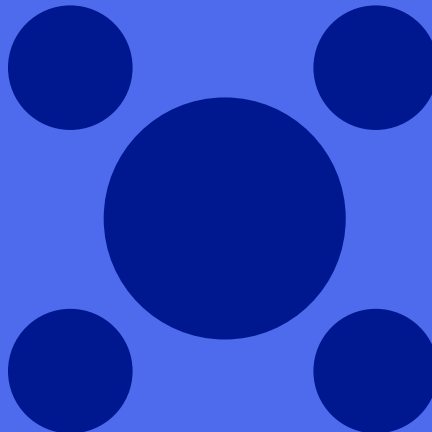


The human side of business continuity

Part 1: Navigating the shift to remote work



Contents

I. Preface

II. Introduction

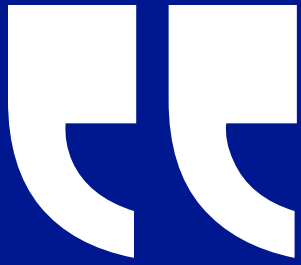
III. Framework

IV. Business continuity dashboard

V. Real-life scenarios

VI. Epilogue

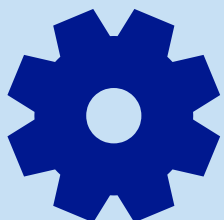
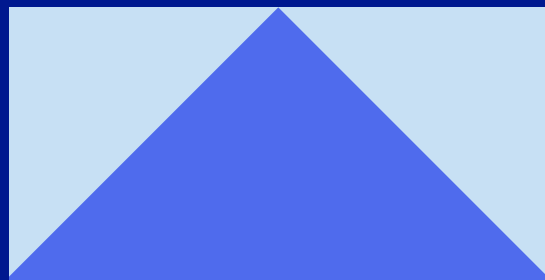




The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence—it is to act with yesterday's logic."

[Peter Drucker](#)

Author and Management Consultant



I. Preface

In this age of the “new normal,” companies are not only confronting an immediate and all-encompassing crisis—they'll also likely have to contend with waves of future disruptions for some time to come. Business continuity, or the ability of a company to maintain critical functions through a crisis, navigate risk, recover successfully, and prepare for what's next, will face a spectrum of challenges, shifts, and resets. Thriving through this successive sea change will demand agility and a growth mindset.

We're still learning what the stages of this particular unprecedented disruption might be. We'll likely move through the remote-work phase, in which companies are focused on responding to the shift, into a rebuilding phase of transitioning some and then more employees back into an office that might look and function very differently than before. There could be future transitions back to mass remote work; some companies have already moved permanently to a more remote-friendly or remote-focused approach. And new hybrid realities are certain as conditions change and flexible work becomes increasingly expected by employees and necessary to companies.

As work rapidly shifts, organizations and employees will continually face new questions: How is our collaboration changing? How is work-life integration faring? How are we maintaining our customer relationships?

It is critical that business leaders like you prepare for a spectrum of change from end to end.



This report offers a framework and guidance for how companies can use data-driven insights to measure how work happens in real time, compare it to a baseline of what work looked like before, and map the impact of shocks across teams and organizations. Armed with these insights, leaders can help people and teams adapt, optimize work norms for the current phase, and nurture long-term organizational resilience so companies can emerge stronger and more resourceful.

II. Introduction

Protecting your people

Most companies have a well-honed system in place to protect technical and physical infrastructure during a major business disruption. But there's another more critical aspect you must address: the people who make your business run. When a major disruption—such as a global health pandemic triggering a massive shift to remote work—occurs, the ripple effects impact an already complex work environment, exacerbating conditions and imparting greater levels of imbalance, fragmentation, and stress on your human infrastructure.

So how can companies ensure they survive the disruptions that lie ahead, along with the rapid influx of new norms and ways of working? In a long-term study of 2,000 organizations, McKinsey analyzed 5 million data points around how work gets done to understand

what drives optimal outcomes.¹ It found that the way people work is a key driver of overall success: companies with the highest organizational health scores had up to three times the returns of those with the lowest scores.

The challenge is that, even during periods of “business as usual,” it is difficult to quantify organizational culture. A major disruption creates even more ambiguity, leaving companies to guess how people, teams, and the business are responding and reacting to the shock, with little visibility into how day-to-day working norms and processes have changed as a result. Understanding how your workforce is adapting to major change is the single most important aspect of maintaining business continuity and protecting your human infrastructure.

¹A better way to lead large-scale change, McKinsey & Company.
www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/a-better-way-to-lead-large-scale-change



Risks of inaction

Most companies are scrambling to respond quickly in the midst of unanticipated crisis, focusing on marshaling resources for tactical survival. Yet even as they engage in immediate response to a shock, companies must also begin to strategize for the future and seize the opportunity to redefine the workplace in ways that will enable resilience, ensure competitiveness in the market, and drive long-term success. To do this, companies must stay focused on and gain new insight into employee engagement, moving beyond tooling to learn what employees are experiencing and what they need to thrive.

And within this rapid landscape shift, employees are trying to navigate novel challenges, stay productive, and integrate work with life. Methods of collaborating and communicating may change overnight, leaving some employees feeling disconnected or

fearful. The Gartner ReimagineHR Employee Survey, fielded in 4Q19, revealed that 41 percent of respondents don't feel connected to colleagues when working remotely and 26 percent of employees feel isolated when they work remotely.² According to a recent Gallup report, companies with low engagement showed higher absenteeism, lower innovation, and lower profitability.³

If your business fails to analyze, understand, and act on the changes in everyday work that happen now and in each subsequent wave or future shock, you could end up in a position that's hard to recover from—facing disengagement, lost productivity and efficiency, and negative customer satisfaction.

² Gartner Webinar, Lessons Learned From Managing Remote Employees: What Has Worked and What Hasn't, April 2020

³ "How Employee Engagement Drives Growth." <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236927/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>



What we've learned: Adapting to remote work at Microsoft

Currently, companies and workforces are adapting to the sudden shift to remote work in fascinating ways. Harnessing data already available from everyday work, leaders can go beyond guessing and gut reactions to challenge assumptions about how workforces are impacted or to validate the anecdotal experiences of people and teams. Analyzing data from our own teams at Microsoft, for instance, we've noticed these interesting trends:

Work-life balance has shifted to work-life integration. Normal dips in people's work, such as lunch breaks, have faded as employees stay "on" more hours per week and collaborate later into the day.

Shorter, 30-minute meetings have increased significantly (22 percent) while longer meetings have fallen (11 percent) as employees adjust to the new demands and rhythms of remote work. This pattern bucks the trend in recent years of longer meetings that research shows can negatively impact productivity and employee engagement.

A huge uptick (72 percent) in instant messages sent reveals that employees are turning to Microsoft Teams chat as an informal mechanism for preserving relationships and sharing the information they need to do their work.

Maintaining relationships remains a priority. Nine out of 10 employees are able to keep a meaningful level of connection with their teams, and most employees have maintained their networks despite the loss of in-person connection.

Manager check-ins are critical to maintaining stability and nurturing employee and organizational resilience. Employees with regular manager one-on-ones were better able to prioritize and actually reduced their workload impact from the shift by 50 percent compared to those without regular check-ins. Yet we also learned a quarter of employees were not having regular manager one-on-ones—a critical area for improvement.

Senior management is most affected by the change, experiencing spikes in work-week and collaboration hours. Refocusing inward to restructure days and priorities and reaching out and collaborating more frequently with employees reduces their focus on external customers.

What's apparent in these discoveries is that real-time ongoing visibility into how work is happening is critical. Leaders need to identify the right indicators that reveal the most valuable insights at the right time. These insights can then drive action to promote new work habits and norms and adapt as conditions evolve.



III. Framework

A framework for evaluating your human infrastructure

Using what we've learned from customers as well as our own experiences and measurements of remote work at Microsoft, we devised a framework to guide leaders to the most critical insights that will enable them to rapidly respond and maintain business continuity. This framework is based on the following four principles:

- 1 Measure what matters.** In times of disruption, change is immediate and often unsettling. Responses need to happen fast. Attention can only be given to insights that support critical priorities.
- 2 Understand more than averages.** Since people's responses to change can vary widely, looking at averages limits learning. Often, the most actionable insights are around the groups experiencing the most extreme disruption, or around the bright spots—things working well that can be replicated in other parts of the organization.
- 3 Show changes over time.** The picture of how we work today looks different from a few weeks ago and continues to change each week. This fluidity makes it critical to monitor trends over time and compare patterns against a baseline period.
- 4 Connect data to the lived experiences of people.** Bringing together complementary data and contextualizing it with organizational attributes, employee surveys, research, and previous learnings helps leaders connect the data to what matters most to make quick, meaningful decisions.



IV. Business continuity dashboard

Insights from the business continuity dashboard

To understand how the shift to remote work is affecting business continuity, you need to look at people and their actions. No work or process exists without the help of skilled workers. To respond quickly and even proactively, leaders need to discover how work is happening in this new normal.

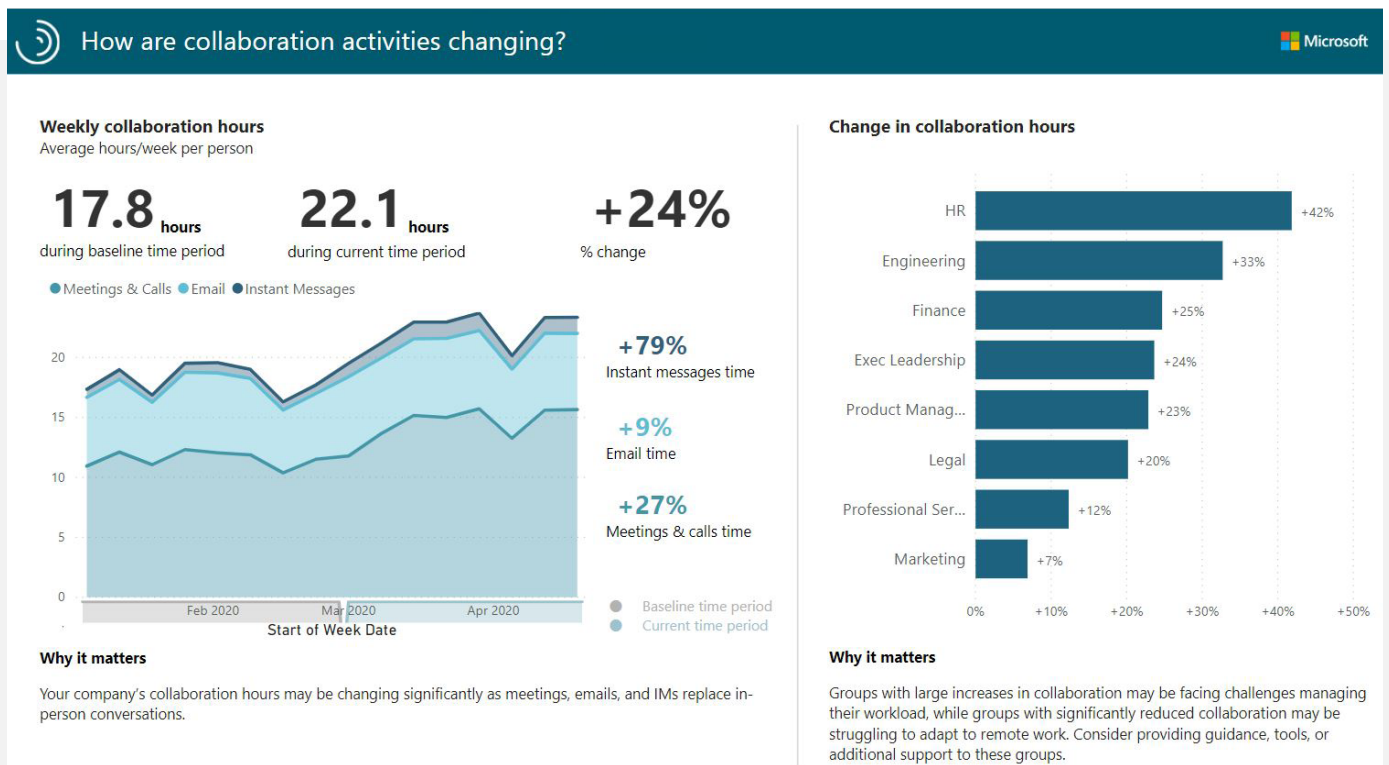
But how can we gain visibility into patterns and processes we often feel but cannot see? The key is behavioral data that already exists in the Microsoft Graph.

Tapping into workplace insights

For years, information about how people worked was understood on a very basic level. Data was collected through point-in-

time surveys or by following people around and recording their activity, methods that provided a snapshot but failed to paint a picture of how things change over time. Surveys, especially regular pulse checks, are still powerful qualitative assessments of employee sentiment, especially in times of crisis—but used alone, they leave gaps in our understanding of employee experience and how work is happening.

Now, however, communication and collaboration tools your employees already use every day, such as email, instant messaging, and calendar, can quantify how people connect, collaborate, and spend their time—a foundation that makes evaluating your human infrastructure possible. Microsoft Workplace Analytics measures patterns of work from your teams' day-to-day actions in Microsoft 365, offering a dynamic view of collaboration and mapping the effects of disruption so organizations can respond with effective action.



Keeping the pulse on your human infrastructure

Protecting the wellbeing of employees, ensuring that the most critical business activities can continue, and finding ways for employees to do their best work are top-of-mind concerns for employers during this time. The Workplace Analytics business continuity dashboard was created to highlight shifts in ways of working that are having the largest impact and to provide a measurable starting point for leaders to identify opportunities for action.

The dashboard takes the pulse of the organization and offers visibility into before-and-after norms to show how business as usual has changed. Topics explore questions business leaders are asking, such as: “Are employees engaged and connected?” and “How are work patterns evolving?” Through key indicators based on these critical questions, the dashboard displays changes driven by the shift to remote work and indicates why the learnings matter.

Taking action: Improving remote work effectiveness

During and in the wake of a shock, leaders are rightly focused on identifying the most critical areas for tactical and strategic response. That’s why, in addition to key indicators organized around driving questions, the business continuity dashboard identifies five areas for improving remote work effectiveness. To identify the underlying remote work issues that most need to be addressed, use the Workplace Analytics metrics selected for each of these areas—complemented by surveys, focus groups, and employee discussions—to reveal the changes in collaboration behaviors unique to your teams and organization. Supporting guidance and best-practice recommendations help leaders move from data to action. The following examples are from these five key opportunity areas:

What are the impacts of work-life integration? Microsoft

Collaboration time

Percentage of employees whose collaboration hours **increased or decreased** by more than...

0 hours per week

17%

of employees had a **decrease** in collaboration



83%

of employees had an **increase** in collaboration



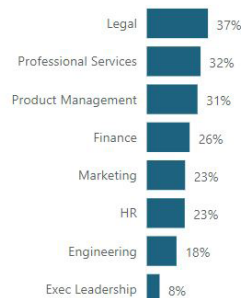
Workweek span

Percentage of employees whose workweek span **increased or decreased** by more than...

0 hours per week

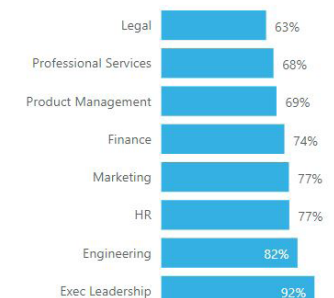
25%

of employees had a **decrease** in workweek span



75%

of employees had an **increase** in workweek span



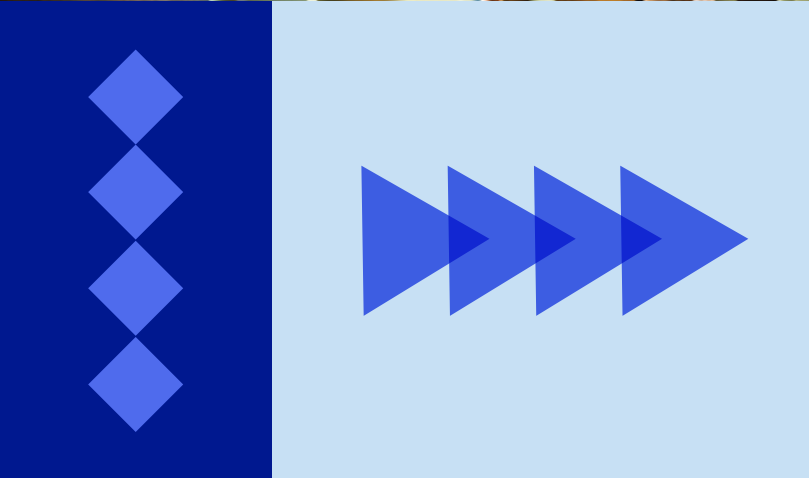


Are employees managing their workloads?

Employees who have an increase of more than four hours in both collaboration hours and workweek span may be experiencing difficulty in managing their workloads. One or the other metric on its own isn't sufficient—those who replace face-to-face interactions with virtual ones may still be managing to accomplish work during regular work hours, and those with expanded workweek spans may simply be choosing to perform personal obligations in the middle of the day. But those who are experiencing an uptick in both may benefit from task prioritization and workload balancing. The dashboard provides targeted recommendations to address overload.

Are employees receiving manager guidance?

Regular manager one-on-one check-ins are critical for establishing rapport, managing workloads, and creating an environment of empathy and trust. Our data paired with employee listening showed that this manager action is important in buffering employees from the potential negative impacts of a crisis, helping them prioritize, and supporting work-life integration. Learn how employee-manager relationships are faring in your organization and find ways to support and improve them.



V. Real-life scenarios

A focused lens into business continuity has enabled companies to examine their organizations in ways that weren't possible before. Here are some examples of how the insights gained preserved the human infrastructure.

- “As the COVID crisis began to spread, we acted quickly to respond to the shifting needs of our clients.”
- “We realized early on that we needed to understand how our work and collaboration were changing in order to help our employees prioritize and focus in an increasingly complex environment.”
- “The business continuity dashboard gave us the ability to baseline our new normal and respond proactively to help our clients and our workforce thrive.”



National Australia Bank

In late April 2020, in the midst of an unprecedented global work shift, [National Australia Bank \(NAB\) used Workplace Analytics](#) to understand how people from across the bank were collaborating and to what extent work habits had shifted in the previous 8 to 10 weeks. Leaders were able to measure not only shifts in collaboration patterns but also obtain insights into differences across groups and how the mix of tools people used to connect was changing. This helped create a big-picture view of how employees were maintaining their connections and relationships and how they were adapting to the loss of in-person meetings and casual check-ins they once relied on in the office. The initiative is part of a broader drive at the bank to use people analytics for good, and the insights came at a critical time as customer support needs, cases, and loan applications spiked.

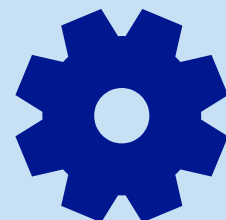
The findings indicated that certain teams and individuals—IT workers, bankers that were supporting businesses, senior management—were experiencing a significant increase in their work activity, and that the increased flexibility of the workday had led to more after-hours collaboration. These trends were reflected in employee sentiment surveys. In response, new weekly emails offered key visibility into work patterns to enable managers to support employees, and an executive dashboard surfaced major changes across the business. All these insights helped leaders move quickly to generate ideas to manage workload and prevent employee burnout. These data insights will continue to help NAB measure and understand changes to work and impacts on employees so the bank can listen, adapt, and thrive.

McChrystal Group

"As with most of the world, the first few weeks of the COVID pandemic added a lot of uncertainty into our environment. In response to this uncertainty, our organization acted quickly with a heavy ramp-up of organization-wide communication and a reprioritization of our product suite to be most relevant to our clients. This included establishing new behaviors, connecting in novel ways, and accelerating our innovation cycle significantly. Shortly into this transformation, we realized the pace of change and the new communication pathways required a check-in on our business, to identify risks and codify the outcomes of our changes. The business continuity dashboard gave us an elegant solution to an otherwise complex problem, allowing us to measure the impact of change, and identify and respond to our new normal."

Victor Bilgen

Partner, McChrystal Group



Finastra

“At Finastra, we find Workplace Analytics really helpful as we navigate remote working for nearly 10,000 staff. We know we're lucky that most of us are able to work remotely, but this is also new territory. Having real information about how our teams are adapting helps us make better decisions.”

Tom Kilroy

Chief Operating Officer, Finastra

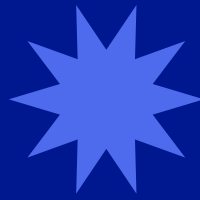
CenturyLink

“With the Workplace Analytics dashboard, we've been able to apply real evidence to the anecdotal feedback that many of our team members, supervisors, managers, and leaders have largely identified through interacting with their teams, and we've been able to use that evidence and that information to help us really understand and validate how patterns are shifting. If I think back to a world without using the WpA analytical data, it would be very subjective. But, actually, being able to observe and see a change in work patterns from pre-COVID to post-COVID and start to isolate by team size, geography, function within the company, we're able to react much quicker to things that we feel like we need to address or potentially identify for further investigation.”

Rob Gillard

VP, Planning and Enablement, CenturyLink





VI. Epilogue

Readying for what's ahead

In this new normal, we're still moving from surviving to thriving. Each new wave of disruption will bring new unknowns for employees and organizations, along with a renewed need to respond quickly and optimize for what's next. Business continuity depends on bringing people along and ensuring they adapt and thrive at each step, and visibility into new work norms compared against baseline data arms business leaders with the insight they need to make the right decisions for their organization. Without this insight, leaders will know that their employees are impacted—but they won't know how.

While companies start to reimagine workspaces, move back to the office, develop hybrid approaches, seek efficiencies, and rebuild for the future of work, the ability to maintain a pulse on how people are adapting will remain critical to ensuring the resilience of teams and workforces.

© 2020 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.



1 To learn more about the shift to remote work, visit:

aka.ms/human-side-of-business-continuity

2 To explore our blog on the subject, visit:

insights.office.com/home/work

