

Covid-19 will foster much needed collaboration in the future of work

By [Ronald Ravel](#)

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We are currently living in a period unprecedented in both our personal and professional lives. The coronavirus pandemic is having an era-defining impact on how organisations and their employees operate and, importantly, collaborate.



Ronald Ravel, Director B2B South Africa, dynabook South Africa

Although the crisis is still unfolding in some parts of the world, as lockdowns ease and economies slowly begin to wake up, business leaders are starting to discuss the lessons learnt from these challenging times and how they can be used to shape the future world of work.

While the problem can't be fixed with one solution alone, workplace teamwork is vital to not only improving productivity but also fostering creativity and problem-solving, ultimately leading to better employee retention and more successful business outputs. So, it's surprising when you consider that collaboration has often remained one of the most undervalued and underemployed workplace tactics.

Choosing the right tools

In recent months, though, this has changed dramatically. Collaboration has become vital for organisations all over the world who have made a rapid transition to a remote working model. Covid-19 has forced many businesses into a new reality where teamwork no longer means having to be in the same physical location, and technology has been key to this change.

The video conferencing industry in particular has seen significant traction during the outbreak - being hailed as the technology of the lockdown - as companies have turned to the likes of Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and Zoom to connect remote employees and customers. In fact, in March of this year, video conferencing applications saw a record 62 million downloads.

In response to this growing reliance on video conferencing and other cloud-based services for collaboration, there has been an increase in demand for laptop and notebook devices as companies look to equip employees with the right tools to set them up properly for home working. Research from analyst firm IDC found a surge of almost one third in year-on-year demand for notebook computers and laptops across Europe in the first quarter of this year.

Businesses which are investing in new technology need to consider that successful remote collaboration requires more than what is often anticipated. Factors like internal storage capacity, core processor speed and power, RAM memory, operating system updates, and more, all impact a remote employee's work environment.

Connectivity, however, is one of the most important considerations. Achieving this and avoiding costly downtime means supplying employees with a device which is fit for purpose, equipped with the latest WiFi network support, Bluetooth capabilities, and peripheral connections such as HDMI and USB ports. Not only this, but the importance of a reliable camera, quality audio and reduced fan noise has never been more important as employees rely so heavily on video calls for team collaboration.

New ways of working, new technologies

It's not just laptop devices which are playing a fundamental role in fostering collaboration during this time, but also wearable technology which has been on the cusp of mainstream adoption for some time now. The unprecedented working environment created by the pandemic has propelled technologies like assisted reality (AR) forward beyond proof of concepts, opening up new use cases and demonstrating the potential of wearables in driving collaboration amongst remote teams.

Differing from augmented reality and virtual reality, assisted reality (AR) refers to the projection of information into a user's immediate field of vision, and, importantly, is hands-free. With assisted reality-enabled smart glasses, you can project diagrams, text, images and videos, without interfering with the user's peripheral vision.

So, how can this technology help to support collaboration both at this time as well as in the future as we enter a "new normal"?

Critical tasks such as power station equipment maintenance need to continue, even during global lockdowns when teams

aren't able to reach a site. This is where AR-powered smart glasses come in. If a local power station technician runs into an issue, they can use the Remote Expert function on the glasses to contact an expert - who may even be based in another country - to show them the problem using the head mounted display and camera, and get the advice and help needed to fix it.

In the current crisis, this removes the need for multiple teams to be on site, thus reducing the risk of potential transmission. For the future, it means reduced need for travel or face-to-face contact.

While this example is quite easy to imagine, there are also perhaps less obvious use cases which have led to the re-imagining of future collaboration. For those in an office or home environment, smart glasses also provide a vehicle for interactive remote communication through document retrieval, workflow instructions and real-time data capture - bringing people face-to-face, so to speak. And with organisations shifting to remote working even after Covid-19, this might well become more common practice for collaboration in the future.

The coronavirus pandemic has provided a unique opportunity for business leaders to re-assess and re-imagine their operations and employee experiences. According to a recent Gartner poll, 48% of employees will likely work remotely at least part of the time after Covid-19, versus 30% before the pandemic.

For many, the shift to remote working has been both a challenge but also a success, not only unearthing new ways of achieving collaboration but also proving that it must be at the heart of any organisation's strategy moving forward.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ronald Ravel, director B2B South Africa, dynabook South Africa

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