




How the COVID-19 crisis is impacting the Future of Work  
*Webinar Insights*  
April 2020

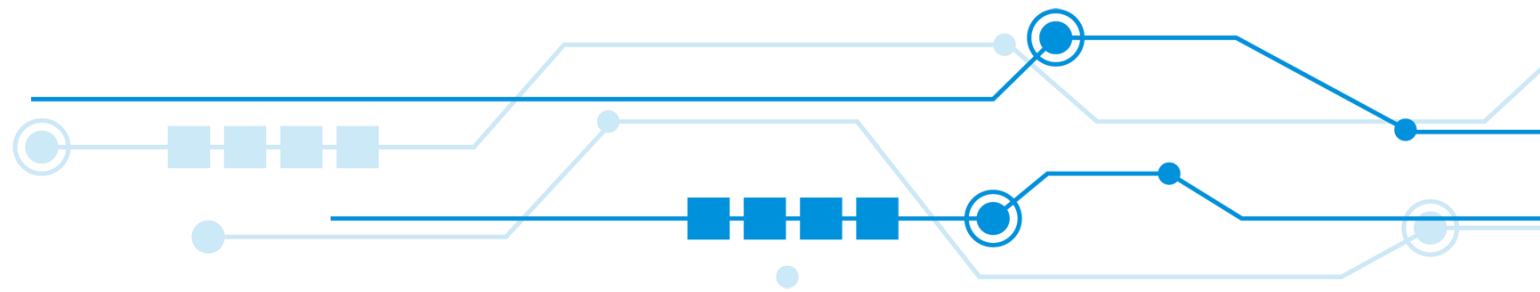


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# How the COVID-19 crisis is impacting the Future of Work

A photograph showing a group of people in a meeting. In the foreground, a person with long dark hair, wearing a blue shirt, is pointing with a white pen at a document on a wooden table. Another person's hand is visible, holding the document. On the table, there is a laptop, a smartphone, and some papers with charts. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in the meeting.

The rapid spread of COVID-19 has pushed organisations to respond promptly to the crisis and allow remote working for professionals where possible.



*“Organisations that have long introduced remote working prior to the COVID-19 pandemic are demonstrating a certain degree of resilience towards these work changes.”*

Some organisations have found it challenging to adapt to the unforeseen changes resulting from the wide spread of COVID-19, more especially the introduction of lockdowns which have affected people, organisations and the way of working. With some form of lockdown currently affecting about 80% of economic activity globally,<sup>1</sup> organisations and people are forced to tap into the future of work (FOW) now, in order to gain resilience during these times of change and ensure business continuity.

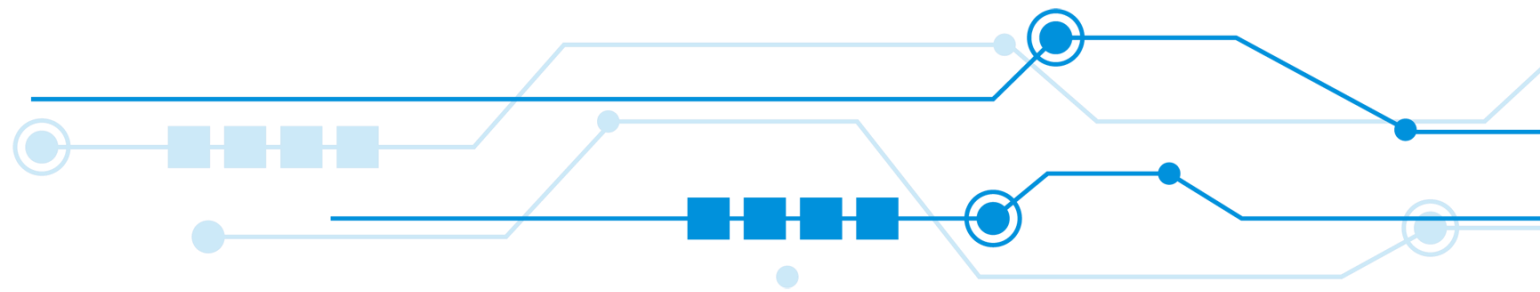
The rapid spread of COVID-19 has pushed organisations to respond promptly to the crisis and allow remote working for professionals where possible. Remote working, with the support of technology has been one of the most effective ways to respond to the crisis for some sectors.

Sectors such as food and medicine supply chains, as well as retail, have been able to respond by creating the right sanitary environment and social distancing to ensure safety of workers during these times.

While some organisations are flourishing in these critical times, others are struggling. Organisations that have long introduced remote working prior to the COVID-19 pandemic are demonstrating a certain degree of resilience towards these work changes. Organisations that only started introducing remote working and technological capacity after the COVID-19 outbreak are striving to ensure business continuity in the current environment.

Remote working at present and potentially in the immediate future (and with the relaxation and phasing out of lockdowns going forward) appears to be the new way of working for sectors that are able to do so. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced organisations to think about finding ways to adapt to the new ways of working (remote working) without leaving humanity behind.

<sup>1</sup> Fitch Solutions, 2020. Covid-19 Recession: Three Downside Scenarios for the Global Economy.



*“Trust is an important element for team members’ psychological safety and is good for team cohesion, productivity and a sense of security.”*

### Psychological challenges: Assessing the impact of working remotely

There are psychological challenges experienced by individuals owing to the dynamics of change, which may potentially be passed on to other team members. For example, there may be a growing sense of social as well as professional isolation. Researchers link professional isolation to an “out of sight, out of mind” mentality.

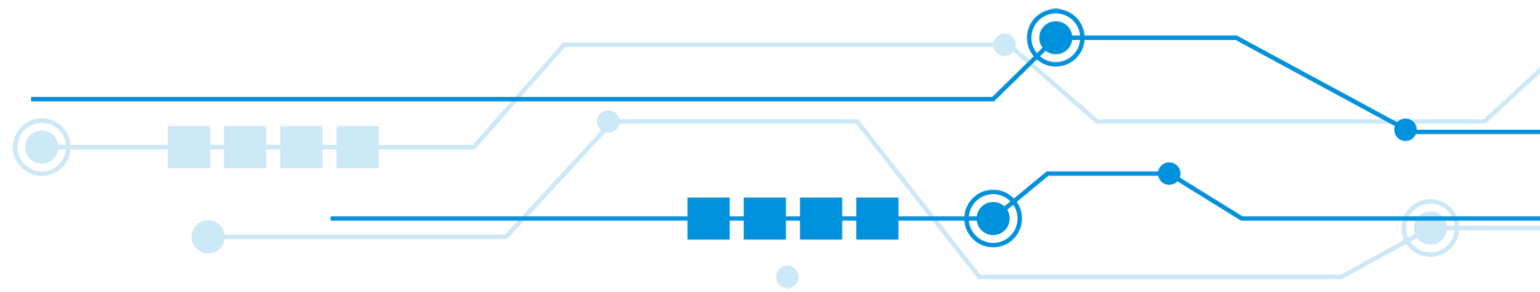
This comes as the majority of conversations amongst colleagues are now much more task-focused, either through emails, video calls, or direct messaging, resulting in some form of psychological distress. In addition, some individuals experience the inability to detach themselves from work, which may potentially lead to burnout.

Another psychological element that may be affected is trust. Trust is an important element for team members’ psychological safety and is good for team cohesion, productivity and a sense of security. With remote working taking place in most organisations, individuals are finding it difficult to build team trust as before, partly due to reduced communication and, at times, difficulty to resolve conflict.

The psychological upside is that, because of this uptake of virtual work, it is anticipated that individuals are expected to learn to continue to be productive in this new environment over time.

If organisations are able to find ways to manage the above-mentioned challenges, there may be some form of resilience where people are naturally adapting to these changes.





*“Organisations are moving towards adaptable ecosystems and are realising the power and benefit of partnering with other organisations...”*

### Defining and navigating the “new normal”

Remote working is highly likely going to become part of organisations’ “new normal” across the world. In fact, it has already become the new normal for some people, with a shift from working face-to-face to virtual working. Organisations are moving towards adaptable ecosystems and are realising the power and benefit of partnering with other organisations in times like these.

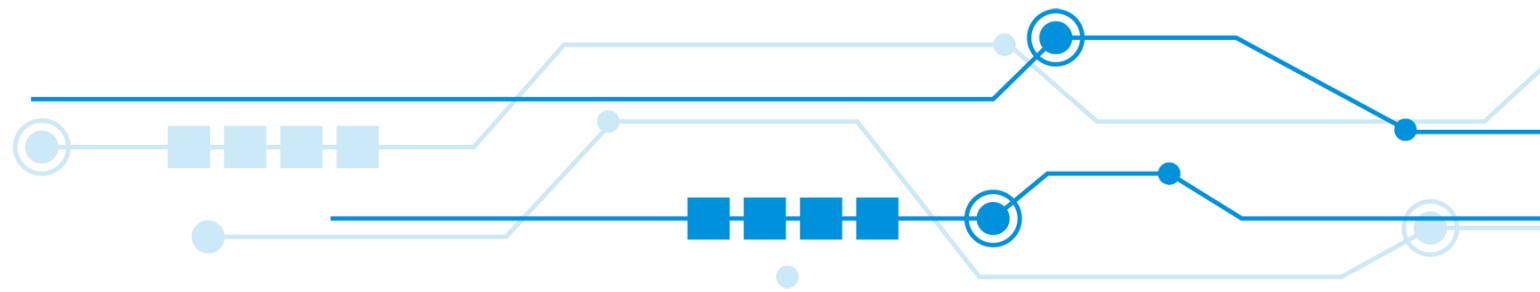
There is furthermore a deeper integration between humans and technologies to both get the work done virtually and to increase the use of technologies in performing more tasks. Humans thus can and will be shifting towards more meaningful work.

From a workforce perspective, the entire workforce is currently learning new skills and new ways of working, and the contingent workforce is becoming part of organisational talent strategies. Organisations need to expose their professionals to new technologies, mainly because there is no other alternative. The spread of COVID-19 is accelerating this.

Team leaders furthermore need to operate and lead intentionally and differently in order to improve the human experience and take advantage of the contingent workforce. There also needs to be a culture of collaboration through frequent collaborative cross-functional teams, powered by the use of virtual tools and collaboration platforms.

As the new normal of remote work sets in, HR departments need to rethink their current policies in order to be supportive to employees during these times. Various forms of employment contracts and legalities need to be reassessed to support people that may be highly affected by this and other unforeseen dynamics.

In order to advance to the new normal rapidly and reap the benefits, organisations also need to anticipate the possible risks that may arise due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ascertain the workforce solutions, adopt an adaptable mind-set, accelerate collaboration through virtual work and ultimately focus on achieving value.



*“...organisations will need to think of ways to mitigate the risk of spreading the disease internally through more active scenario planning, sanitising the workplace and enforcing social distancing.”*

### *Anticipating risk*

Most organisations are beginning to think about what the essential pieces of work are, and what possible risks may affect these.

For example, if individuals are located in an area that is experiencing high cases of COVID-19, the organisation will likely think about its degree of health redundancy, policies in place that may support individuals that could be caring for family, and finding ways to support affected individuals in order to have business continuity.

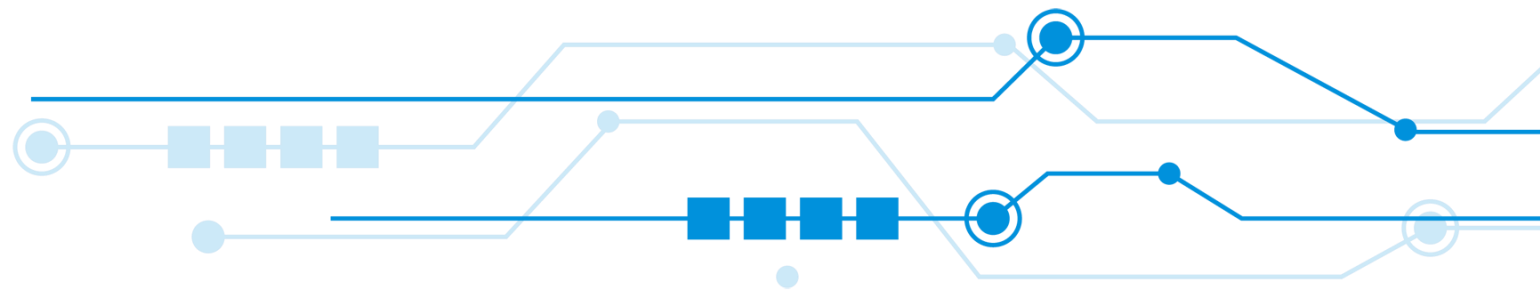
Taking all these risks into consideration, organisations will need to think of ways to mitigate the risk of spreading the disease internally through more active scenario planning, sanitising the workplace and enforcing social distancing.

### *Adopting an adaptable mind-set*

An adaptable mind-set refers to exponential flexible thinking in the organisation.

- Individuals need to think of organising their work and care for family and themselves in a way that makes sense for them and ensure there is a certain light of wellness. Organisations should also be unlocking resilient individuals through adaptive talent programmes to enable how they want to learn, grow and develop.
- Leaders are inclusive orchestrators instead of just being technical task masters, as inclusivity helps to unlock the full potential of diverse skills sets. Leaders should be more authentic and think of how to continue building organisations, how to manage the process, communicate more thoroughly and lessen the anxiety within the team.
- The team leader is critical in helping the team to work well together, setting a schedule and manage work flow.
- Teams must adopt connected ways of working and an adaptable culture to enable high performance.





*“The COVID-19 pandemic should be seen as an opportunity to use challenges as lessons.”*

- Organising tasks is a crucial element in the process of adaptation. Organisations need to think about the work outcome considering the current state of crisis. This includes organising capabilities away from deep hierarchy and silos, towards a network of multidisciplinary organisations.
- The ecosystem includes creating flexible capacity and introducing products in the ecosystem. Adaptable organisations exist in purpose-driven ecosystems with defined customer-focused missions.

#### *Accelerating collaboration and virtual work*

When doing work virtually, organisations must ensure information transparency by using digital collaboration tools and platforms. These tools not only assist with communication but they also help to scale what actually needs to be done and diminish the need for ongoing emails.

#### *Achieving value through purpose and outcomes*

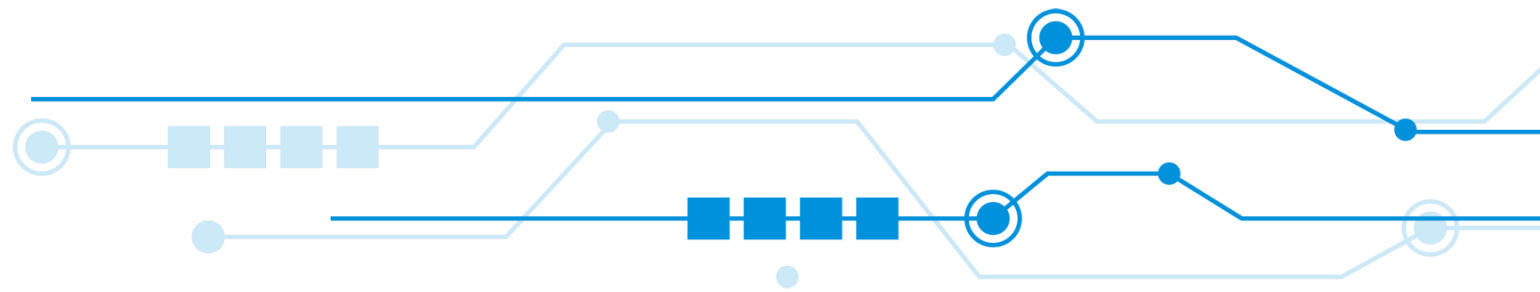
Organisations, team leaders and team members need to note that focus should be on the operating

style of the team and the organisation, whereby rethinking work outcomes comes into play. Overall value can be achieved by understanding the purpose of the organisation and ensuring that the outcomes align with it.

#### *Navigating towards the “new normal”*

There will be life and a new normal after COVID-19, where the FOW will have come into play. The real opportunity lies in learning from the current experience and ensuring that organisations have the relevant technological capacity to support the current changes, i.e. virtual and flexible work.

The COVID-19 pandemic should be seen as an opportunity to use challenges as lessons. Essentially, organisations are forced to apply FOW practices of technology, to look at what works and what does not, and rid themselves of outdated processes that are not fundamentally needed to sustain organisations in the future.



*“Organisations must ensure that there is the right technological capacity and human capabilities that will align with the FOW.”*

### Building FOW capabilities

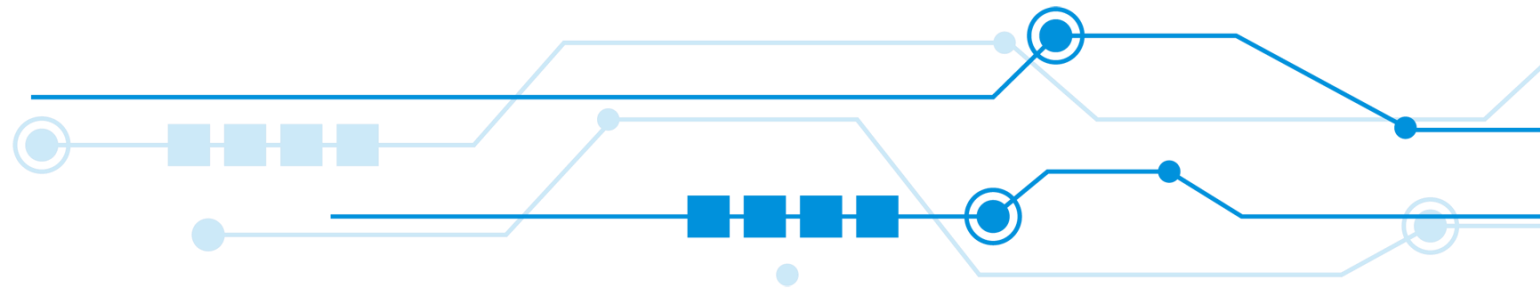
Digital organisations are more resilient and have a high operational recovery rate in terms of business continuity. Organisations must ensure that there is the right technological capacity and human capabilities that will align with the FOW. This will include, for example, ensuring that individuals have the technological skills and that the organisation has the technological capacity to adjust to these changes or other changes that may arise in the future.

Organisations, team leaders and team members need to be cognisant of the fact that they are all grappling with various factors that make the adaptation phase challenging. They therefore need to seek and reinforce solutions that align to the organisation’s purpose, societal obligations and serve the heart of the organisation.





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This insights summary is based on a webinar with the same title that was hosted by Deloitte Africa's **Dr Martyn Davies**, Managing Director of Emerging Markets and Africa, and Dean: Deloitte Alchemy School of Management on 2 April 2020. Speakers included:

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