

SUCCEEDING WITH DIGITAL COLLABORATION

THE POSTPANDEMIC ORGANIZATION



The COVID-19 pandemic rapidly forced millions of people in organizations around the world into new patterns of working. Although many organizations seemed to have managed the rapid transition to digital and remote work reasonably well short-term considering the circumstances, the new situation imposes substantial long-term challenges for business executives to maintain business continuity and productivity. Amid the second pandemic wave with surged infection rates followed by a new wave of restrictions, organizations are faced with an accentuated need to consider and take proper action for how to successfully adapt to the new normal.

The new hybrid way-of-work

The need to successfully manage digital collaboration has for long been high on the agenda for business executives and entrepreneurs. In today's global business environment where employees and business partners are working together across geographical boundaries, digital collaboration is often

a necessity. The pandemic merely accelerated an already existing trend and although certain teams and entire industries are used to working virtually together, and are infrastructurally equipped for it, to move an entire organization to the virtual domain is an entirely new challenge.

While organizations are still managing to function with the work-from-home policy and even report some productivity gains, significant challenges exist to make the remote work model feasible long term. For example, previously co-located teams need to migrate their way-of-working and managers need to change their style to adapt to not meeting their employees face-to-face with the same frequency. Importantly, virtual interactions are far from equivalent to physical meetings and not suitable for all interactions. In contrast to the challenges, the possibility of not having a completely co-located workforce can come with benefits such as reduced real-estate cost, broader accessibility to talent and potential for individual productivity gains and flexibility.

As the world is trying to adapt to some sort of new normal, while controlling the spread of the virus, many companies have transitioned into a hybrid model of work, combining the aspects of co-location and remote. The hybrid model is believed by many to become the new standard for companies, outlasting the pandemic.

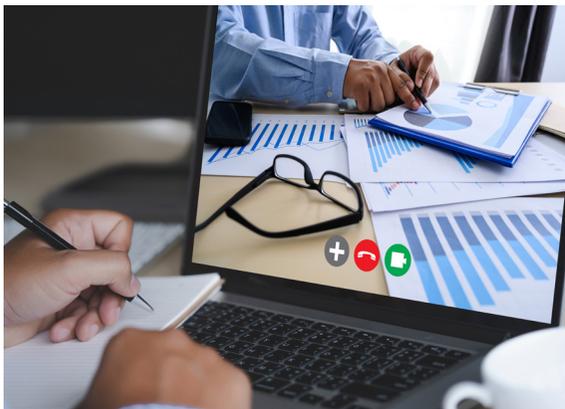
One size does not fit all

It is not the first-time companies are making transitions to a remote workforce. An example is US internet media company Reddit, who in contrast to the current situation did prepare employees for working from home. The company did however later return to a co-located setup. So, what went wrong? The CEO claimed that the problem was not productivity of individuals or teams. The problem was on an overall-company level. Larger initiatives and emergencies were not handled as efficiently over virtual meetings, emails, and chats. There are more examples of companies attempting and ultimately failing in the migration, but also many success stories. What is becoming apparent is that ensuring effective digital collaboration is a prerequisite to every model. The exact model to use ultimately depends on the specific organization, the teams, individuals and how they interact. Each organization needs to find a point on the scale between the two extremes that balances the pros and cons.



TRIATHLON CASE STUDIES

With the pandemic driving and accelerating the need for a virtual model of work, organizations are faced with the challenge of migrating from physical to digital while maintaining efficiency. To the right, two concrete practical cases are presented which highlight some of the success factors in these endeavors.



TURN VISUAL PLANNING DIGITAL

On-site physical team meetings are often a core element in projects utilizing visual management and Scrum. As the pandemic hit, such physical meetings were suddenly unfeasible, requiring a digital structure and way of working for previously co-located teams.

Triathlon has supported clients in making a swift digital transition of Scrum boards and visual plans. Three main success factors were identified to secure a successful migration to the digital way-of-working:

- **Leverage existing way of working**
Migrate project methodology as close to its physical correspondence as possible. In this case, visual plans were migrated with the same appearance and structure as their physical correspondence, and the meeting agendas kept the same. A digital tool is only efficient if people know why, and how to use it.
- **Select the right tools and use them properly**
Today there are a multitude of advanced digital collaboration tools available. It is important to prioritize user friendliness and low barriers to adoption to ensure proper utilization - sophisticated tools do not directly translate to increased productivity. In the visual planning context, MS Office tools were the natural choice.
- **Enable informal discussions**
Without the normal office interaction, alignment and information flow is affected. To avoid confusion and to ensure a common view of the project status, project leaders need to closely monitor the progress and create the correct circumstances to open alternative communication channels between team members.

SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL WORKSHOPS

In a recent assignment, one of the objectives was to understand and define the client's global functions. This required close contact with stakeholders from all over the globe. Since the participants could not travel, a virtual collaboration was required.

Triathlon successfully planned and executed digital workshops to achieve the objective, three main success factors were identified to ensure a successful outcome:

- **Rigorously plan for engagement**
It goes without saying that solid preparation is key to ensure successful outcomes. With shorter attention windows and without being able to interact with the spontaneity of physical collaboration, preparation is even more important. Physical tools need to be replaced with a solid game plan and tools to ensure attention and successful outcome.
- **Use technology to drive innovative thinking**
A simple thing like a whiteboard or having a lively discussion together in a conference room, does not have a simple solution in the digital domain. Real effort must be invested to both find, prepare, and utilize user-friendly digital tools for disruptive thinking. Examples can be virtual polls or idea-boards.
- **The increased importance of the moderator**
In a virtual meeting, parallel discussions and subtle reactions are lost. The moderator needs to take an even more important role to engage, ensure understanding, re-direct questions, and secure productive discussions. Further, since it may be difficult to maintain energy levels during longer virtual sessions, allow for short breaks.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Based on experience from implementing numerous change programs enabling a transition into efficient digital collaboration, five key considerations for organizations to address are identified.

1 Let the need define the digital tool

To ensure that employees can collaborate digitally several prerequisites are required. The most important being that digital tools serve a clear purpose and support a process the employees understand. Just adding new tools will not produce productivity gains or easier collaboration, rather the other way around. Other key prerequisites include a supporting IT-infrastructure, clear roles and responsibilities and processes. Companies must be both technically and organizationally equipped to adopt new tools successfully.

2 Allocate and follow up efficiently

Maintaining an understanding of what people are working on, and why, is increasingly complex in the virtual setting. To secure alignment the structure and information stored in digital mediums needs to increase so that employees have transparency in tasks, deadlines and what the overarching target is. Agile and software inspired methodologies such as OKR (Objective Key Result) and Scrum are great examples of when this transparency can be achieved in the digital format.

3 Facilitate knowledge sharing and innovation

Innovative thoughts and ideas are rarely born in isolation and requires different perspectives and personalities. If employees are not meeting in informal or dedicated settings for this purpose, important insights can easily be lost. Companies must invest time in creating the circumstances

to cultivate new ideas and innovation, for example through dedicated workshops or, if possible, physical kick-offs.

4 Maintain continuity

Teams and individuals naturally develop norms and habits such as working hours, common coffee breaks, and lunches. As the private life and working life mixes together these norms are disrupted. The effect is different depending on individuals, some will thrive, and some will not. It is important

to provide employees with guidance in how to approach the new reality, in terms of boundaries and expected online-hours as well as to regularly check in on their well-being.

5 Continue to evaluate and improve long term strategies for digital collaboration

In the transition to the new model of work, it is crucial that the performance of digital collaboration is being monitored and improved where possible. Key metrics need to be defined and evaluated continuously. This relates not only to individual productivity but to IT infrastructure and IT security, competence development activities and continuous learning for employees. Finally, allow for new ideas for your company to continue to reach your customers and secure future business growth.

5 KEY CONSIDERATIONS

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- ▶ Allocate and follow up efficiently
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- ▶ Maintain continuity
- ▶ Continue to evaluate and improve long term strategies for digital collaboration



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