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Looking to the future. The Digital Workplace.

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1. Introduction

Every cloud has a silver lining. We have just entered a new normality that will bring with it major changes at all levels of society, the economy and, of course, work models.

If in the early days of the health crisis, the ordinary employee had no choice to start working remotely and digitalise with extraordinary agility, becoming a decisive factor in ensuring that the global economic slowdown was not absolute, it is logical to think that in the environment of a new normality this option will continue to be a driving force for economic activity.

According to the latest Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE) Labour Force Survey, [REF-1] "In the first quarter of 2021, 11.2% of employed people (2,146,100) worked from home more than half of the days. This percentage is more than one point higher than in the fourth quarter of 2020 (9.9%). In 2019 the percentage was 4.8%.".

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This trend will continue to rise, according to the Adaptación Digital 2021 study conducted by IEBS Business School [REF-2], which states that 94.5% of workers who took the survey believe that their job will evolve over the next three years, while 42.4% believe that their current job will have nothing to do with their future job. On the other hand, 52.1% of those surveyed thinks that their job will hardly change at all.

Additionally, according to the World Economic Forum's study "The Future of Jobs Report 2020" [REF-3], the demand for teleworkers by companies has increased. In this sense, access to telework has almost doubled since 2011, from 28% to 54% of workers mentioning that they have the opportunity, supported in the acceleration of the processes digital transformation.

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2. The Digital Workplace

Teleworking in Spain has not been as recurrent in the past as it has been since the restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Dossier of telework and mobile work indicators, produced by ONTSI, since this time, telework figures have tripled in Spain in the second quarter of 2020, with 16.2% of workers working from home at least half of the days. In general figures, although still below the European average of 12% of teleworkers, Spain has remained above 10%, which is not a negligible figure [REF-4].

› Additionally, according to the same study, at regional level, those that have seen the greatest increase in the level of teleworking are Madrid, with 26.6% of teleworkers, and Catalonia, with 18.5% (in both cases during the second quarter of 2020) and somewhat lower figures of 21.6% and 15.2% respectively, during the first quarter of 2021.

Although teleworking has experienced a significant boom in recent times, it has not negatively affected most workers in companies, with 71% of Spanish companies equipping their employees with devices that enable mobility in 2019, rising to 74% in 2020 [REF-4].

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The survey "Working from home during COVID-19" developed by Colliers international states that 76% of employees feel equally or more connected to their teams when working remotely or that 53% consider that their productivity has not been affected by teleworking, and in some cases (23%), it has even increased [REF-5].

This shows that **we are experiencing a push for new ways of working, with new hybrid models, new methodologies, and new tools to support our daily activity** and new competencies for all employees.

The context brought about by the current crisis has led to the generalisation of remote work and is promoting a reflection within organisations on new ways of working. In this sense, the concept of the new digital workplace (Liquid Workplace) has emerged, or how technology can make it possible for work to be conceived as a flexible activity that is not necessarily linked to a specific physical space, prioritising objectives such as productivity, efficiency, innovation, and the retention of the best talent through the optimisation of the employee experience.

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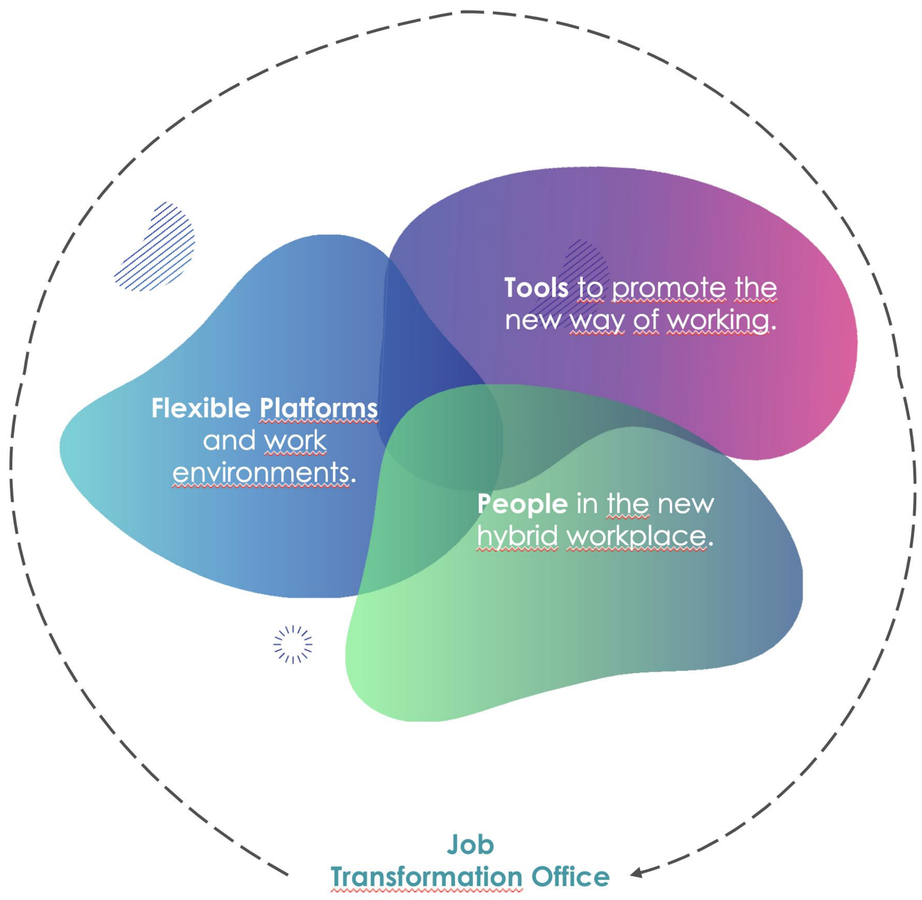
Liquid Workplace

A holistic aproach to the new workplace.

Although the concept of the Liquid Workplace may imply a high technological component, any organisation that considers how technology can help transform the way it works must approach the exercise by understanding the new digital workplace as a whole. In this sense, they should consider a reflection that considers 3 fundamental axes:



› **Tools** , Trying to relate the new ways of working with new technologies that enhance interaction, collaboration, productivity, creativity, and innovation, in this new more digital context and adapting this ecosystem of solutions to the specific reality and degree of maturity of the organisation. We are talking about new tools to facilitate remote work (tools designed to work with online documents, to make video- conference calls - e.g., Microsoft 365, Google Workspace, Slack, Asana, Zoho office, etc., new corporate communication portals, tools for knowledge management based on artificial intelligence and machine learning, conversational assistants, tools for the robotisation and automation of processes, etc.).

› **Environments** Where issues such as the incorporation of new devices in the workplace and the possibility of managing them remotely in an agile and efficient way, the migration of productivity, communication and collaboration platforms to the cloud or the "securitisation" of workplace infrastructures are proposed.

› **People** Helping to adapt the workplace to the needs and problems of each employee, defining the new employee experience around technology, promoting the use and adoption of tools, and developing their digital skills.

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Organisations must be able to design the digital workplace that best suits the needs of each employee depending on the type of work they do on a day-to-day basis, as well as the needs of their customers.

But they also need to ensure that their teams have, know, and know how to use the new tools, to develop the necessary skills and behaviours around these new ways of working and to foster a new hybrid work culture.

On the one hand, the new digital workplace offers employees new capabilities and functionalities that enable a new way of working and interacting with their customers and potential customers, but on the other hand it brings new challenges for organisations to ensure the best possible use of technology and return on investment.

Being able to store information in the cloud and access it anytime, anywhere, to work and edit documentation collaboratively and simultaneously, or to free themselves from administrative tasks thanks to automation, means a "brutal" empowerment of employees and greater ease of access to customer data, which greatly facilitates the relationship with them.

However, at the same time, it also means that organisations must manage more and more heterogeneous knowledge, have to worry about managing new forms of relationships between people, customers and teams, or finding new ways of generating engagement. Organisations are undoubtedly facing new challenges around the new digital workplace.

With the evolution of the company considering the different aspects related to the transformation of the digital workplace, adapting to the new needs of customers and the constantly evolving relationship with them will be much easier, being able to offer better services and, with this, attract a greater number of customers and build customer loyalty, thus boosting sales.

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Needs of the digital workplace

Considering the initial conceptualisation of the digital workplace, reference can be made to some of the minimum needs or requirements of employees and companies when carrying out their functions, in this sense: [REF-6].

1. Connectivity

In order to really talk about digitalisation, we cannot separate it from connectivity, the need to be connected to mobile or fixed internet. Companies need stable and quality connections anywhere and at any time to be able to offer added value and to be able to serve their customers properly, through direct and fluid communication.

2. Equipment

The equipment of workers when teleworking should be composed of as many compatible electronic devices as needed, to effectively develop their work both inside and outside the office (laptops, mobile phones and / or tablets) and to be able to resolve possible doubts or questions from their customers remotely.

3. Basic productivity apps and tools

It is necessary that the company enhances its digitalisation with the installation of applications and tools that allow all its workers and clients to work, share, communicate, etc. with the greatest comfort, such as M 365 or Google Workspace or other free tools such as Slack or Asana, which are also good options.

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4. Communication & Colaboration tools.

Collaborative tools such as Teams, Hangouts, Zoom and Trello, among many others, are very interesting for collaborative work, allowing a simple connection in real time with different collaborators and customers, to hold meetings or hold informal team conversations.

5. Information Repositories in the Cloud

Once we have assumed the connectivity of the company, we must consider how we will manage our company's information.

Cloud technology makes it possible to store, access, modify, etc. information from a "virtual repository" of information, which can be managed through an internet connection, being able, among other things, to give different access permissions to different people within a company. In this way, it becomes the most efficient way to manage the company's information, customers, and potential customers and to be able to access it remotely from any place and any device.

6. Security

We should not believe that the higher the level of digitalisation, the greater the danger to our internal company systems. However, it is necessary to implement security measures to protect the data of our company and our customers. There are numerous solutions on the market that we can use to protect ourselves and that do not necessarily have to be very expensive.

Installing advanced antivirus systems, raising employee awareness of cybersecurity, with guidelines and measures to be developed by each employee, making backup copies in the cloud, and analysing the information we receive, are some of the necessary guidelines to consider our work environment secure.

7. Management and Maintenance

The management and maintenance of the applications or tools that are used in the digital workplace is no longer necessary with the different cloud solutions. The providers of these solutions are responsible for providing daily management and maintenance support. In this way, the impact on employee productivity will be positive.

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3. What tools & how can SMEs use to adapt to the Digital Workplace?

SMEs now have the option of providing their employees with the appropriate tools to carry out their work completely remotely.

The short-term goal, due to the consequences of the pandemic, is that SMEs and their employees can adjust to the digital working model that was mandated as one of the main consequences of COVID-19. However, the long-term trend of hybrid working (one % remote and one % face-to-face) is to be maintained, because of the benefits it brings.

Additionally, adapting to the digital workplace can lead companies to think about, for example, the internationalisation of their company, because if you can be in contact using existing applications with people in the same city as you, why not with people more than 1000 km away?

To carry out this transformation in the work model, digital tools are needed to allow companies and employees to continue their work in the normal way and to continue offering the same quality service to their customers.

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There are different digital tools available to all users. First, we will look at some of the existing **paid digital tools:**

1. Microsoft 365

Is one of the most widely used collaborative tools on the market today. It is also one of the most complete with different capabilities that enhance and facilitate the implementation of the digital workplace.

This tool includes the office package, which gives the user the ability to create documents, presentations, spreadsheets, planning and, all this, including cloud storage to increase the security of the data handled, both business and customer data.

Another aspect to be considered is that this tool has differentiated plans for small and medium-sized companies, as well as for larger companies. In addition, it has all kinds of integrations with other tools to facilitate the implementation of a complete digital workplace.

The Microsoft 365 package also includes the Microsoft Teams platform, with which you can hold meetings, calls, share files, edit them and everything digitally and in the cloud, so that any user has access to documents in a digital library securely.

It is important to note at this point that Microsoft 365 licences must be paid per user [REF-7].

2. Google Workspace

Google makes the Workspace tool available to companies and users to facilitate the implementation of the digital workplace.

The technology giant's tool allows users to work from anywhere and includes all the necessary applications for the normal development of their work.

In addition, the tool allows integrations with other solutions to complement its operation and optimise the services provided to users.

Thanks to Google Workspace and its wide range of tools included, SMEs can provide their workers with all the necessary tools to maintain an efficient connection, allowing the organization of meetings, video calls, document storage and editing them online, which provides, as in the case of Microsoft 365, a high degree of security.

Google Workspace together with Microsoft 365 are the most comprehensive digital tools on the market today because they encompass a wide range of functionalities to enable users to carry out their remote work effectively and efficiently both internally and for customers. Licence fees work as in the case of Microsoft 365 [REF-8].

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Digital tools do not necessarily require an investment to use them. There are also **free digital tools** on the market that also have functions that facilitate the implementation of the digital workplace:

Slack

› **Is a collaborative tool with functionalities that allow a company's employees to interact with each other and with customers in an efficient way.** It has fewer features than the previous ones but has a free version that is accessible to everyone. **This digital tool has common functions to the previous paid ones we have analysed, such as the chat and video function, calendar organisation, file sharing, etc.**

Additionally, as in the case of Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace, Slack can also be integrated with other tools to complement their functionalities and make it a more complete tool. However, these integrations would become paid, because a specific licence is required, which is not included in the free version [REF-9].

Asana

› **Is another digital tool that has a free version and brings together functionalities that allow users to facilitate the implementation of the digital workplace.** Among other functionalities, it offers chat and video calls, organisation and calendar, activity registration and collaboration with up to 15 people. **Its free version includes very interesting services but, as in the case of Slack, the improvement of services is linked to the payment of a monthly fee for each user.**

In addition, it also has the option of integrating with other platforms. However, also as in the case of Slack, these integrations are not included in the free version [REF-10].

Trello

Is a digital tool that is currently used to manage tasks within projects or any activity or task of the participants, thanks to a visual dashboard where users can create cards in which activities are defined.

This tool lacks the chat and video functions that others have. **It is one of the most useful project and time management tools on the market** and should not be missed as a collaborative solution to facilitate teleworking and project management [REF-11].

Bitrix24

Is a digital tool that has, in its free version, chat and video functionalities, organisation, as well as an interesting task tracking function.

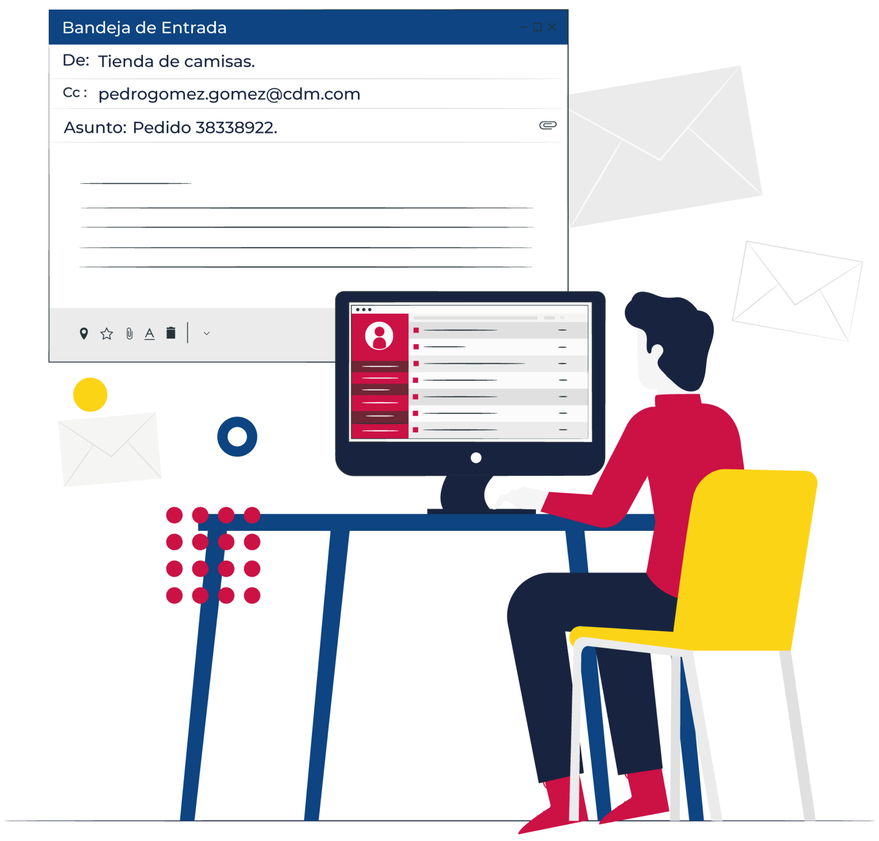
It has other functions such as the creation of web shops, with their respective SEO positioning and specific templates and a user support centre.

Regarding project management, it has functions such as workload management thanks to reports that can be generated, the existence of task templates and automation and visual project management [REF-12].

4. Case of use

How to improve the customer experience with collaborative tools, through a digital workplace?

Here's how John, owner of a custom shirt shop, uses the different tools of his digital workplace to manage his day-to-day life and his relationship with his customers.



9:00 h

John checks his business mail for possible orders or needs from his customers.

10:00 h

John and his team hold their daily meeting via a video call application. Also, he can meet with the clothing team.

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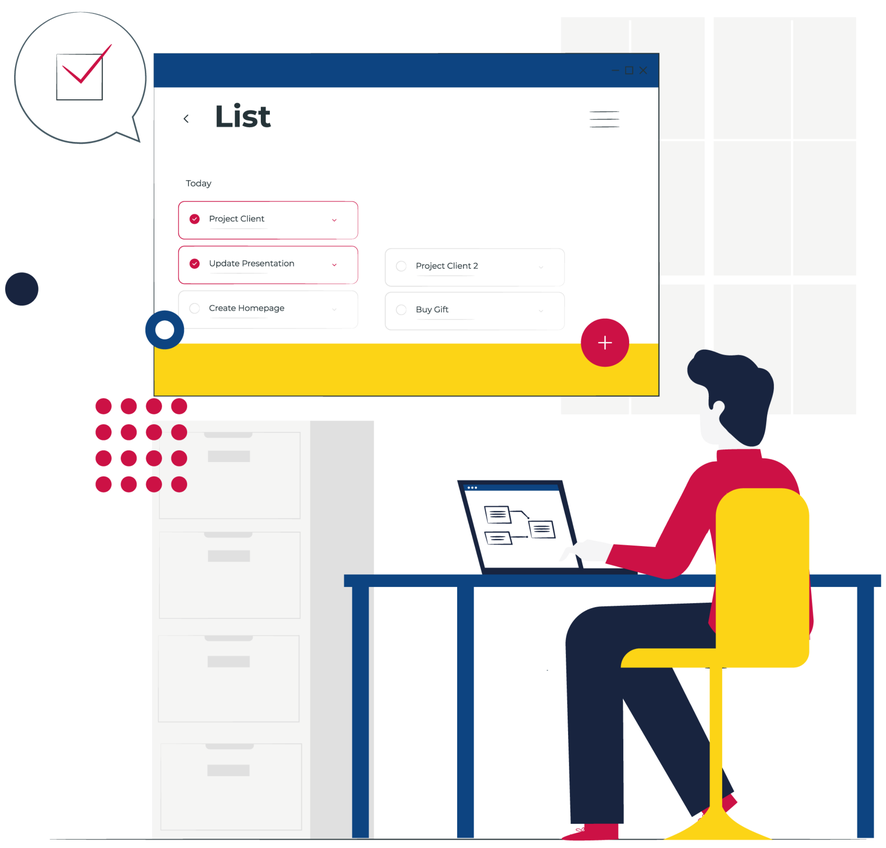
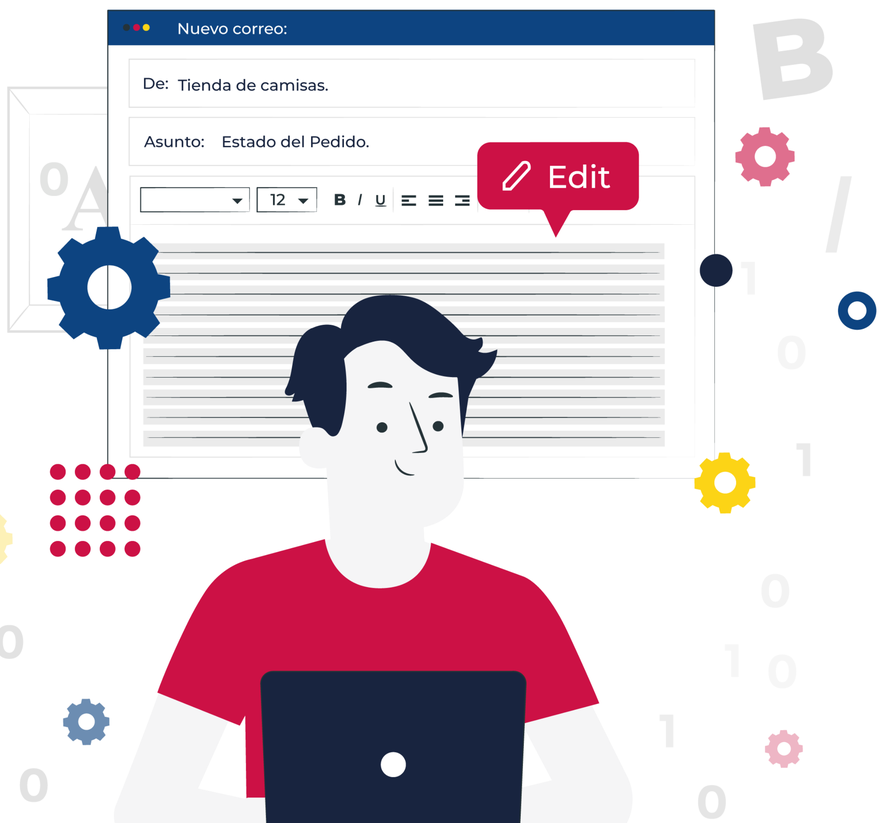


12:00 h

John checks his project management tool to see what tasks are still pending and the orders progress.

14:00 h

John accesses the budgets made in the cloud to manage them with his team in real time.



17:00 h

With the help of collaborative tools, John meets his customer's needs and informs him of the status of the order. Also, he can manage the day to day of his teams and his business.

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Conclusions

The situation resulting from the pandemic caused by COVID-19 has meant that many companies have had to opt for teleworking to be able to continue offering their goods or services. However, the implementation of remote digital workplaces has been on the rise for a few years.

In order to best implement a digital workplace, a series of variables must be considered, such as **technology,** which must support employees in order to promote productivity, creativity and innovation, as well as contact with customers and potential customers; digital work **environments,** with the variable of providing employees with devices that facilitate their day-to-day business, internal data and customers management and, of course, **people** who, in order to be able to do their work effectively, have a series of needs that must be covered.

Internet connectivity, the right equipment, establishing adequate communication channels with employees, as well as establishing adequate security standards are some of these needs that arise to be able to do their job effectively.

There are numerous tools on the market to achieve the ultimate goal of developing a digital workplace that meets the needs of employees and customers. Some of these tools are paid, but others are free and provide great capabilities to achieve this.

There are many possibilities that open with digital workplaces and now is the time to embrace them and boost a trend that can be very positive for your company.

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