONSIDERATION

As hot desking becoming the de-facto standard across most organisations, there will be a much greater consideration and contention on office-based desk space

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Ensure the appropriate capacity and placement of desk space within your office space, whilst in the short term adhering to any lingering social distancing rules or best practice
- Ensure that desk space is cleared of any current equipment (screens, peripherals, Thin client terminals, phone handsets) and potentially recycled as this equipment may no longer be required in the modern ways of working
- Consider implementing hot desk booking solutions to manage occupancy density
- Consider how to manage enhanced hygiene requirements within the office space? Providing access to cleaning products to people, or enhancement of wider cleaning regimes

TOPIC 3: ENABLE PERVASIVE AND PERFORMANT CONNECTIVITY (TECHNOLOGY/WORKSPACES)

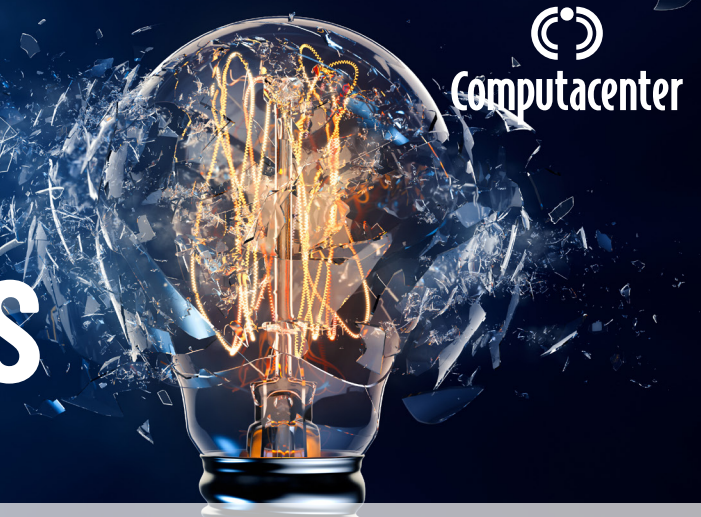
CONSIDERATION

Many users are now equipped with portable devices [e.g. laptops] displacing traditional desktop hardware. This will move the primary network to be the Corporate Wireless

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Ensure that your wireless network has the capacity and performance to meet the anticipated demands of your users
- Ensure that your outbound network connectivity is reviewed and scaled for any increased usage of cloud-based services [e.g. collaboration tools such as Teams or Zoom] that have been implemented in the past 12 months
- Ensure that supporting services such as DHCP are scaled to cater for additional usage on supporting networks

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TOPIC 4: OPTIMISE CORE INFRASTRUCTURE PLATFORMS (TECHNOLOGY)

CONSIDERATION

During the period that offices have been vacant or semi-vacant, many devices will have been unused or maybe even withdrawn, and this should be handled with care to maximise security and performance of core platforms

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Ensure that any expired devices are deleted from the corporate directory and management systems
- Ensure that any user accounts from people leaving the business are disabled and removed according to policy, to mitigate security risks
- Ensure that access control and ID badges are enabled for people returning to office

TOPIC 5: MODERNISE IT FOR SECURE REMOTE WORK (TECHNOLOGY/SERVICE AND SUPPORT)

CONSIDERATION

The shift to hybrid working may mean that some traditional IT approaches such as VPN remote connectivity or on premises systems management are ineffective for current ways of working

Furthermore, the move to remote working introduces significant cyber security threats and concerns from both a technology and user behaviour perspective

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Consider the security management approach and whether traditional VPN security is required for remote users or whether alternative or additional approaches can be employed to enhance security posture, usability and performance
- Consider a user awareness and training regime to mitigate vulnerability to security threats such as phishing
- Evaluate the transition towards cloud-based systems management (i.e. Modern Management) and SaaS applications to alleviate the dependence upon on premises infrastructure and network traffic

TOPIC 6: EMPOWER THE “NOMADIC” USER (PEOPLE/TECHNOLOGY)

CONSIDERATION

People may require much more flexibility in where they work in the future, either due to company policy, or as risk mitigation for any future business risks or issues

The “nomadic” user needs to be self-sufficient

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Provide defined hardware “bundles” to support working wherever they need to and to mitigate hygiene concerns of shared peripherals
- Consider amending policies and procedures (including IT support services – see point 9) to grant additional flexibility for remote working for some types of users

TOPIC 7: ENSURE COLLABORATION IS INCLUSIVE (TECHNOLOGY/WORKSPACES)

CONSIDERATION

Rich collaboration has enabled everybody throughout the pandemic but has been simplified as everybody is working to a common way of working. As we enter hybrid work, collaboration in the future needs to be inclusive for all

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Ensure that meeting spaces are set up and equipped with appropriate technology and integration to connect to disparate systems
- Ensure that both meeting rooms and individuals are equipped with appropriate equipment to enable meetings to be as collaborative as possible
- Define the principles and guidance (e.g. a working charter or best practice framework) to support hybrid ways of working – for example specific instructions about how and when workshop/creation activities are performed to maximise participation and output

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TOPIC 8: RAISE DIGITAL LITERACY AND TECHNICAL CONFIDENCE (PEOPLE/SERVICE AND SUPPORT)

CONSIDERATION

Technology is a key enabler of hybrid work. Ensuring people are aware of, and have basic usage skills in core platforms is key to engagement and collaboration in the future

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Support users through training, e-learning and other activities to ensure base competency of key collaboration and productivity tools
- Instigate an awareness and training programme to maximise awareness of security threats, more prominent in hybrid ways of working
- Ensure that service and support capabilities are available via multiple channels to cater for individual preference and needs of consumption

TOPIC 9: ASSESS SCOPE OF USER SUPPORT (PEOPLE/SERVICE AND SUPPORT)

CONSIDERATION

Users, particularly remote users may be faced with additional technology challenges caused by remote working

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Consider how you will support users with issues caused, for example, by home WiFi in order to keep them productive and performant
- How and where will you seek to provide support to users? Will you support them at their home, or will you expect them to visit offices where direct interventions are required?
- What support will you provide for users working at home? Will any subsidy or benefits be offered for equipment provision etc.?

TOPIC 10: FOCUS ON PEOPLE (PEOPLE)

CONSIDERATION

The return to work for some will be greeted with joy and excitement, for others it will be met with fear and uncertainty

Retain your focus on people and ensure the future working environment feels safe, inclusive and comfortable for all users

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

- Establish or create an employee wellbeing initiative as a cross business initiative to ensure that people understand and can access required support
- Establish mechanisms to take regular feedback from users (office based and remote) on how they are feeling
- Ensure that the hybrid workforce does not become a 2-tier society of those in the office and those remote, and that collaboration, engagement, reward and recognition is balanced for all

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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

There are many challenges, logistical and otherwise in affecting a safe and secure return to the office. For many people the push towards the office, fuelled by ineffective or unsustainable home working situations, will be as strong as the pull of organisations seeking to rebuild collaboration and culture within their business.

There is no set blueprint for when and how this will happen. As much as you can theorise on percentages of the workforce, timing and motives for the return to offices, the reality is that this will play out over time, and in the immediate term flexibility and consideration of complex circumstances [individual and organisational] is key.

In the mid-term we will arrive at this “new normal” of which we so frequently speak and understand any lasting legacy of the past 12 months ways of working and what is really needed from a technology and IT service perspective to continue to support and empower the workforce into the future.

GETTING STARTED

Make progress quickly with one of these initial services that can help resolve the questions and considerations posed above.

- Return to Work Advisory Service
- Wireless Network Assessment and Implementation
- Meeting Spaces & Collaboration Assessment Service
- Remote and Mobile Worker Technology Bundles
- Workplace Security Review

NEXT STEPS

We offer a range of other services across the key pillars of People, Technology, Service and Workspaces. If you require any further details or further support, please contact your Computacenter Account Manager, email enquiries@computacenter.com or call **01707 631000**