

HOME OFFICES

As we all quickly shifted to working remotely, organizations suddenly became at least partially responsible for the performance and security of dozens of individual home networks.

- How does working from home put your corporate reputation at stake?
- What should you consider from technology, HR, and financial perspectives?
- What should each person's IT setup look like?

DOCUMENT COLLABORATION

While many employees had been slow to adopt digital document collaboration, necessity has pushed us into what is often a motley set of tools that are not aligned with best practices.

- What are the practical and emotional benefits of effective collaboration?
- What are the risks of not having one defined solution?
- How can you promote company-wide adoption of your chosen platform?

VIDEO FATIGUE

Video conferencing is a useful alternative to in-person meetings, but an excess of Zoom meetings can lead to exhaustion and disengagement even with more extroverted employees.

- How has the nature of employee engagement changed?
- What new challenges does video conferencing introduce?
- What concrete guidelines does your leadership need to consider?

EMPLOYEE MIGRATION

With the pandemic cutting ties to our physical offices, employees are reevaluating where they live, and employers are reevaluating the need for local talent.

- What opportunities does an employee migration present to employers?
- What risks should you consider (and mitigate) at the HR and IT levels?
- How can you best support a permanently dispersed team?



HOME OFFICES

WHY IS THIS A TREND?

As we all know, the spread of COVID-19 sent most of us home this March. According to the Owl Labs 2018 Global State of Remote Work report, only 16% of companies worldwide had been fully remote prior to the pandemic. This means that a full 84% of us were not accustomed to having our entire teams working from home at all times.

Suddenly, organizations went from maintaining a carefully designed, secured, and managed office network to having each individual employee work from whatever a “home office” looked like for that person—be it a private room already set up with a full desk, comfortable chair, and company-owned equipment, or a seat on a shared couch with an aging personal laptop on unsecured WiFi.

This has added layers of complexity from a technology management perspective, as well as a host of risks from IT, HR, and financial perspectives.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Even if your organization had the technology infrastructure to stay functional despite the rapid shift to working from home, such a significant change has long-term implications as far as:

- **Security.** Since the start of the pandemic, cyberattacks have quadrupled and phishing scams have increased by 667%. Add to this BitSight’s finding that 45% of home networks already have malware present, and it’s clear that our risk of a security breach has skyrocketed.
- **Productivity.** Many of us will lose some level of productivity while working from home. Technology limitations, lack of equipment, distractions at home, and increased stress can all contribute to a decrease in output that can impact both morale and your ability to serve your clients.
- **Engagement.** It is, of course, much easier to feel emotionally disconnected from an organization when you are physically disconnected. This disengagement can be exacerbated by gaps in a home office setup, like not having a webcam or having collaboration tools that only part of the company has adopted.
- **Liability.** There’s also legal liability to consider. Decisions on whether to pay for technology upgrades at their home, to ask employees to occasionally work from the office, or to institute new remote ‘productivity trackers’ (i.e. surveillance) all warrant deep consideration from HR and legal perspectives in advance.



HOME OFFICES

- Cost. We are, of course, facing a recession as well; few of us have unlimited funds to throw at each employee's home office, meaning we often must prioritize our purchases based on what sort of return we'll get on our investment.

And here's the kicker: every single one of these elements has the potential to negatively or positively influence your corporate reputation. How well are you serving your clients? Minding the physical and mental safety of your employees? Staying financially solvent?

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Start by pulling your leadership together to brainstorm what exactly each employee needs to be successful from home. (If you have already done this, plan to do it again as the situation evolves.)

In addition to technology, your list should include security controls to bolster their new network, routines to maintain personal connection, and policies to guide safe behavior and limit your legal exposure.

While every organization has unique needs, here's a sample setup that will work for many:

- Company-owned laptops with cloud applications, or a virtual desktop solution
- Docking stations with a second monitor, wireless keyboard and mouse, and comfortable chair
- Advanced endpoint protection on all machines accessing corporate data (in addition to centralized patching and anti-virus, plus ongoing awareness training)
- Guidance on securing home routers and segregating connected devices
- Home bandwidth requirements, and stipends to upgrade if needed
- Consistent, mandatory department meetings plus optional company-wide virtual events
- Written guidelines for equipment use, data privacy, and how to safely visit the office

Which of these does your organization lack today? Which are most critical to keeping your team productive and your data secure?

On the equipment side, give special consideration to investing in peripherals that will have a material impact on productivity: ergonomic chairs can provide a 17.7% boost, additional monitors offer up to a 35% increase, and mice are twice as fast as a laptop trackpad.

If you need help assessing your team's home office setup, or procuring any additional hardware or software to enhance their experience, let us know—we can help!



DOCUMENT COLLABORATION

WHY IS THIS A TREND?

Even late adopters have had to embrace document collaboration over the past several months.

For years the technology to securely share and coauthor documents in real time has been available to our businesses—sometimes as unused applications bundled into subscriptions we already pay for. But in many cases, adoption of these tools has been haphazard; one department will use it while others don't, one executive will insist on printing hard copies, or a handful of employees want to use the package but don't know how.

Now, with many 'old school' methods off the table, and with most of us becoming more open to new ways of working out of sheer necessity, we're seeing a newfound interest in fully implementing and embracing these tools company-wide.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The ability to digitally collaborate on a document has quickly transitioned from a nice-to-have to a must-have for many of us. This means that you can either provide your team with a solution, or allow them to find their own.

Our younger employees in particular are often so comfortable with products like OneDrive and Google Docs that they will begin using them reflexively and with little thought to any unintended consequences like security vulnerabilities and data sprawl.

Rather than letting your team dictate your organization's technology strategy, we need to identify a clear solution that will provide the kind of benefits our teams are craving:

- Productivity and efficiency. This point is fairly straightforward. If you could choose between passing multiple file versions back and forth to your colleagues over email, or jumping into the same document at the same time, which is more efficient (and less maddeningly convoluted)?
- Employee engagement. Being able to co-author a document in real time with your team offers a level of closeness that is second only to an in-person roundtable. Any opportunity to bring our team "together" is one we should take advantage of.
- Flexibility and lower stress. This goes for both internal and external parties. Rather than having to follow a convoluted review sequence on a document, a shared link can be available to all stakeholders for their review and contribution whenever it is convenient for them.

In most cases all of this can come at a highly reasonable cost to boot.



DOCUMENT COLLABORATION

OUR RECOMMENDATION

As is the case with any software, the success of the platform is contingent on a proper technical implementation, plus a thoughtful campaign to secure company-wide adoption.

To this end, we recommend engaging with an outside consultant to take the following steps:

- Evaluate what you have today. Do you already have SharePoint and OneDrive built into your Office 365 subscription? Has a portion of your team already started a successful trial of Google Docs? Is half the team using NetDocs and the other half using a mix of Dropbox and email?
- Select one solution. Identify which package has the features and security controls you need and a price point you can stomach. Developing a comparative matrix tends to work well here.
- Develop “rules of the road,” and schedule training. Walk your team through how the technology works, and how they are to use it in the context of your culture and workflow. This can include file naming conventions, file sharing guidelines, and policies on moving data outside of the shared platform.
- Coordinate your roll-out. Work with your IT team to plan the implementation. Having employees install their own packages is not a good idea even for small organizations (for many of the same reasons outlined above).
- Remove competing packages. Uninstall any conflicting software packages so that your team doesn't fall back into old habits.

Our team is well-versed in these software selection and adoption projects, and can help you with any and all of the above. We also have our own tool, SafeShare, that might be a good fit for some organizations due to its enhanced security and integration with file servers.

If you'd like to discuss further, just let us know.



VIDEO FATIGUE

WHY IS THIS A TREND?

Before the pandemic, the number of daily Zoom users peaked at 10 million. That number has since exploded to over 300 million—and Zoom’s market value now surpasses the top seven airlines combined at nearly \$50 billion.

Microsoft reports a 1,000% increase in Teams video calls in March, and on March 31 specifically the platform recorded 2.7 billion meeting minutes, up from 560 million just two and a half weeks prior.

It’s no big surprise that organizations have leaned into video conferencing during quarantine. But what many people have been surprised to see is the sheer volume of time we are spending seated in front of our computers, staring at ourselves and dozens of other tiny boxes, yearning for a few minutes of respite between leaving one on-camera session and joining the next.

Now, the question has become how we can mitigate this digital fatigue without abandoning the closest approximation to face-to-face interaction we have.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Businesses have been struggling with employee engagement for years. A 2019 Gallup study found that only 35% of American workers are engaged with their jobs, 52% are “just showing up,” and 17% are actively disengaged.

When you then introduce the fact that many organizations have lost core components of their corporate culture with the shift to remote work—we miss our Friday breakfasts in the office!—and the dangers of low productivity and even lower morale are acute. An Axios report from May found:

- 55% of remote workers feel less connected
- 46% feel more stressed
- 47% are working more hours, blurring any sense of work/life balance

We hoped that video conferencing would help solve these challenge of connectivity, but we’ve now found that it brings its own issues to the table. Between very subtle delays in communication, staring at your own face, having dozens of different environments to take in, and seeing other participants so “up close” that it begins to trigger fight-or-flight response, video conferencing confuses our brains and leaves us drained.

This means that simply swapping in-person interactions with video conferencing will not work. And even if it did, our “normal” baseline for employee engagement is less than stellar. In short, it’s high time to rethink our strategy.



VIDEO FATIGUE

OUR RECOMMENDATION

It can be a challenge to figure out the right balance when it comes to video conferencing; in a classic Goldilocks scenario, it's easy to negatively impact engagement by having too much, or too little digital face time.

Some best practices to consider are:

- Share tips to reduce distractions. A few people in your organization might have heard of tips like hiding your own camera view, having a plain background in the camera view, and scheduling breaks between meetings. Make sure the rest of your team can take advantage of these suggestions, too.
- Remind your leadership to consider the individual. Most teams are a collection of different personality types; some may welcome impromptu video calls, and others may find them invasive to the point where the call will not be productive. Take the time to learn these preferences and maximize your effectiveness.
- Set company-wide guidelines for when video is necessary, and when it isn't. Not every meeting needs to be a video conference with mandatory camera use. One-on-one check-ins probably should be, for the sake of additional body language cues. But perhaps your regular department huddles can be over the phone so your team can be up and moving around.
- Experiment and collect feedback. Remember that an all-virtual team is new territory for 84% of organizations; we aren't likely to get everything right the first time. Be willing to try new ways to engage with your teammates, collect feedback on effectiveness, and adapt your approach accordingly. If nothing else, employees will clearly see the effort you're making to connect in a meaningful way.
- Step away from the machine! Whether it's because of a barrage of video calls, or simply the nature of your day-to-day activities, it's so important to get up, walk around, and give our eyes a break from screens throughout the day. Encourage your team to do so!

Also be aware that conferencing platforms are fully aware of how video fatigue is affecting us, and that they are taking their own steps to combat the issue. Teams, for example, will be releasing a new feature called "Together" that eliminates individual boxes and puts your teammates in the same virtual space, theater-style.

Experiment with these new features too, and let us know how we can help!



EMPLOYEE MIGRATION

WHY IS THIS A TREND?

We are all clearly able to work from home. We've been doing it for six months, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. That being the case, what is tying us to where we're currently living?

For 20% of American adults, the answer is: nothing. Pew Research Center found that one-in-five adults have either relocated due to the pandemic, or know someone who has. These moves happened for four main reasons: colleges closing, not being able to afford housing, wanting (or needing) to be with family, or perceiving an area to be unsafe.

Compared to last year, twice as many people in the U.S. relocated this spring.

All told, the workforce is experiencing a major physical upheaval, which in turn is forcing businesses to decide how they want to handle any moves with their current employees, and whether or not it makes sense to continue putting geographic restrictions on new hires.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Expanding your organization's geographic footprint (either by choice, or in response to an employee relocating) comes with some challenges to navigate, but also with compelling opportunities.

- **Taxes and healthcare.** Each state comes with its own rules and regulations for taxes and healthcare that your Human Resources and Accounting teams will need to parse through.
- **Salary adjustments.** Several big-name companies like Facebook, Oracle, Stripe have made it clear that if employees relocate, their salary will be adjusted down to reflect lower cost of living in different areas. You'll need to decide whether to implement a policy like this.
- **Legal liability.** Decisions on matters like salary adjustments in particular can be dicey from a legal perspective; if an employee has a signed offer letter guaranteeing certain pay, can you go back on that agreement? It will be important to consult with legal counsel in addition to working with your HR team.
- **A wider talent pool.** When you aren't restricted by location, your organization has the chance to bring aboard the absolute best talent—from anywhere. This is especially appealing in hyper-competitive metropolitan areas like Washington, DC. Not only that, but pulling in employees from areas with a lower cost of living also allows you to bring on highly skilled professionals at a price point that is more feasible during a recession.



EMPLOYEE MIGRATION

- Conversely, a wider recruiting pool. The same way you can hire employees from anywhere, many of your employees can be hired from anywhere. This amplifies any issues you may have with engagement, as finding a new career opportunity may be easier in many cases.

Add to this the ubiquitous challenge of wrapping employees into your corporate culture without relying on any in-person interactions. We've already been forced to address this issue in the short term, and will need to make sure we have a sustainable long-term strategy in place if any portion of our team will remain remote on a permanent basis.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

If you intend to embrace a dispersed workforce where at least part of your team will be working exclusively from home on a permanent basis, consider the following sooner rather than later:

- How you will adjust your onboarding process for remote employees
- How to provide equivalent technology functionality for all employees
- How to create equivalent connections to your corporate culture and values
- How you may need to adapt management styles to support all teammates equally
- How to guarantee career advancement that does not unintentionally favor local employees
- Whether you will have specific technology requirements (e.g. minimum bandwidth, private space to work) for remote employees
- How you'll adjust your employee separation procedures for remote employees

We also suggest making it known to your current team whether they will be required to disclose their moves to you (and how far in advance), as well as your stance on any salary adjustments related to their move.

Your answers to these questions will require collaboration on the part of your IT team, HR team, and company leadership. We are happy to facilitate this discussion with your team if it would be of value!