

# The Digital Workplace in the Age of Pandemic

*The Key to Assuring Business Viability and Continuity*



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# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed global business overnight.

Millions became remote workers. And business continuity became the new priority for organizations—first for survival, then in preparation to thrive in the still-undefined, post-pandemic future state.

None of this could happen without Digital Workplace tools for seamless communication, collaboration, and data sharing among dozens, hundreds, or thousands of remote workers.

In *The Digital Workplace in the Age of Pandemic*, you'll discover valuable, actionable insights from the StitchDX Digital Workplace team, acquired in our proprietary Discovery & Design customer workshops. The insights are grouped into two sections:

## **Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis**

## **Planning and Building a Digital Workplace for Now and the Future**

No matter the current state of your Digital Workplace, we hope you'll find *The Digital Workplace in the Age of Pandemic* helpful as you and your teams navigate your business through the current crisis and into tomorrow.



# Contents

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

- 4** Will Your Digital Workplace Serve You Well in This Global Pandemic—and Beyond?
- 9** 5 Intranet Features that will Make a Difference in a Crisis
- 13** 9-Point Checklist for Remote Working During any Business Disruption
- 15** 9 Tips for Better Online Training During a Crisis (or Anytime)

## Planning and Building a Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

- 19** Build Your Digital Workplace on These 3 Mighty Pillars
- 23** A Better Discovery is the Path to a Better Employee Experience
- 26** Skype is Dead. Long Live Teams!
- 31** How Multi-Factor Authentication Helps Secure Your Digital Workplace
- 36** Case Study: Digital Workplace Crisis Response
- 38** Conclusion

### Chapter 1

# Will Your Digital Workplace Serve You Well in This Global Pandemic—and Beyond?

As the world adjusts to the coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic emergency, every business has had to adapt as well. Many have closed offices, forcing millions of employees to work from home. Others have been required to increase production and maintain distribution channels. Organizations that have invested in a modern Digital Workplace—and are leveraging it to enable remote workers and keep employees engaged and educated—are better positioned to survive now and ensure business viability and continuity beyond the immediate crisis.

**Is your Digital Workplace up to the challenge? If not, there's good news: it's not too late to fix it.**



The first step during any crisis is having a communication plan,” says John Bwarie, Founder and CEO of Stratiscope, an organization that works with businesses, communities, and policy makers on disaster resilience and communication strategy. “Organizations that can disseminate clear, fact-based and value-driven communication directly, effectively, and quickly are in a better position to mitigate negative economic consequences.”



**A Digital Workplace should provide every worker, from desk employees to remote and field workers, access and information that supports and empowers them**

With a modern Digital Workplace, businesses can rapidly engage their workforces with up-to-date information; give them access to business-critical data, documents, and information; gather intelligence on the ground to determine if localized action is

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

necessary; and push geographically relevant content to affected parts of the business. Timely response can mean the difference between failure and success in any crisis.

### Why your Digital Workplace is an advantage in a pandemic

Events like the coronavirus outbreak offered organizations the rare opportunity to establish communication ahead of the disaster. Also, we know that an effective vaccine—the key for any “return to normal”—is months away, and even then, it must be mass-produced and distributed. This long-duration impact means *businesses that implement targeted and clear communication strategies early on during a crisis are more likely to ensure operational continuity, organizational resilience, and continued business viability.*



A modern Digital Workplace allows you to reach and connect with employees to provide actionable information that helps them prepare, cope, and recover. “Internal corporate communications should empower employees to make informed decisions to protect themselves, their families, and their co-workers,” says Alyson Cobb, Public

Health Emergency Specialist for JSI, a global healthcare research and consulting firm. “Keeping employees informed is the first step to ensuring safety and decreasing the impact of any disaster on corporate functions.”

### To make crisis communication most effective, organizations should focus on meeting three objectives:

- 1. The safety of your people.** The primary objective of every organization during any crisis should be the safety and security of their employees and families. Reassuring employees that the organization is aware of and working to maintain their health and safety can alleviate worker anxiety and help them to better focus on delivering on their objectives.
- 2. Business continuity.** Early on in a disruption, employees will want ready access to policies and status updates. Critical information like work-from-home policies, sick leave policies, and planned closures are a good place to start. In addition,



## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

organizations should open communication to better understand the questions workers, customers, and vendors may have at this time. This will enable the organization to better provide contextually relevant information—based, for example, on country or region, worker type, business unit, or organizational function.

- 3. Risk mitigation.** It is important to keep your workforce informed throughout the crisis—before, during and after—with content that both informs and helps them avoid potentially dangerous situations or activities. Keep communication fact-based and be honest about the risks and potential health or safety hazards they may face. Under- or overreacting generally lead to the worst outcomes. “Communicate often, lean on trusted and verified sources for information—such as the CDC,” says Cobb, “and provide employees with actionable steps they can take.

### Critical capabilities your Digital Workplace needs during a disaster

A Digital Workplace should provide every worker, from desk employees to remote and field workers, access and information that supports and empowers them. “Today’s organizations frequently have complex structures with many types of employees across multiple locations,” says David Maffei, President of Akumina, an Employee Experience Platform software provider. “Having technology capabilities to keep employees consistently and appropriately informed, along with access to all the tools they need to do their jobs is critical. Especially if the company is suddenly forced to operate with a largely remote workforce.”



While every organization has different needs, these Digital Workplace basics provide businesses with critical advantages in weathering a crisis:

- **“Single Pane of Glass” view.** Employees need a common perspective of the situation, provided by a single source of content and information for everyone. However, that source should also differentiate the experience

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

with targeted content that's specific and more relevant to those that might be more affected by the crisis than others.

- **Staying connected.** Whether at home, in the office, or on the road, employees should be able to access all the information they need to perform their jobs. One StitchDX customer, based in Milan, Italy, is currently on a mandatory work-from-home lockdown. Yet all team members can stay engaged with each other, accessing the content and information they need, and remain productive—even though remote working wasn't planned.
- **Alerts and push notifications.** Employees may not be able to actively monitor the intranet or even email during an immediate crisis. The ability to send alerts via the Digital Workplace, trigger push notifications, or send SMS direct to mobile devices is often more reliable.
- **Up-to-the-minute news.** In a world where the news cycle is constantly changing, employees expect news to be up-to-date and fresh. This is especially true in situations where facts and information are still emerging. The ability for workers to stay "in the know" will give them better visibility and improve the credibility of the organization as they prepare for whatever is on the horizon.



A Digital Workplace should provide every worker, from desk employees to remote and field workers, access and information that supports and empowers them."

- **Localized information.** For organizations with a dispersed workforce, the ability to provide targeted, local information is critical. News, contacts, resources, policies and procedures, etc. should reflect the language, culture, and any requirements of the local government and policy makers.
- **Constant engagement.** In the early days of an emerging crisis, data and information may not always be reliable. Engaging in two-way communication with your employees and staff in the affected areas can

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

be a more reliable way to get information from the ground and builds a stronger relationship between the organization and the employees.

- **Community building and strengthening.** While organizations have a primary responsibility to ensure the safety of workers and their families, they also have a responsibility to the communities where they work. In times of crisis, organizations can encourage their workforce to show leadership in their communities and share those stories. In addition to building community, those stories can also become great opportunities to share how the people of your organization work together to maintain resilience.

A full-featured Digital Workplace that will empower your business and employees during a crisis is critical to long-term business viability. It's true during the current crisis, and will remain so when we reach the other side of it.





### Chapter 2

## 5 Intranet Features That Will Make a Difference in a Crisis

Whether political unrest, natural disaster, global pandemic, or some other form of chaos, a crisis will put a business to the test—and offer a unique opportunity to provide real value to your most important asset, your employees. Utilizing these five features of your intranet can make the difference between just riding out a crisis and building a resilient organization that emerges stronger and ready for what's next.

In the workplace, crises demand that you be agile, quick-thinking, clear-headed, and laser-focused on what needs to be done... all at a time when you may be concerned about your own safety or that of your loved ones. As Heidi K. Gardner and Ivan Matviak note, specifically about the coronavirus, in the [Harvard Business Review](#), “the increasing uncertainty and anxiety about the personal dangers from the epidemic and its impact on the economy will make the challenge of adjusting to these work changes even greater.”

On top of the usual work, there are additional discussions to be had, processes to be thought through, and decisions to be made. Where did we put that emergency plan? Can we get information out to employees' mobile devices? Does everyone have remote access to the files they need?

It can be overwhelming. But this is where your intranet comes through, providing real value to your employees and organization.



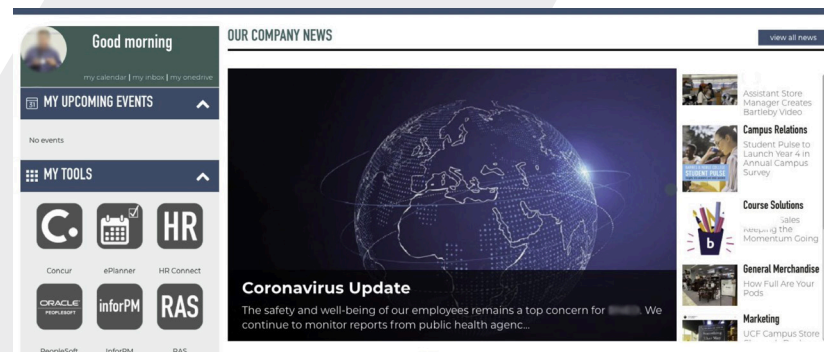
## In a crisis, your intranet is a priceless asset.

Without clear, frequent, managed communications, your organization will struggle in the face of a major crisis. Fortunately, most intranets have built-in features to help ease that struggle.

While your organization likely uses many of these features already, it's time to reconsider them in the light of a local or global crisis like our current COVID-19 outbreak. As the center of a well-designed Digital Workplace, your intranet provides a ready, almost custom-built "situation room." It's a natural place for communications during a crisis.

## The 5 Digital Workplace features that will make a difference in a crisis

1. **Alerts.** Many organizations have some sort of alert function to notify employees of computer outages, snow days or closures, and reminders of important deadlines or dates. Consider this "sacred ground," reserved for only the most pressing of announcements created by a designated few. If possible and appropriate, target your alerts to distinct groups so they only display to employees for whom they are relevant. This can improve the impact of the alerts for those that need it and decrease general anxiety and confusion for the rest of the organization.
2. **News.** In many organizations, the News sections of their intranets are often utilized by corporate communications for presenting high-level strategic and brand messages. While an emergency is no time for that type of messaging, it is also not a time to go silent. The News section is the perfect place for senior leadership to talk directly with employees, reassuring them that there is a plan in place and the organization values its people.
3. **Documents.** The last thing you want is for your employees to feel the frustration of not being able to find the most recent and relevant information they need in the moment. Whether it is work-from-home instructions and policies,



*With a modern intranet you can instantly push critical news and information to employees.*

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

access to health care documents, or a crisis plan, having a clear information architecture and well-structured taxonomy will help employees search for and find the documents they need quickly and efficiently. Links to important and timely documentation can also be included in news articles, added to FAQs and organized into Quicklink lists.

4. **Collaboration.** When employees have to work from home or otherwise remotely, they can begin to feel isolated and alone—yet in a crisis, people want to feel connected. When employees have the tools and opportunities to work together no matter where they are, disruptions to “office life” are much less...disruptive. If your organization relies on the collaboration tools of the modern Digital Workplace already, this may be “business as usual.” However, a crisis is an excellent time to remind your teams of those tools for working collaboratively— it may help facilitate a return to normalcy that many people crave during a crisis.
5. **Social.** As important as clear communication from senior leadership is, people also need to hear from their friends and co-workers. Absolutely use the already-established channels on Teams, Yammer, Slack, or other tools to engage with employees during a crisis. Ask how they are doing. If people are isolated or stuck in one place, look for ways to spark conversation and connection so people can find comfort in each other. (Virtual happy hours, cooking demos, home tours a la “MTV Cribs,” and book groups are just four examples.)



### Building a stronger, more resilient community in times of crisis with your intranet

Crises can bring out the best people and in organizations. Study after study shows people want to have a connection to their place of work, and the stronger and more positive that connection is, and the more resilient the organization is. While so much of our time in corporate life is focused on making smart business decisions and driving profitability for our stakeholders, a crisis is an opportunity to provide a different but intrinsically related type of value for employees.

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

If employee experience is the sum of all the experiences an employee has from their first interaction with the employer to their last, then how adeptly an organization handles a crisis can be crucial in this important business metric. When as leaders we are present and proactive, no matter what the crisis, we help our employees, and our organizations, not just survive a crisis but come through stronger and more resilient. A modern intranet, if utilized with an intelligent strategy incorporating these five features, can be a key factor in building that resilience.

### Chapter 3

# 9-Point Checklist for Remote Working During any Business Disruption

Remote working is now standard business operating procedure, whether an organization's workforce numbers in the dozens or the thousands. It's all about Job #1: Keeping employees, vendors, clients, and customers safe.

Your next priority is the operational continuity of your organization, and Digital Workplace technology is the key to it. Now it's time to check your Digital Workplace tech to make sure it—and your people—are ready for an extended, productive period of all hands working from home.

### Your 9-point tech checklist for effective remote working

- 1. Hardware and support.** If employees are borrowing company laptops, monitors, etc., that hardware must be inventoried, signed out, and accounted for. Also, IT teams need to write up, implement, and distribute hardware support procedures.
- 2. Home Internet.** Not only has remote working become the new normal, but with schools and universities closing and instituting distance learning and online classes, entire families are now home full-time. Employees **MUST** confirm that their home internets have ample, reliable bandwidth to support their demands for work, school, and, yes, streaming services to keep the kids diverted.
- 3. Video conferencing.** What's the capacity of your current platform and license? Can it handle the highest-volume situation you can reasonably envision?





## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

4. **File storage/data governance.** What naming and filing conventions are in place? How compliant are your employees? Who is responsible for managing and enforcing compliance? Content search in a Digital Workplace only works when all users speak the same language of file naming. And people won't be able to tap their office mates on the shoulder to ask, "Hey, where can I find...?"
5. **Passwords and security.** Review all your permissions to ensure employees can only go where they belong. This is also the time to initiate multi-factor authentication across your Digital Workplace.
6. **Project management.** A cloud-based project management platform such as Microsoft Project, Asana, or Monday.com is one of your most valuable tools when it comes to day-to-day continuity and delivery—and that value multiplies with remote workers.
7. **Time reporting.** Likewise, a cloud-based time-tracking platform like Harvest or Toggl is priceless for managing project budgets. Even better: time-tracking that integrates with project management.
8. **Integrations.** To expand on point #7, look into any opportunities to integrate tools you're currently using. Yes, some integrations admittedly work better than others. But when your tools are "playing nice together," less friction and more efficiency result. That's what you want in times like this when your workplace is disrupted.



Content search in a Digital Workplace only works when all users speak the same language of file naming. And people won't be able to tap their office mates on the shoulder to ask, "Hey, where can I find...?"

9. **And one more little thing that can figure big for business continuity:** If you use desk phones, make sure employees forward theirs to their cell phones.

Effective remote working—particularly during a long-term disruption like the one we're currently experiencing, requires three critical factors: Technology, connectivity, and consistent management best practices, constantly applied.

### Chapter 4

## 9 Tips for Better Online Training During a Crisis (or Anytime)

New remote workers are learning necessary new skills and practices to fulfill their roles in business continuity. We can learn volumes from Google searches and YouTube demos, but sometimes the job calls for a formal training session. Use these 5 tips to create and deliver more effective online trainings.

### Seize the opportunity to improve your online training.

Remote working is old hat for some of us, but sooner or later we all need to learn new skills or tools as more and more people work from home. In addition, tools like Microsoft Teams, Slack, and Zoom are rolling out new features to enable better workforce productivity. This will become increasingly important even after the current crisis subsides (see Elisabeth Marsh's [compendium of digital skills](#) and Dom Nicastro's piece on [digital employee skills](#)).



StitchDX is a digital experience agency; we partner with software providers to help organizations create better digital experiences for both customers and employees. In that partnership role, we often lead or create training sessions for our customers. Drawing on that experience, we can share our top guiding lights for better online training.

### Keep these 9 tips in mind to make your online training better.

#### 1. Start with the end in mind.

Know why you are asking for people's time and attention and what you are giving them in return. Be very clear about what you want them to understand and, if appropriate, be able to do. This is actually an important distinction. While it is far

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

better for them to understand the logic behind a system, so they can figure out how to use the system more easily, you also need to strike the balance between the theoretical and the practical (see Tip #4).

### 2. Respect your audience.

Your students are gifting you with their attention. Treat it with respect. Know why they are tuning in and what they are hoping to gain from spending training time with you online.

### 3. Teach the fringe scenarios.

This may seem absolutely counterintuitive, but consider: The simple, straightforward tasks demonstrated in the vast majority of online trainings we've witnessed (or been hired to do) can be best demonstrated with short, quick 5-minute videos, or, even better, quick tips on the platform itself. When we conduct trainings, we feel we deliver the highest value when we explain and walk through what to do when the use cases are slightly different than the "norm." Some of the productive training time is when we walk users through the "what if I want to..." scenarios.



### 4. Focus on tasks.

Too many online trainings are given by software experts who understandably want to pass on their knowledge of (and perhaps passion for) the software. The problem is that most training is an overview of the main features of a software—but that is not how people work. Do some research, find out the tasks that your audience faces every day, and show them how to do those. For instance, "How do I invite people to a meeting?" "How do I access and edit a shared file and then share it with others?"

### 5. Explain once, show twice.

Our trainers try to keep their explanations as simple and straightforward as possible. They'll explain, "I am going to do X, then Y, and then Z," and then they'll walk through it slowly until the final step. They ask if there are questions and then often walk through it one more time, a little more quickly.

### 6. Keep it short and focused.

Twenty to 40 minutes is about the right length for an online training. Any longer than that, and the majority of what they learn can't be put to use immediately. In addition, the folks dialing in from home have more distractions to contend with. Building off Tip #2, prepare your students with quick videos that demonstrate how the system works in the best-case scenario. This will cut down on the time you need to demonstrate the basic things and allow you to focus on those "what if" cases.

### 7. Record and write.

Arguably *the* most important task in any sort of training is hitting the "record button." As Asif Rhemani reminds us in [CMSwire](#), "People forget most of what they learn within 24 hours after training. They find the learning curve too disruptive to their work." Having that recording to go back to is invaluable. Another tactic: Make sure to have written directions to send to attendees right after the training. The best case is topic-specific user manual covering what you taught during the session, but even links to more resources is super-helpful.



Do some research, find out the tasks that your audience faces every day, and show them how to do those.

### 8. Take Questions.

Decide early how you want to handle questions—blurted out during the presentation, at specific junctures, held for the end, written in the chat window—decide what works for you and the situation. As Rhemani notes, "People will definitely have questions following a training session, so make sure you follow every live training session with a live [Q&A session](#). The event gives everyone a chance to learn from their peers."

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for the Current Crisis

### 9. Have some fun with it!

Learning can be messy and online training perhaps even more so. Keep your sense of humor and assume best intent. Remote working will continue to be critical through the next few months as we transition out of the shutdown. New training for team members will be implemented online, questions and concerns will be delivered remotely, and management will have to adapt to a changing environment.

Using our 5 tips, you can improve your online training tactics and keep your employees informed.





### Chapter 5

# Build Your Digital Workplace on These 3 Mighty Pillars

When we ask customers what they hope to achieve when they build a new Digital Workplace, we typically get answers that describe lots of different hopes and dreams and frustrations. Although the details might vary from organization to organization, they generally fall into one of three buckets:

- **Relevance**
- **Usefulness**
- **Connection**

These three themes—within the overarching goals of optimized productivity and business continuity— provide an excellent framework for organizing the key features as you build your ideal Digital Workplace. (An “ideal” DWP will drive greater employee engagement, collaboration, innovation, and productivity.) And when your people are more engaged, collaborative, and innovative, they will in turn drive your desired business outcomes such as revenue growth, efficiency, and cost containment.

Think of *relevance*, *usefulness*, and *connection* as the “3 mighty pillars” that a successful Digital Workplace requires. As you weigh your Digital Workplace needs, consider how you can build on these three pillars.

### Digital Workplace Pillar #1: Relevance

Relevance is about providing the information that is meaningful to your employees at any particular moment. According to CMS Wire, nearly 50% of professionals struggle with documents and content scattered across disparate applications and storage locations. The same article cites a Gartner report that 85% of a typical company’s information is unstructured and unorganized.



## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

You probably don't have to imagine the tremendous employee frustration and wasted time that result from these conditions—you probably *experience* it every workday.

*What if that wasn't the case?*

With an intelligently designed Digital Workplace, you get everything you need and nothing you don't. The information you see is tailored to your department, your role in the organization, and your physical location. There is an almost infinite variety of content types and categories that can be used to provide targeted information to individuals, but most Digital Workplace employee portals start with:

- **News items.** With more and more people generating and sharing news items, it is easy to get buried in items that are not relevant to you. Keeping your employees informed with key news and updates is critical when everyone is a remote worker. Good enterprise-level Digital Workplaces show accounting news to accountants, marketing news to marketers, and corporate news to everyone.

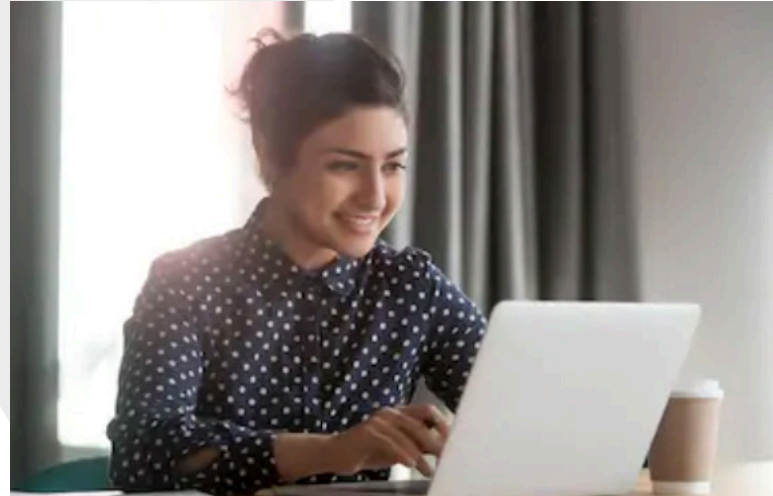


Think of relevance, usefulness, and connection as the “3 mighty pillars” that a successful Digital Workplace requires.

- **Document library.** Again, one key to a good Digital Workplace is having “everything you need and nothing you don't.” This is particularly true in a document library where you are often looking for a specific document with specific criteria. With document list views and targeted search, you see what you need almost before you know you need it. (It gets better: As AI comes to enterprise intranets, search will become more predictive, learning from each individual's search history, position and role, and interactions with others.)
- **Alerts.** Important messages get their own space at the top of the website.

## Digital Workplace Pillar #2: Usefulness

Information and tools are only as good as they are useful. A well-designed Digital Workplace, like any good workspace, has the tools and resources that you need close by, clearly labeled, and ready to use. Clearly, the growth of Siri, Alexa, and all the other voice assistants demonstrate that we want someone to serve us with information quickly and easily. In a digital world, we create bookmarks or drop icons that allow us to quickly switch from program to program, document to document, without having to search or navigate through endless folders or jump from browser tab to browser tab.



While we can't anticipate every need our users might have, here are a few that show up time and time again:

- **Specialized lists.** If you have a list of specialized documents or content types that users refer to over and over again, why not show it?
- **FAQ.** Think of the hours saved across the entire enterprise if you can provide the answers to common questions right there in your Digital Workplace platform.
- **Quicklinks.** Whether the links are to other parts of your intranet, third party vendors, or trusted news sources, you can provide your users with easy, one-click access to pretty much anything, anywhere. Make it easy for employees to book a room, put in for time off, submit expenses, or access professional development resources.

## Digital Workplace Pillar #3: Connection

Lastly, and probably most importantly, a good intranet brings employees "into the fold." Study after study shows that employees perform far better when they are engaged, valued, and made to feel part of a community. This is particularly true for large, diverse, and distributed organizations.

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

Whether your coworkers are in the next cubicle or around the world, being able to share stories about your child's high school graduation or the recipe for that potato salad you brought to the company picnic creates a connection. Here are some important ways large organizations are using Digital Workplaces to create a sense of community among their employees:

- **Photo and Video Galleries.** A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it remains worthless if buried on some remote drive where nobody ever goes.
- **Directory and Profile information.** While most enterprises are organized into departments or teams or levels, the reality is that it is all about the people. You need to know who is doing what.
- **Department Pages.** Most people like to feel part of a team. They like to have a place where they belong. In large enterprises where any single contribution may get buried, it's validating to have a department page where work, and resources are on display and easy to get to.

### In conclusion: 3 mighty pillars = 1 mightily engaged workforce

As you may have noticed, many of these features could belong with more than one pillar. The point here is not to define a rigid taxonomy but to show examples of how each feature provides a benefit. A good Digital Workplace may have lots of different features and tools. A successful one will provide these clear benefits—Relevance, Usefulness, and Connection—to end users. Your teams will feel more efficient and more connected to their work and colleagues. You will be less frustrated by staff time wasted looking for the documents and tools they need to do their jobs.

Research from Gallup shows 70% of the workforce is disengaged at a cost of over \$500 billion yearly. An effective Digital Workplace built on the three mighty pillars of Relevance, Usefulness, and Connection is not just an investment in a happier workplace. It is a driver of a better bottom line.





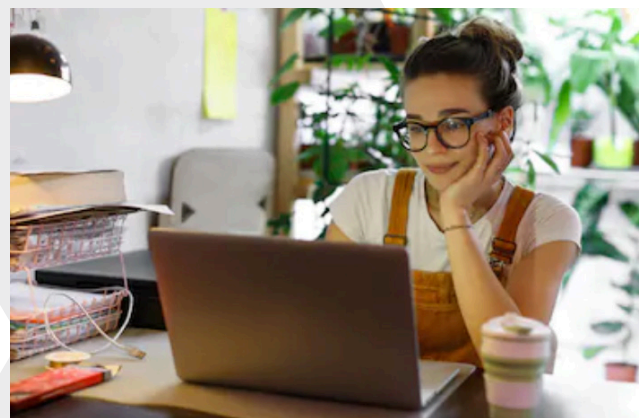
### Chapter 6

# A Better Discovery is the Path to a Better Employee Experience

You want an employee experience that reflects your organization's brand values. You need an employee experience that drives positive results for both your employees and your customers. Building a better employee experience that meets all your goals can seem daunting at first, but starting with the right steps in the beginning makes the path clear and road smoother.

First, a definition: we agree with Forbes that employee experience is the "sum of interactions employees have with the organization and with their colleagues." We're used to these interactions happening in conference rooms, in hallways, and around the water cooler.

But in the current moment, they're almost exclusively online. We call that the "digital employee experience." One key aspect (among many) of the digital employee experience is the set of digital tools that each employee uses to do their work— their "Digital Workplace."



### **You *have* a Digital Workplace. But is it the one you want?**

Even while the concepts of employee experience and Digital Workplace are gaining traction every day, many organizations are stuck with a loose constellation of legacy systems, outdated structures, and untested technologies. As they survey the disconnected set of tools they use for document storage, internal communications, customer interactions, HR functions, etc., they can get overwhelmed pretty quickly.

As a result, when it comes time to revisit their Digital Workplace, too many organizations hurriedly look for the quick fix or settle for the "it's better than what we have now" solution. The end up with something that may seem like an improvement at first but really is just papering over the cracks. Not really a solution.



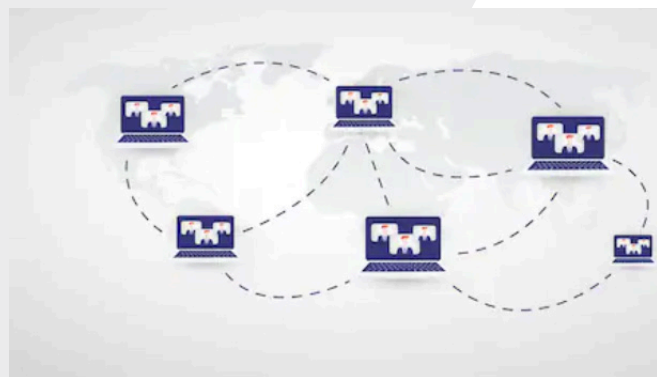
## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

An employee experience that seamlessly integrates all facets of the Digital Workplace provides tremendous benefits to the organization...but it takes time. For example, more investment in time and resources to the planning phase of implementing or revitalizing an intranet portal—a phase we refer to as the “discovery process”— can improve employee satisfaction, increase efficiency, and drive greater productivity.

### For better employee experience, start with your users’ needs.

That said, doing the discovery process right does not mean it has to be a long, drawn-out painful affair or an enormous drain on resources. Some activities in discovery are vital to the success of the project. Others are the “nice to haves.” We’ve led many organizations through this process and see these moves as worthy investments when it comes to delivering an optimal employee experience:

- **Begin by listening to as many voices as you can.** One key factor to success is gathering the right mix of stakeholders, content owners, technical experts, and decision makers to work on the project. You may not need everyone all the time but getting the right people to the table is vital.
- **Decide what you are trying to achieve before you decide what you want.** Most project owners get caught up in the features of an intranet. Try to keep your team focused on what end users need to do their jobs well.
- **Allow for lots of time for wireframing and discussing the details.** This phase is not given nearly enough credit (and time). Finishing wireframes and documenting the required functionality is an important step in connecting what users see and how the site operates.
- **Don’t forget IA.** Information architecture is how you organize and structure your content so users can easily find what they are looking for. The goal is to always be providing content that is both relevant and useful.



## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

- **Start small and iterate quickly.** While there may be reasons to do everything at once, many successful projects start with a smaller pilot and grow based on user experiences and feedback.

### Slow down to go fast (and save money).

In the current time of disruption, designing the optimal employee experience might take a backseat to implementing “whatever works” now and promising to revisit it when the waters calm a bit. Such an immediate solution *may* help you enable your remote workforce for better collaboration and greater productivity over the short term.

But when you engage in a thoughtful, methodical discovery process, you find opportunities for both money-saving efficiency and providing greater value for the same dollar. For example, during actual discovery processes with our customers, we’ve discovered that:

- Creating a set of standardized section and page templates for one client would save their tech team hours of work down the road.
- Demonstrating how widgets could be adjusted for one department’s specific purposes reduced the need for custom development.
- Revisiting priorities identified during the design process led one team to avoid a costly change in development costs.
- Identifying opportunities for the field staff to communicate with the home office in new ways helped shift corporate culture away from picking up the phone for every small request to more self-service.



### Reflecting your people’s best work

The best solutions tend to be ones that solve the real challenges your organization faces. If done right, a good discovery process, powered by design thinking, leads to not just a better Digital Workplace build—because it reflects input and guidance from many people. It is the path to the employee experience you not only need but also want.

### Chapter 7

# Skype is Dead. Long Live Teams!

The coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic emergency has forced businesses everywhere to reconsider the state of their remote workforce. If your organization is looking for a solution to enable employee communication and collaboration, Teams is worth a second look NOW—particularly because Skype will no longer be supported as of July 2021.

Microsoft launched Teams in 2017, but it has become one of the most widely used business communication applications in the world. [It surpassed Slack in number of users](#) back in July of 2019, and in one week in March saw [a spike in Daily Active Users](#) (DAU) from 32 million to 44 million—undeniably a direct result of the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic emergency.



Teams offers significant advantages when it comes to collaboration, communication, and file sharing. It's why we've been using it here at StitchDX for the past three years with our staff, partners, vendors, and externally with clients. It's also why we recommend it as a core component of any Digital Workplace solution.

If your organization is looking at utilizing Skype to fortify your work-from-home policy during this crisis, you might want to consider migrating to Teams.

### **Skype is going away. Make way for teams.**

In the summer of 2019, Microsoft officially announced the end-of-life for Skype for Business Online, effective July 31, 2021. After this date, organizations using Skype will be forced to use Teams for internal and external communication, screensharing, and conference calling.

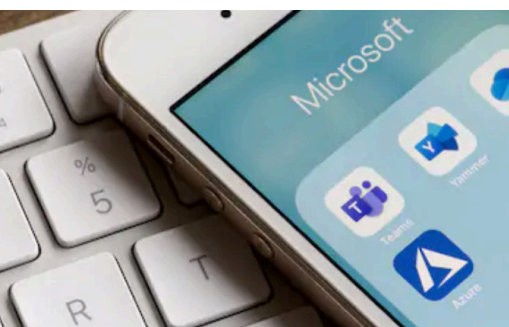
## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

Current Skype for Business customers can continue to use the existing service, including adding new users, until August 1, 2021. New customers, however, have been immediately routed to Microsoft Teams since September 1, 2019.

While this announcement is significant, it is *hardly* surprising. Microsoft has been less than subtle about their plans to put Skype in the rear-view mirror and shift to Teams as their preferred communication platform. They've made significant investments in making Microsoft Teams "the hub for teamwork," combining chat, video, voice, and document collaboration into a single, integrated application.

### Why is Microsoft making this change from Skype to Teams?

Microsoft acquired Skype in 2011. Around the same time, major advancements in mobile technology, data network reliability, and bandwidth increased employee mobility. This undoubtedly helped Skype become one of the most popular Voice Over IP (VoIP) communication tools to help gather disparate teams at organizations of every size around the world.



But as workforces have become more dispersed, there's also been a massive shift to the cloud — especially Microsoft's own SharePoint platform. As organizations continue to proliferate a growing volume of data and content, there's been an increased demand for better document management and collaboration tools. These functions are beyond the capabilities of Skype chat and video alone.

Enter Teams.

Backed by SharePoint, Teams integrates all the things people love about Skype (chat, screensharing, video conferencing) with the collaboration and document management features a modern workforce demands: file sharing, editing, notifications, social, group discussions, and more.

### How can the switch from Skype to Teams transform your organization?

Teams introduces a considerably different approach to the way most organizations function. Beyond how groups communicate, Teams shapes how they organize and govern themselves, and how they manage, control, and collaborate on their content.



Beyond how groups communicate, Teams shapes how they organize and govern themselves, and how they manage, control, and collaborate on their content.

At first glance, all the tools and capabilities of Teams and SharePoint can be overwhelming. Which is why a strategic approach to implementing Teams can help maximize your organization's existing investment in O365, streamlining operations while maintaining control of your data.

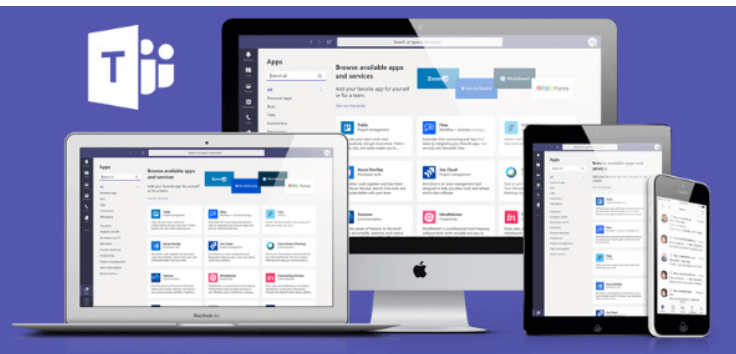
Microsoft's continuing investment in Teams means a growing list of functionalities that enable and empower your people:

- Users can chat with individuals inside and outside the organization, define ad hoc groups, save conversations, and collaborate on projects or content.
- Integrated document management and collaboration means native Microsoft documents can be viewed and edited without having to leave the app.
- Teams Channels integrate "micro-site"-like web experiences that include a shared calendar, "sync-able" document-management, news-based communication to keep everyone on the same page, and much more.
- Meanwhile, business rules allow your IT and security groups to maintain control over managing high-level permissions, taxonomy, provisioning of channels, and data governance — or decentralize by distributing the responsibility among specific users.



## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

- Scheduling meetings is much easier. Calendars are integrated into the experience to send invites from within Teams. This eliminates having to switch between Outlook and Teams to coordinate schedules.
- Teams also offers integrations with a wide range of third-party tools, including productivity solutions like Jira, Asana, and Zendesk.
- In addition to the traditional individual and group video calls, Teams has incorporated recording options, screen-sharing and remote screen-control.
- Microsoft has also introduced a more social experience to organizational chat—with support for inline emojis, gifs and stickers that give employees the ability to react and engage with their colleagues.



### Plus, Teams announced these upgrades in March of 2020:

- Noise suppression for calls
- A “raise hand” feature that promotes more orderly conversations
- “Breakout” capability for sidebar conversations
- Offline and low-bandwidth support
- New integrations

### A better employee experience awaits.

Even though Microsoft will continue to support Skype for Business into 2021, organizations that want to make the most of their Microsoft investment should begin considering a strategic implementation of Teams now.

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

Using our proprietary Discovery process, we've helped implement Digital Workplace experiences with Microsoft Teams and SharePoint at the core. We've seen how a thoughtful implementation of Teams can drive better utilization and transform the way organizations work.



Microsoft Teams allows your employees to feel constantly connected and be easily accessible as we all work through the current crisis. From video calls to file sharing with SharePoint, its full suite of capabilities, in our opinion, allows the best replication of the in-

office experience that your remote workers have left behind that can maximize your workplace.

## Chapter 8

# How Multi-Factor Authentication Helps Secure your Digital Workplace

### A better employee experience awaits.

The reason for creating finely tuned digital employee experiences (EX) and customer experiences (CX) is simple: You do it to [accelerate the growth of your organization](#). But right now we want to discuss how to use multi-factor authentication in your Digital Workplace to protect the business results and growth you're already working to achieve.

As we continue to depend on the Digital Workplace and online communications to optimize remote workforce performance, ensuring security for your organization is more critical than ever. Protecting your organization as we work through this transition is one less thing you want to worry about.



### Bad things can happen when you DON'T use multi-factor authentication in your Digital Workplace.

The following is a true story.

In late 2019 we learned about a small, service-based business that fell victim to a six-figure cyber fraud. Hackers had gained access to their bookkeeper's email. Once in, they generated fake invoices (using the exact same format and wording), which they emailed to the firm's customers.

The catch? *The emails directed payment to a different bank account.*

Now, a question for you: How closely do you pay attention to where you send payments? Most if not all of us take it on trust that the places we're told to send payment—whether for business or personal debts—are legit.

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

So did several of those customers. And when the firm sent authentic invoices, the customers replied with receipts indicating they had already paid on the *fraudulent invoices*. Those invoices totaled more than \$100,000. That's serious, hard-earned money that the firm will likely never see again.

Which raises another, bigger question: Could your organization absorb that kind of loss (or one proportional to size of your company)? *Particularly in the current business climate?*

### What does this have to do with your Digital Workplace?

We're fond of saying "you already HAVE a Digital Workplace," even if you're not operating a unified digital intranet. If you're using ANY digital tools to get work done, then you have a Digital Workplace. In the case of the defrauded firm's bookkeeper, the Digital Workplace consisted of email and accounting software. Once the email was hacked, the Digital Workplace was compromised.

*The good news: Multi-Factor Authentication can secure your Digital Workplace against cyber fraud.*

Simply stated, [multi-factor authentication \(MFA\)](#) requires more than one verification of identity ("factor") for a user to access an application, data, or service. You can dive into the Web as deeply as you wish to learn more about MFA, but we'll keep to the basics.



Authentication factors fall into three categories:

1. **Knowledge.** Something only the user knows, like a password or PIN. (Security questions such as "What was the name of your first roommate?" can seem like secrets but theoretically, they can be cracked with enough time and research.)

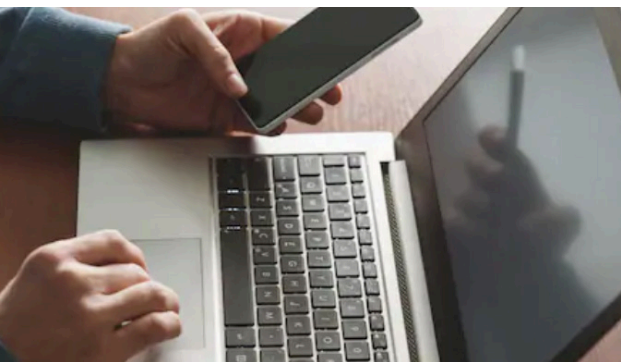
## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

2. **Possession.** Something the user and only the user *has*, typically in the form of a “token.” Analogous to a physical key to a lock, hardware and software tokens are the most common possession factors. A one-time password (OTP) to access your bank’s website is a common example. (More on OTPs shortly.)
3. **Inherence.** Something only the user is. Most commonly these are biometric factors such as fingerprint, facial recognition, iris scanning, and voiceprint recognition.

You use MFA—in the form of two-factor authentication—every day with your ATM or debit card: One factor is the chip in your card, the other is your PIN. Only you should know your PIN, so only you can use your card.

### Online, Two-Factor Authentication is becoming the standard.

We’re seeing more two-factor authentication (2FA) than ever online, and that trend will only continue. You encounter 2FA whenever a site instructs you to request a one-time password (OTP) to gain access or complete a transaction.



Sites will usually give you a choice of where and how to receive your OTP: SMS text, voice call, or email. Also, OTPs have a very short lifespan of just a few minutes, to further ensure your data security.

To top off the process, sites will also send you an email or text (your preference) advising you that someone has requested an OTP. If that someone isn’t you, the message will guide you in reporting the potential hack.

### Take these steps to secure your Digital Workplace with Multi-Factor Authentication.

Here at StitchDX, the story we told above was a wake-up call. We wasted no time activating multi-factor authentication in our Microsoft Sharepoint/O365/Teams-based Digital Workplace and have been breathing a little easier ever since.



## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

What about you? Consider all the digital tools and apps that keep your organization running. How hard are they working to protect the data that they use every day—especially financial information? Consider the software integrations that streamline the work you do. Do they represent weaknesses that hackers can exploit? And I'll ask it again: Can you afford *any* financial loss, let alone one six-figure or greater?

*Follow these steps to assess your risk and start making your Digital Workplace more secure:*

1. **Conduct an app audit** in your organization, creating a list of actively used tech in your organization. This is also a great opportunity to weed out apps and tools that are active but no longer in use.
2. **Research** if the tools you're using/keeping offer any form of MFA. You can make short work of this with Google; just search "[App name] MFA." You'll find that the most widely used apps and platforms offer 2FA, if not full MFA. Here's a sampler:
  - Microsoft Office 365
  - Adobe
  - Box
  - Dropbox
  - Google
  - Gusto
  - HubSpot
  - Marketo
  - Monday
  - PayPal
  - QuickBooks
  - Slack
3. **Activate** 2FA or MFA, following the instructions for each tool (look in "account settings").



### Amp up your Digital Workplace security with authenticator apps.

Hackers will stop at nothing and that includes [hijacking your smartphone's number or](#)

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

[SIM](#). Authenticator apps such as Microsoft Authenticator, Google Authenticator, Authy, and DuoMobile harden your Digital Workplace security by preventing hackers from redirecting your 2FA notifications to their own devices. [This Wired article](#) goes into greater detail on the advantages of authenticator apps.

### One last question: 2FA or MFA?

It would seem obvious that more = better when it comes to authentication factors. But depending on the size of your organization and the nature of the data you're aiming to protect, a deep MFA protocol may or may not be called for. Additionally (and getting back to employee experience), your users may find MFA to be a speed bump, slowing down (ever-so-slightly) their productivity and performance.



You may discover that you need to strike a balance between security and convenience. And you may come to the conclusion that for your enterprise, security is non-negotiable.

We can't say it strongly enough: It's time to implement a multi-factor authentication plan in your organization. Start the conversation with your IT department or provider *now*, before your business becomes the next victim of cyber crime.

# Case Study: Digital Workplace Crisis Response

## Barnes & Noble Education

When Barnes & Noble Education (BNED) launched their new intranet portal in the fall of 2019, it was a drastic improvement over the preexisting intranet. The old version was not much more than a link farm with outdated information and little engagement. The new portal, which included BNED and their subsidiary Barnes & Noble College (BNC), boasted a beautiful interface, a dynamic news page, and the ability for groups to easily create and modify pages. With more than 450 stores across the country, BNC in particular required effective channels for distributing vital instructions and documentation.

## Equipped and ready for the emerging crisis

As universities and colleges across the country began to close down in early March as the coronavirus spread, BNED and BNC had an advantage. They were able to act quickly and effectively by utilizing their new intranet as the internal hub for their COVID-19 response for employees.

Corporate Communications began by posting messages from senior leadership to the entire enterprise. This helped set the tone for the crisis: senior leadership was in charge and prioritized the health and safety of their employees above all else.



By using their new intranet, Corporate was able to set the tone for the crisis: senior leadership was in charge and prioritized the health and safety of their employees above all else.

On a tactical level, the operations team began posting specific instructions on how stores should begin winding down their stores and transitioning to remote work where possible. When the updates became a daily feed, BNC added a customized news block to the home page spotlighting their COVID-19 content. When the volume of content became too much to handle in that space, they created a

## Optimizing Your Existing Digital Workplace for Now and the Future

dedicated “COVID-19 News & Resources” page. This has been mission-critical for getting important information out to stores and distribution centers.

### Key Actions:

- News and messages from senior leadership
- Regular updates on company-wide and specific department changes
- Detailed information and documentation on protocols for shutting down non-essential business functions
- Opportunities for communication and collaboration among office staff now working from home

# Conclusion

Organizations with Digital Workplaces that empower and connect their employees will:

- Maintain viability during the current pandemic
- Thrive in the transformed business landscape that awaits.
- Position themselves for business continuity in future times of crisis.

We hope the insights in this eBook will help your organization leverage the Digital Workplace to better weather the current storm and emerge on a solid footing for future success. We wish your organization success, and you and your people continued health and safety.



# About StitchDX

We are a digital experience agency focused on helping organizations engage with all their customer audiences—internal and external.

Our brand-first approach delivers services and solutions that help you optimize user experience, improve marketing, and leverage technology to achieve high-impact growth goals for employee engagement and customer acquisition.

StitchDX threads together expertise in digital workplace, content creation, UX/UI design, brand strategy, digital marketing, lead generation, employee engagement, and website development for a diverse client roster of SMBs and large enterprises.



We are proud to partner with Powell Software to deliver exceptional digital workplace solutions that propel productivity and strengthen company culture. Powell's products enrich the employee user experience and adoption of Office 365, Microsoft Teams, and SharePoint through modern interfaces and optimized governance.

Whether you seek to improve work management and collaboration, or drive strategic marketing efforts, let's talk. We're here to guide you through the dizzying landscape of technology choices and help you leverage the digital experience platform that's right for you.

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