

A practical guide of actions for business leaders

By [Vukani Mngxati](#)

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Covid-19 has turned into a global crisis, evolving at unprecedented speed and scale. Experts don't know how long it will take to contain the virus so businesses are challenged with not only preparing for the short-term, but also developing new capabilities and ways of working that will seamlessly enable longer-term changes to how they operate.

The most immediate priority should be to protect the health and safety of people. That requires leaders to make rapid, highly-informed decisions, and take actions to protect and support their people while also ensuring that critical business operations continue.

The first step is enabling remote workers at scale. Accenture's Elastic Digital Workplace roadmap outlines six dimensions which have proven effective in quickly transitioning to a remote workplace environment.



Vukani Mngxati, CEO for
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Culture and adoption

For many companies, the shift to remote working can take time to adopt. Tools and coaching are needed to help leaders create the right environment to test and learn and help people rapidly adopt new ways of working. There are three main aspects:

- **Radical transparency** - embrace a truly human approach: Prepare leaders to be empathetic and available to their teams. Accelerate the adoption of collaboration tools by embracing a change champion network to demonstrate and promote behaviours such as document collaboration and using video in virtual meetings.
- **Cloud first**: Shift away from working on local versions of data and documents by adopting cloud-based applications and storage, which can support everything from document creation and application development to task management processes and more.
- **Optimise for remote working right now**: Provide best practices to improve the employee experience, from creating an effective workspace at home, to sharing recommended local network settings. One example is turning off video to improve audio and collaboration during peak network loads.

Elastic collaboration

Elastic collaboration requires a rapid, and in some cases, exponential expansion of your current collaboration capabilities. Case and point: As the largest user of Microsoft Teams in the world, Accenture has 448,000 people communicating and collaborating on the platform.

With the vast majority of our people working remotely due to the pandemic, our usage of Microsoft Teams audio conferencing has more than doubled, from an average of 350 million minutes per month to 760 million minutes per month; and our use of video conferencing has increased six-fold, from 14 million minutes per month to 84 million minutes per month.



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With more employees working remotely, collaboration tools must be able to immediately handle an increase in volume and load while also improving usability and productivity. Actions to consider include:

- **Adopt and measure collaboration:** Expand the existing footprint of collaboration and communication capabilities to employees who need them. Launch an employee education campaign, complete with user stories and relevant examples to encourage adoption.
- **Cross business enablement:** Identify key business contacts and relationships across your ecosystem. Assess current virtual meeting capabilities and deploy a pilot of video and messaging bridging services for seamless interaction with partners, suppliers, and customers.

As a resource for other organisations, Accenture recently worked with Microsoft to launch a Microsoft Teams Rapid Resource Center that provides useful how-to instructions, best practices and additional resources at no cost to help quickly put Teams to work.

Virtual work environment

Virtual work environments provide employees with key resources they need to be productive, such as a secure laptop, and provide seamless access to corporate applications and data. Key aspects that should be addressed include:

- **Device enablement and mobility:** Prioritise enabling workers who have critical roles in driving the business by ensuring they have the tools and access they need.

Reclaim devices from users with more than one device and use contractor devices or explore creative sourcing options. Accelerate a “bring your own device” or mobility strategy for remote workers, and provide protection and management solutions.

- **Virtual desktops:** Implement virtual desktop solutions such as Microsoft, Citrix, VMware or Amazon which offer virtualised workspaces that can extend across boundaries while allowing secure access to remote applications and data for employees who do not have access to secure mobile devices.

Large scale virtual sessions: Enable interactive broadcast and web conference platforms to support the shift from physical to virtual workshops and conferences. Identify and train high touch session facilitators and support to attain the best user experience possible.



Source: www.pexels.com

Seamless networking

Working productively from home or other remote locations requires seamless, secure, and reliable network connectivity to corporate networks, cloud assets, and to strategic partners. Consider the implementation of the following:

- **Virtual Private Network (VPN) capacity:** Rapidly compliment your traditional VPN technology with new cloud remote access solutions that will improve remote worker experience, performance, and security while alleviating capacity risks on your legacy VPN solution. At the same time, confirm your capacity on traditional remote access technologies.
- **Remote and home networking:** Provide clear and prescriptive guidance to employees about broadband connectivity options and packages in their home locations. Give advice on how to configure the solutions to prioritise voice, video, and collaboration traffic, and help employees troubleshoot issues.
- **Partner connectivity:** Establish a SWAT team to quickly provide, or to expand, business-to business connectivity solutions to strategic partners.

Distributed continuity

The most important thing to get right during the COVID-19 outbreak is the protection of customers, employees, and partners. This requires clearly monitoring and assessing a quickly evolving environment, making rapid business decisions, and communicating clearly and prescriptively to your people on how to navigate the situation.

- **Monitor and assess:** Continuously analyse intelligence from leading health institutions, activate crisis management processes and institute a task force as necessary.
- **Business planning:** Incorporate pandemic planning into your business continuity plans. Run full scale human and department-based continuity tests.

Adaptive security

While moving quickly to enable remote workers to respond to COVID-19 is very important, you cannot do so in a way that puts your business at risk of a security breach. This means rapidly addressing your security protocols and solutions to enable the expansion of remote connectivity, including:

- **Zero Trust network access:** Rapidly deploy a Zero Trust model with built-in technologies to enable secure application access without relying on traditional VPN solutions.
- **Endpoint managed protection, detection and response:** The expanded use of a multitude of devices in potentially less secure locations require additional protection. Build analytics and automation into endpoint management detection and response programs to reduce the amount of human intervention required.

While Covid-19 is serving as the catalyst for an immediate implementation of an elastic digital workplace, the crisis will fundamentally alter how we work and engage. A comprehensive implementation plan will enable companies to quickly scale and dynamically adapt to changing business needs based on global and local conditions.

ABOUT VUKANI MNGXATI

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