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Do what matters more

The push for productivity

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Organisations in the UK are in the midst of something of a productivity crisis, and none more so than those in the mid market. Small to medium businesses (SMBs) are responsible for 60% of private sector employment, but are all too often time and resource-poor. As a result, productivity can (and has) taken a nosedive. And the impact of low productivity can be huge. Research we conducted, suggested that up to two months a year are lost to poor productivity.
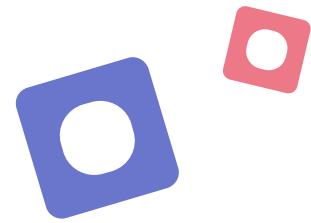
So what's the cause of this crisis?

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Low productivity can be caused by any number of things. From lack of employee training to poor communication, inconsistencies in an organisation, or simply too much of everything. More and more, we're also hearing of poor productivity as a result of software issues. Employees are struggling to access the data they need, or are using too many isolated systems, and therefore wasting time on remembering how to use each one or entering multiple passwords. But just as it might seem that technology is limiting the workplace in this respect, it can also be the key to unlocking so much more.

In this ebook, we'll explore how technology can help organisations break down that barrier to productivity, and how you can utilise the right kind of solutions to get back to doing more of what matters the most.

Contents

Tech and your people

There's no doubt that running an organisation can be tough. And when you're already short on time and resources, trying to tackle a slump in productivity can feel like a pretty big hill to climb. Technology seems the solution, but with so much on the market it can be hard to know where to start. Many senior managers worry that it'll bring with it over-complicated processes and bureaucracy, not to mention concerns surrounding implementation disruption. The question always seems to loom: should we be fearing it, or embracing it?

It's sometimes easy to forget that technology is something which enables us every day, to the extent that we often don't think twice about it. Just look at GPS tracking; in the early days of its adoption, it had something of a 'Big Brother' feel to it - technology that was able to see where we are at all times sounded crazy and intimidating! But now it benefits our modern lives, both in a personal and professional sense, without question. The founder of GPS even won the Queen's awards for Outstanding Engineering, so it's safe to say that times, and attitudes, have certainly changed.

As technology continues to play a growing role in the world, one of the biggest impacts we see is on the people who engage with it. Where there was once fear that it would replace and confine people, it's now demonstrably enabling them to do more than ever before. By bringing the right technology and your people together, you can unlock incredible opportunities and really start to accelerate productivity across the board. Because at its core, technology simply works to set people free - and it's only then that productivity can flourish.

Technology + people = freedom

As we've mentioned, technology is no longer about confining people, or over-complicating their roles. It's about helping them to do more with a freedom they didn't have before. And with freedom comes some pretty great things!

Imagine not needing to spend hours a day on outdated systems that don't work the same way your business does. Imagine the majority of your team's week not being taken up completing routine tasks. Imagine a bespoke solution that addresses all of your pain points, and is designed to make life as simple as possible.

This is what the right technology can do. It means your people can focus on doing more of the value-adding aspects of their job roles, which will ultimately make them want to give more of their best. And it means you can support them properly, through training or improving processes, or just being with your team when they need you.

It simply offers the freedom to do more.

The future of the people/tech convergence

One of the most exciting things about the technology revolution is that there are little to no limits as to how far it can go. The productivity challenges we face in the workplace are sure to evolve over time, so it's natural to assume that technology will evolve in order to meet them head-on. With that said, let's look briefly to the future with two examples - the first being the impact on recruitment.

Technology has the potential to have a significant impact on the way the recruitment industry operates, specifically when it comes to finding the right candidate for a role. [In fact it's already happening](); in March 2019 Swedish recruiters tested the first robot interviewer, Tengai, with the aim of reducing bias in job interviews. Tengai screens candidates by asking questions in an identical manner, with no pre-interview chit chat - meaning an impartial decision can be made without the interviewer forming a biased first impression. Looking further to the future, we could see a robot service designed to scan and analyse CVs - taking significantly less time than manual reviews by a human, and freeing up recruiters' time for other purposes.

The second example we'll look at is the subject of wearable tech. Once an accessory just for the health conscious, it's safe to say that wearable tech has evolved in recent times. From fitness trackers and smart watches, we're steadily stepping further into the world of sci-fi; think smart glasses, wearables and even exoskeletons. And businesses are starting to take note, implementing this new age of technology that converges people and tech in the most literal way possible.

So why is wearable tech proving to be such an important part of the modern workplace? The answer lies in the current environment. In developed countries, we're facing an increasingly ageing workforce, with stats from Deloitte forecasting that by 2026, 37% of people aged 65-69 in the US will still be actively employed. Workplace injury costs are also taking their toll on the purse strings, with the most recent stats out of the UK reporting a £15bn annual payout. It's no wonder, then, that businesses are implementing tech that seems to tackle both of these realities. Let's take a look in more depth at some of the solutions currently being explored.

Where businesses are employing manual labour, exoskeletons can be used to support and increase physical strength while conserving energy, so that employees can carry out strenuous tasks for longer periods of time, including lifting heavy objects. This is revolutionary to this aforementioned older workforce, giving them greater opportunities and allowing them to become more productive despite the age barriers.

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When it comes to increasing efficiency, 'head-up displays' (HUDs) are also on the rise. These are transparent display screens, showing data in a way that means the user doesn't need to look away from their line of sight. Not only does HUD technology provide safer working conditions (allowing workers to retain full focus), it means they can also check instructions or relevant information without having to stop working.

Wearable tech is a great example of how businesses can really bring technology and people together in order to drive success. While it's still very much a future concept, it could one day become commonplace just as GPS tracking has - a way of working that truly aligns technology and people in a positive way.

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How workplace technology can transform your organisation

Let's take a deeper dive into technology's impact on the workplace. It can be pretty significant for any organisation, but none more so than for SMBs. The right technology can completely transform the mid-market for the better; where management previously struggled, they find that technology has removed many of the burdens and issues that can get in the way of doing what matters the most.

Any investment comes with a risk, so it's understandable the first question many businesses ask is 'how will this help me?' There are so many different types of technology available, each working differently for every sector, size and skillset, and each coming with their own unique set of benefits.

With that said, there are some fairly universal pros that almost all businesses would benefit from. Here are just a few:

The right data at the right time

Getting the numbers right is essential for any business and the right software can deliver the highest levels of accuracy. Having a single source of data means staff across different departments, sites, and even remote workers have access to the same information. This will help retain data integrity and minimise errors because all employees can update information from wherever they are. Subsequently they will also spend less time trying to find what they need.

Greater collaboration

The introduction of workplace management tools means team coordination and collaboration has never been easier! Access Workspace is a prime example of this. Because it provides a single source of information via a centralised system, it means efforts between teams aren't duplicated. Employees can speed up workloads and avoid the issues that come with working in silos.

Applications such as Slack and Basecamp are also great for collaboration, allowing real-time communication regardless of physical location. Some tools even allow you to hold meetings remotely via video conferencing, or work simultaneously on the same document, so no matter where you are, it needn't impact on project timelines.

Easy compliance

The right care management software can make it easy to maintain standards. This benefit is particularly useful when it comes to audits and helps to ensure compliance with the latest regulations. The care industry in particular can benefit from easier compliance with care plans, and ultimately improved CQC inspection ratings.

A better office culture

When technology works hard and works smart, life becomes a lot easier for the people using it. Employees feel more empowered to do their job, and their job satisfaction increases - which more often than not can result in a boost to their output.

Read more about how employee wellbeing is closely linked to productivity.

Software solutions and the impact on productivity

When we asked managers about their productivity pain points, the responses we received all shared similar themes; their job involved using too many systems so data was hard to access when they needed it. They also cited communication issues, again caused by too many non-integrated systems. It's clear that in order to turn these pain points around, things need to be brought together, to unblock what's standing in the way and provide that much sought-after productivity boost. The right kind of software can do exactly that - let's look at how.

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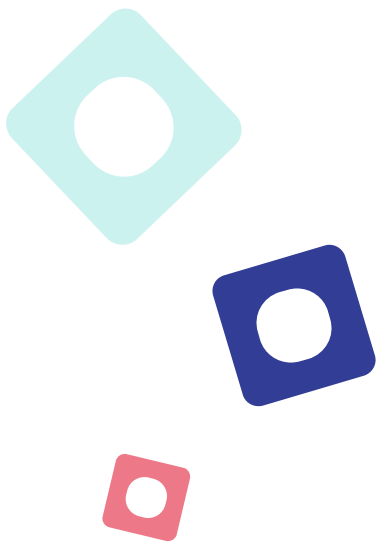
Total integration

Hardly any software solutions provide a single source of data - everything, all in one place for everyone. But the best in class do, and when it comes to knowledge management, this is invaluable. It means that no matter who's in the role, be it an experienced employee or someone brand new, they'll be equipped with the information they need to do their job efficiently and effectively. They'll often only need a single sign-on to access it, too.

This complete integration can lift a huge weight from business owners and management. Not only does it mean all the company data is in one place, but it means building a relationship with just a single supplier. No more going between multiple companies and systems means more time freed up to do other things.

[Cloud technology](#) is something else that's aiding integration in a big way. Its incredible accessibility means that, regardless of location, employees can access files, tools and data from any internet-connected device. And with the freedom to collaborate in real time the chances of bottlenecks occurring become a lot smaller.

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Powerful apps

In today's world, apps help us rapidly complete tasks on a daily basis. Just look at our smartphones and tablets, filled with all kinds of applications that help us do or find things wherever we are. But when it comes to the business world, apps are fairly non-existent - why is that, when they could prove so useful?

Some software providers have now addressed and tapped into this (Access being one of them!), and are offering bespoke suites of apps designed to help staff in the areas they need it most. Some tasks, like booking holiday requests or submitting expenses, are common to all employees in every industry and can be made faster and easier through apps.

Other apps support staff in their particular job role or industry, and aid them in the tasks they do most regularly. For example, the Hospitality sector employs staff as GMs and operations to finance and front of house. Disparate systems for managing bookings, EPOS transactions, stock, purchase to pay, F&B requirements, property maintenance and people slow things down. Having hospitality software with customisable apps ensures that each team member sees the business critical information that is relevant to them, at the touch of a button.

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Not everyone needs a full software licence for every system, they just need the ability to complete their specific tasks quickly and easily, so they have the freedom to deliver exceptional service. These apps are doing just that.

It's distributed enablement, which drives empowerment - and the impact on productivity is pretty clear. With people essentially able to self-serve and help themselves to the info they need, as and when they need it, they're no longer waiting for things to be actioned by other people. That also means that whole departments, previously spending hours filtering through requests and granting access permissions to other employees, are no longer tied up. That's a lot of valuable time regained - as much as 240 hours per employee, per year. That's a pretty big deal!

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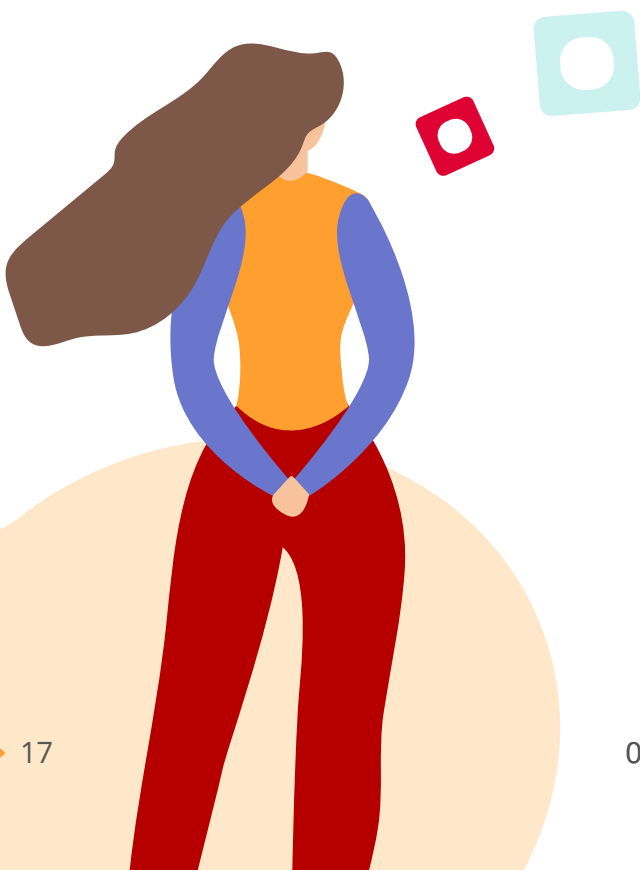
The freedom of automation

If you feel like you spend far too much of your time on routine tasks, then you're probably not alone. The definition of these tasks can change by industry, but they tend to have one thing in common: they're a drain on both people and time. It can be especially frustrating in jobs we're passionate about; no one wants to spend their days filling out forms or completing audits when they could be using that time on the things that really matter.

Technology is actually working to give people this freedom back. By automating many of these routine tasks, it allows management to get back on the floor, offering support to their teams and simply doing more with their time - whether that's providing great levels of care or knuckling down in the kitchen. And let's face it, anything that gets people's heads out of their laptops and paperwork and back to adding real value to the organisation can only be described as a productivity champion.

The potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Once a phenomenon reserved solely for the movies, AI is here - and it's penetrating the workplace. From chatbots to self-service machines to fully-fledged virtual assistants, a whole host of new technology is being introduced with the intention of supporting, automating and augmenting employees' tasks. Machine learning can now be used to help with customer queries, analyse huge amounts of data, and even assist with manual labour roles.

It's reported that 37% of companies have already invested in AI in an effort to get ahead of the competition, and it's a figure that's only going to increase. In fact, Gartner predicts that by 2021, 70% of organisations will assist their employees' productivity by integrating AI into the workplace. But with it comes its own unique challenges, and it's clear this is a journey that's only just beginning.

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The workplace of the future

There's no doubt that much of the excitement surrounding the idea of AI in the workplace stems from its sheer potential - potential to create opportunities the likes of which we've never seen before, and truly transform the way we do things. It provides a unique opportunity to make the workplace a pleasurable, optimised environment for every single person.

Let's just imagine an AI-enhanced workspace of the future; one where an employee enters their office, and the lights adjust to suit their preference. Where they sit at their desk, and it adjusts to their optimum height. Where there's no need for them to sign in, because their computer recognises their voice and does it automatically. Even the air quality within the environment is controlled to better improve concentration. In an AI-enhanced future, employees will have the freedom to focus on the aspects of their job that matter the most, without the burden of the things that tend to get in the way. It's perhaps no wonder, then, that it's causing such a buzz.

Implementing AI

With the potential for AI to significantly accelerate productivity, many businesses want to get up and running with it as quickly as possible. But the technology is so fast-moving that it risks becoming outdated before the implementation process is complete. Therefore it's essential that you don't just strive to incorporate AI into your strategy just for the sake of it. It absolutely needs to align with your business goals, work for employees and be focussed on the long term so that your organisation can develop alongside it rather than shrink in its shadow.

If your business is involved in a supply chain, you'll be aware that technology is changing the way you work, or will be soon. Big manufacturers, like Siemens and Daimler, now operate 'smart factories' – where every aspect of production is linked via a digital network. Robots with artificial intelligence capable of building parts and making decisions, and 3D modelling being used to develop products and address defects before hitting the assembly line. If you're looking to to streamline and improve efficiency in your warehousing, production and planning, check out the [Access guide to Industry 4.0.](#)

Chapter 5:

Integrating technology into the workplace

Integrating any new technology into the workplace can feel a bit daunting, and while it's certainly a big step to take, it doesn't have to be hard. It'll require exploration, research and an openness to change, but with the right support from the right people, the process can be far smoother than you ever thought possible.

Whether it's a management system, a suite of applications, or the latest in AI technology, an implementation strategy is essential to its success. While each business will have its own unique strategy, there are some universal factors that can be applied to help ensure a smooth transition.

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Start with a situation analysis

Before you can successfully integrate tech solutions into your workplace, you need a holistic view of your current situation; what's working and what isn't, and what you're trying to achieve.

You should start with asking your organisation these questions:

- Do we actually need new technology? Can our existing tech/systems meet our demands? Can it be upgraded?

- Are we falling behind our competitors?

- Are employees engaged and motivated in the workplace? If not, why?

- Do employees have what they need to do their jobs to the best of their ability?

- Will new tech help us align with our business goals?

Armed with these answers, you'll be able to more clearly shape your requirements, assess the urgency of your needs and implement the right software change.

Employee participation and engagement

Employee buy-in is a necessary part of the process, if not a little tricky. Change in any organisation will be met with a variety of reactions and if you fail to win over some of the workforce you'll struggle to get the real benefits out of the software. You need to be open throughout the process; the 'why' should always be evident when introducing new systems, so it's important to make it clear why it's come about and how the changes will benefit the individuals.

Be prepared for plenty of questions - it's the perfect chance to understand your employees' pain points and ensure that your new tech has a solution. If it's not addressing some of these pain points, it's perhaps worth going back to the drawing board and changing your focus.

It's also a good idea to identify some technology 'champions' - people in your organisation who will act as promoters and be able to gather feedback from others 'on the ground'. They'll also be able to act as mentors to others and bridge a potential training gap.

Training and resources

Training is often a major part of the implementation process and can often be where things go off-plan, particularly for smaller and mid-sized organisations. A lack of time, resource and expertise can mean that employees don't get the benefit of a full training programme before new technology is rolled out. This can ultimately be counterproductive to the end goal, and divert attention away from other pressing concerns of the organisation.

To best tackle this issue, we recommend looking for a software vendor that doesn't require heavy implementation, where the software is easy for users to learn and to use.

Many software providers also assign a dedicated account manager or customer success manager to help with implementation and beyond. Take advantage of yours, as they're there to help make it a smooth journey. As experts in the ins and outs of your solution, they can assist with the adoption process and answer any questions you might have. Be sure to ask about best practices, how-tos and any shortcuts you can make use of.

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It's all in the timing

When the pressure's mounting, it can be tempting to give in to the urge to roll out everything at once. It's the same mentality as ripping off a plaster - just get it over with. But adopting change takes time, and value can be lost by not implementing in a mindful way. On the other hand, one of the most common complaints of digital transformation is the length of time it takes to implement new systems. You don't want to risk losing engagement, or risk your tech falling behind that of competitors before it's even up and running. So is there ever a right pace?

The best thing is to just be realistic with your timeframe. Be mindful of your resources and create a roadmap that gives adequate time to each stage of the process.

Review, and review again

The journey's never really over, even after go-live. You should always be looking to the future and seeing how you deliver continuous improvement. Be sure to factor in time to revisit your software and iron out any kinks, and potentially plan additional phases.

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Conclusion

The push for productivity is something organisations worldwide are working towards on a daily basis, and it seems clear that integration with the right technology is the way to bridge the gap. Whatever the technology might be - from the out-there things of the future to the systems we use every single day, what truly matters is how we feel about it and how it works with us. It's a coming together of sorts - intuitive tech and engaged people, and the result can only be better productivity.

So go ahead and start the convergence: discover how to utilise technology to boost employee wellbeing and empower your organisation to do more of what really matters.
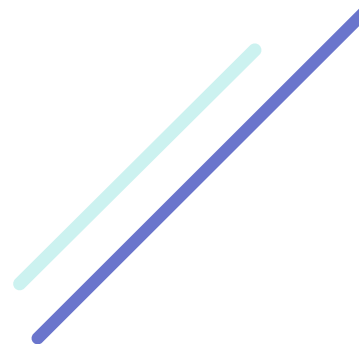
About the Access Group

The Access Group has been recognised in The Sunday Times Tech Track 100 in 2019 and is a leading provider of business software to mid-sized UK organisations. It helps more than 20,000 customers across commercial and not-for-profit sectors become more productive and efficient. Its innovative Access Workspace cloud platform transforms the way business software is used, giving every employee the freedom to do more.

Established in 1991, The Access Group, with an enterprise valuation of over £1billion, employs more than 2,000 staff.