THE TOP 5 THINGS IT CAN DO
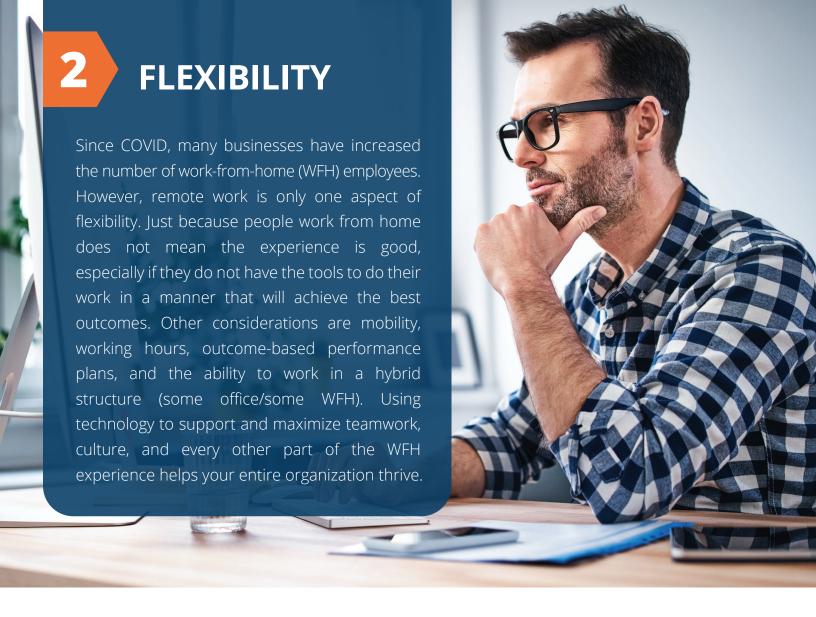## TO HELP YOUR BUSINESS THRIVE

By Thomas H. Douglas

A thriving business requires getting five things right: culture, flexibility, performance, accountability, and strategic alignment. Most organizations get one or two right, but rarely all five. Here is how IT can help you can align these five areas:
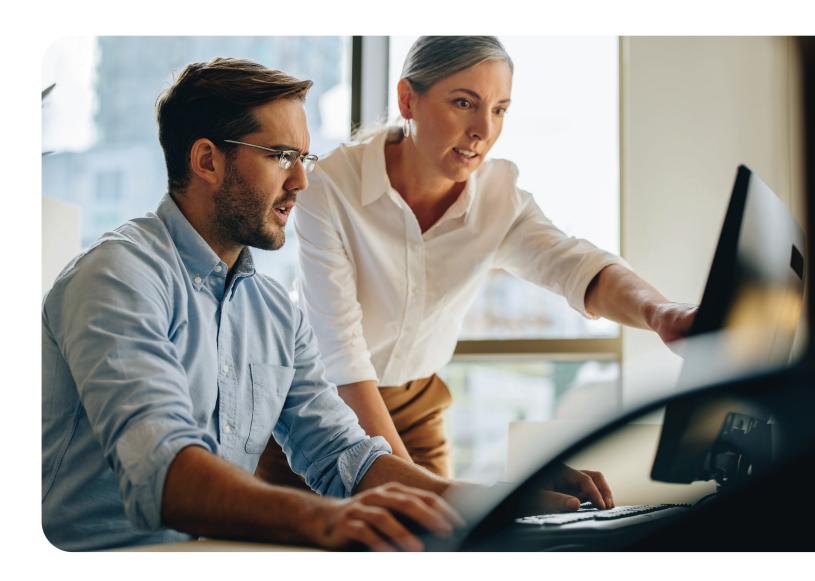
1 ▶ CULTURE

People are the biggest asset in your business. Yet only 36% of the working population is truly engaged in their job. Studies show that improving culture can increase profitability by 21%. Furthermore, they also show that a great way to do that is with good technology. It must be of high quality, properly configured according to best practices, and offer your employees great support—bad technology results in distractions from success and frustrated users. Frustrated people do not thrive. In addition, those same studies show that it is important for people to be challenged and constantly learning. People stay engaged by having a formal training plan focused on the applications your team uses and the core competencies they need. The technology your organization uses is the pathway to these outcomes.

2 FLEXIBILITY

Since COVID, many businesses have increased the number of work-from-home (WFH) employees. However, remote work is only one aspect of flexibility. Just because people work from home does not mean the experience is good, especially if they do not have the tools to do their work in a manner that will achieve the best outcomes. Other considerations are mobility, working hours, outcome-based performance plans, and the ability to work in a hybrid structure (some office/some WFH). Using technology to support and maximize teamwork, culture, and every other part of the WFH experience helps your entire organization thrive.

3 PERFORMANCE

Improving an organization's performance means getting more work done more quickly with fewer people. When this happens, profitability and job satisfaction go up. Good people want to be able to do good work. To empower them, the IT infrastructure must be designed to work efficiently so that workers have the right devices with the right applications, tools, and capabilities to accomplish their tasks from wherever they need to operate in order to achieve the desired outcomes. This means that the backend and applications are just as important as the computers themselves. If your organization runs on old, clumsy, or inefficient applications or ones that don't easily support remote work, your people will be less apt to dive in and knock out work in short bursts when they have a few minutes. Said differently, if it is fast and easy to get "X" done, you'll see people knock something out when they have a few minutes. However, if it takes ten minutes just to get set up, they will not take the time.

4 ACCOUNTABILITY

Bottom line: Accountability will be improved by applications that offer transparency around work outcomes so peers and leaders can see them. Challenges in tracking and maintaining accountability are common. However, properly-designed technology can help to close that gap. A display of performance with stack-ranking will always make a difference. This idea goes back to Henry Ford and his first manufacturing plant. He challenged the day and night crews to outperform each other. A friendly competition ensued, resulting in better performance by both crews. If you can display production, you'll see a substantial improvement in outcomes. As a by-product, accountability will become much more self-managed by the employee rather than manager-led. The best way to track performance and production in real-time is with the help of technology.

5 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Very few organizations are able to use technology to drive strategic outcomes in the business. However, those that do crush their competition. This is achieved through intentionality, clarity, automation, and innovation.

Intentionality: Often, IT is brought in too late for major decisions, but it should be one of the first parties in every discussion. An example of this is when a business expands to a new location. Sure, it's easy for IT professionals to connect two sites, but the core infrastructure likely was not designed for remote support and expansion. But if the IT team is made aware of the expansion prior to a major lifecycle plan, the design can be much more successful and cost less. Another example is an acquisition. Because IT is so critical to business success, having an appreciation for the IT SWOT of an environment can make a difference of thousands of dollars that may be able to be negotiated through the purchase price. If the company being acquired has a great deal of technology debt, you need to know that before signing the check. When it comes down to it, most strategic priorities involve some measure of each of the following: healthy growth, satisfied customers, great people, increased profitability (i.e., efficiency), reduced risk, and the organization's valuation—all of which IT impacts substantially.

Clarity: Your business thrives when IT knows the strategic priorities and is empowered to act. If the goal is a better customer experience, technology can quickly drive valuable information to the appropriate parties. If the priority is growth, IT can help ensure the CRM systems are optimized to empower sales and marketing efforts. Once IT knows the desired outcomes and is empowered to innovate, everyone can win and thrive.

Automation and innovation: While people are the most valuable assets in business, they are also the most expensive. By empowering IT to find ways to automate and innovate, an organization can reduce staffing costs while also improving outcomes and experience.

Warning: Trying to innovate when the IT infrastructure is not stable, secure, or utilizing best practices will likely create chaos. This happens because innovation built on an unstable foundation will introduce many variables that are almost impossible to measure and manage. Innovation involves change, trial, and error. If there is no baseline, the improvements (or lack thereof) can actually increase work and reduce performance.

Optimizing an IT infrastructure requires a host of subject matter experts (SMEs) experienced in the following:

- Server infrastructure
- Network infrastructure
- Security
- Remote access
- Workstation management
- Mobility
- Current operating system best practices
- Vendor management

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