



Navigating the Long-Term Workforce Productivity Impact of COVID-19

The 451 Take

The outbreak and subsequent spread of COVID-19 shocked the business landscape – both broadly, across products, services and operations, and narrowly by impacting the experience and productivity of many organizations’ employees. In our 451 Research Voice of the Enterprise: Digital Pulse, Coronavirus Flash Survey from March 2020, we found that 78% of organizations experienced a negative operational impact following the outbreak of the virus.

In our follow-up Coronavirus Flash Survey in June, 41% of organizations said they had experienced increased strain on their IT resources, and 26% had been forced to halt the rollout of new products or services. In that same survey, 52% of respondents were delaying or reducing hiring in response to the pandemic, while 28% believed they were experiencing a drop in employee productivity. This number was 40% back in March, which could suggest workers are beginning to adapt to the new normal.

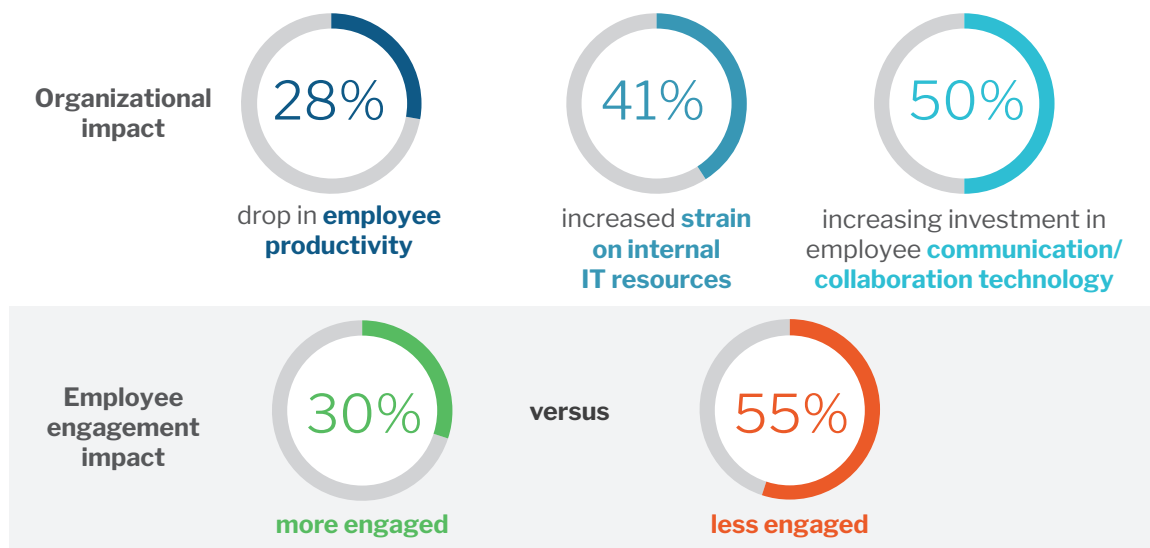
Our data indicates that the impact of COVID-19 will be prolonged. From the June flash survey, 67% of respondents expect expanded remote-work policies to remain in place long term or permanently, and 42% expect travel limitations to continue in the same way. In our Voice of the Enterprise: Workforce Productivity & Collaboration, Employee Lifecycle and HR survey from 2020, 55% of respondents said they were more disengaged at work following COVID-19. However, about 30% said they were more engaged. Positive or negative, these impacts will shape the future of enterprise operations.

In response, organizations are increasing spending on employee collaboration tools (50%), mobile devices and connectivity (43%), and network bandwidth (38%), according to the June survey. This focus on employee collaboration tools mirrors the pre-virus priorities of many organizations. Indeed, our Voice of the Enterprise: Workforce Productivity & Collaboration, Employee Lifecycle study from 2019 found that the top priority in IT-led digital transformation was ‘improving employee productivity and collaboration tools.’

Digital transformation projects leverage tools that remove friction from daily work processes. In the case of sales, for example, document automation and digital signatures take center stage – used by 81% of ‘digital leaders’ vs. 62% of ‘digital laggards’ (as defined by organizations’ self-reported digital transformation progress), according to 451 Research’s Voice of the Enterprise: Customer Experience & Commerce, Digital Transformation data from 2019. Digital transformation is the new normal, and organizations must prioritize tools that mitigate the shock of COVID-19 while supporting the prolonged, permanent changes it will bring.

Business Impacts of COVID-19

Source: 451 Research’s Voice of the Enterprise: Digital Pulse, Coronavirus Flash Survey



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Business Impact

ORGANIZATIONS WERE FORCED TO REACT IMMEDIATELY. Following the COVID-19 disruption, organizations scrambled to make mass-scale remote work minimally viable while troubleshooting the friction points in their tooling. Companies began adopting technologies, policies and procedures that would set the stage for their own 'new normal' and how they would support productivity in the post-COVID world.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IS BEING ACCELERATED. The mass-scale shift to remote work is forcing businesses to adopt tools that are hallmarks of digital transformation – tools like automation, videoconferencing, digital signature and more. As companies begin investing in new tools and products, look for investments that support work that's remote, contextual, collaborative, continuously executed and visible.

ORGANIZATIONS ARE FACING A LONG-TERM IMPACT. Many of the policies and operational changes put in place during COVID-19 will be long-lasting or permanent, forever altering work patterns and tooling strategies. Organizations should focus on investments that address the most important work tools: email/calendar, content creation, phone/voice, content management/digital signature, and messaging/collaboration. Leaders should look to capture quick wins that focus on the organization as a whole and set the tone for aligned execution. Look at existing licenses and product suites for tools or features that support productivity and autonomy.

Looking Ahead

COVID-19 is pushing organizations to accelerate their digital transformation efforts, whether they planned to or not. In fact, 21% of our June survey respondents said that COVID-19 had accelerated their overall digital transformation initiatives. Moving forward, it is essential that organizations fight the urge to pursue quick fixes, instead opting for quick wins that are organizational and set a foundation for a longer-term response. The goal isn't to stop the bleeding by fixing problems as they arise; it is to implement tools that address employee needs while sustaining digital transformation.

This requires that leaders reinforce the essentials of digital business by setting a standard that supports privacy, scalability, productivity and mobility with their investments. The workforce should be provided with full-featured tools that help them fight fragmentation and loss of context in their work. This also requires that organizations support their IT department (which is likely overburdened) by considering self-service options and looking for familiar tools or products that may maximize a license they already have.

As organizations are leapfrogging into mid- to late-stage digital transformation, it's critical that leaders prioritize agility, flexibility, automation and creativity within the context of corporate alignment. These tenets and the tools that support them help build digital transformation that is sustainable and scalable.



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