

THE CORONAVIRUS IS PUTTING REMOTE WORK TO THE TEST. IS YOUR ORGANIZATION PREPARED?



Remote work is nothing new. Nearly [two-thirds of American workers](#) telecommute at least occasionally and the numbers continue to rise. But while a gradual shift to working from home is the norm, the current situation with the coronavirus is definitely not business as usual.

Because of COVID-19, organizations across industries, locations, and size are asking their employees to stay out of the office. Amazon, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft have all [told their workers to stay home](#). For both workers and their companies, this unexpected paradigm has significant consequences. More people telecommuting translates to much higher demand for more and different IT services. More tickets are coming in requesting new hardware, access to systems, and forgotten passwords. IT staff, who are often also working from home without their usual resources, must navigate this additional strain on their time, resources, and systems.

What does that look like? A comprehensive approach that incorporates tools, technology, culture, and strategic service management.

Tools and technology: How to outfit the new home office

With a fully remote team, leaders must replace both the formal and casual interactions that typically take place at the office. That means setting up and/or codifying the use of channels for communication, collaboration, and conferencing. These may include Slack, MS Teams, or Skype for Business; the important thing is to choose a tool and stick with it so everyone knows where to go to

find their people.

Multiple types of available communication help too. Think about the types of conversations that happen at the office. There are small, one-on-one chats, whose digital equivalent is instant messaging (IM). There are informal group conversations that occur in the break room or at someone's desk; for those, look to group chats or meeting spaces. Whiteboarding sessions can be replaced by collaboration tools. Official meetings require a more robust solution that should ideally include video and recording capabilities, like Zoom or WebEx.

Security is another important consideration for a successful remote workforce. You need to create a secure digital workplace, which may include everything from a VPN environment to BYOD policies to secure online spaces for document sharing and collaboration.

Finally, new remote employees often require hardware to work effectively from home. Depending on the type of work, team members may need docking stations, monitors, keyboards, and/or standing desks. That means organizations must account not only for how to get the right hardware to the right place, but how to track and manage it moving forward.

Company culture: How to keep employees connected and productive

Tools and technology, of course, are only half the battle when it comes to creating a positive remote working environment. The company culture that differentiates your organization at the office should carry over into the new digital landscape. Achieving this goal starts at the top. Ensure that executives are fully engaged in the designated digital channels. They should demonstrate the desired usage and tone of each tool; set healthy expectations around working hours, taking breaks, and work-life balance; and show empathy and compassion during what can be a tricky transition.

Video is your friend here, both live and recorded. Video conferencing helps employees feel connected and reduces isolation. It also encourages workers to dress for "real work" and bring their best selves to their new work environment. From prerecorded tutorials to team meetings to one-on-one discussions, video brings your office community into your employees' homes.

With a fully remote workforce, you may also need to add or reconsider company policies. What do sick days look like? Can you offer reimbursement for internet and/or mobile data? What are the rules around which tools to use for what, when? Decide on your new policies quickly and communicate them clearly to keep everyone on the same page and reassure employees that you continue to have their best interest in mind.

Service management in the digital workplace: How to handle the influx of requests

Significant change to your employees' working environment will translate to an increase in service request volume. People will have questions, and in a period of uncertainty and transition, they need to have a positive experience finding answers. That requires a service management solution that enables users to easily find answers themselves and, when necessary, work with agents efficiently and effectively.

What does that look like in practice?

- An intuitive user interface that makes it easy for both users and IT staff to get what they need and maintain productivity
- Robust knowledge management that helps users help themselves – self service that makes employees' lives easier, not more frustrating
- Intelligent capabilities like intelligent swarming and ChatOps to streamline and accelerate solutions to complex incidents
- Virtual assistants via chatbots to address lower-level employee questions and requests, enabling quick resolution and freeing up IT resources for more value-added work
- Cognitive automation capabilities to optimize agent work and maintain employee satisfaction

Different employees will need different levels of support during this type of transition. With a strong service management backbone, you can focus on culture, communication, and collaboration – not resetting passwords and getting new hardware up and running.

What's next? Moving forward in a work-from-home world

While we don't know the implications of the coronavirus and its effects on the workplace, we do know that remote working isn't going away. Whether your organization sends everyone back to the office post-coronavirus or sticks with a partial or complete work-from-home workforce, IT must have tools in place to support the modern digital workplace.

BMC Helix Digital Workplace delivers exactly that. With a fully responsive design, employees enjoy a consumer-like experience that works on any device, anywhere, any time. Intelligent omni-channel experiences connect to key remote work technologies like Slack and Skype, allowing workers to access services on the tools of their choice. A single pane of glass consolidates portals and catalogs to give employees a true one-stop-shop that streamlines service management for users and IT staff alike. And easy, drag-and-drop service creation means that users can focus more on getting work done and less on requesting services.

In addition, BMC Helix Digital Workplace incorporates cognitive capabilities that offer faster, more accurate service. The BMC Helix Chatbot allows organizations to quickly and easily embed cognitive capabilities into existing services to boost responsiveness and automate services – and it can be trained and set up in just a few clicks.

Work is changing at a never-before-seen pace, punctuated by events like the coronavirus. Every organization's first priority should be keeping its employees safe and healthy. After that, it's up to business and IT leaders to put solutions in place that keep creativity, productivity, innovation and communication flowing, no matter where their employees spend their days.