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IT's opportunity to shape a new technology environment

Teleware research discovers an IT sector poised to accelerate next generation innovation, but only if old barriers can be overcome.

Teleware has taken a snapshot of the UK's business technology environment at a critical moment in time. We have commissioned a survey that encompasses more than 250 IT decision makers and 268 workers from companies ranging in size from 50 to 1,000 employees. It documents a year where the IT sector has faced unprecedented challenges and met them on an unprecedented scale — with unprecedented success.

Looking forward, results also reveal that the IT sector has a unique opportunity to reshape the UK business technology environment, but only if it can influence companies at a strategic level, optimise existing technologies and maintain momentum to accelerate the next wave of innovation.

Success promises improved customer outcomes, enhanced employee experiences and boosts to productivity and profitability.

Executive Summary

The IT context is one of cautious optimism. IT decision makers can now cite in-house evidence of the practicality and value of accelerated adoption. Alongside this, there is a likelihood that a return to a more familiar business environment will release pent-up demand for yet more technology-driven benefits. While businesses rapidly adapt to a new normal, familiar pinch points remain.

Teleware's research shows that the technology adoption door is open, but IT departments need to push.
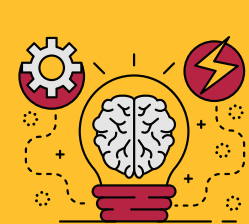
Immediate innovation: whilst presenting significant challenges, the pandemic has spurred IT departments to deploy virtually instantaneous innovation, creativity and organisation to vaccinate UK businesses from the worst effects of Covid-19; protecting the economy, businesses and jobs.

Open opportunity: IT departments have demonstrated that technologies can be adopted at previously unheard-of speed. But, while these technologies boost performance, they have yet to be fully exploited, offering yet more potential for growth.
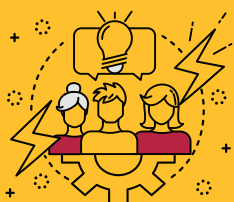
Accelerated adoption: There is a growing ambition and urgency to harness the next wave of innovations, such as Robotic Process Automation (RPA).

Strategic disconnect: IT decision-makers want to consolidate rapid gains and are already looking to new technology horizons. There is, however, a cloud: a lack of IT strategic representation at Board level could seriously limit new-found potential. This strategic disconnect leaves IT departments vulnerable to deficits in areas such as C-Suite ownership, budgets and internal resourcing.

Findings: a new UK technology environment

The past year has acted as a 'technology sprint', fast-forwarding the adoption of existing technologies and the development of emerging innovation. It has extended horizons beyond what was formerly thought possible — catalysing, for example, new ways of working. What might have been a five year technology roadmap in March 2020 became a daily reality for millions by March 2021.

The scale of IT's achievement in implementing new technologies is breath-taking. Using collaboration tools as an example, in 2019 1.7 million people worked from home — just 5% of the UK workforce[1]. In April 2020 this had rocketed to over 46%[2].

Since March 2020, 75% of UK workers[3] have used at least two new platforms to ensure that they keep working — showing that the technology and human capabilities are there and can be rapidly adapted and assimilated. A report from the Harvard Business Review[4] finds that productivity, and indeed general feelings of worker wellbeing, have increased during the period, further suggesting that there is an appetite for the agility that technology offers.

The power of productivity

There is widespread understanding that technology improves organisational performance:

97%	**70%**	**56%**
of organisations surveyed see IT as important to productivity (78% as "very important")	of organisations report that productivity is a strategic priority that influences IT decision making	see 'collaboration' and 'employee engagement' (key productivity drivers) as additional strategic priorities

Productivity and collaboration tools are in widespread use, with the top five made up of:
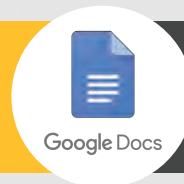
65% Microsoft Teams

55% Zoom

43% Whatsapp

43% Google Docs

35% Skype for Business

It's also clear that workers are keen to adopt novel technologies: close to half (47%) state that they are eager explore its capabilities "straight away".

Untapped potential

The UK's IT decision makers are aware that their organisations have yet to fully exploit all the potential of their existing technology solutions. There is huge variation in the level of utilisation of business tools. Of those organisations surveyed:

Believe they use between **40% and 59%** of their platforms' capabilities

Use between **60% and 79%** of their platforms' capabilities

28%

34%

18%

5%

13%

Believe they use between **80% and 100%** of their platforms' capabilities
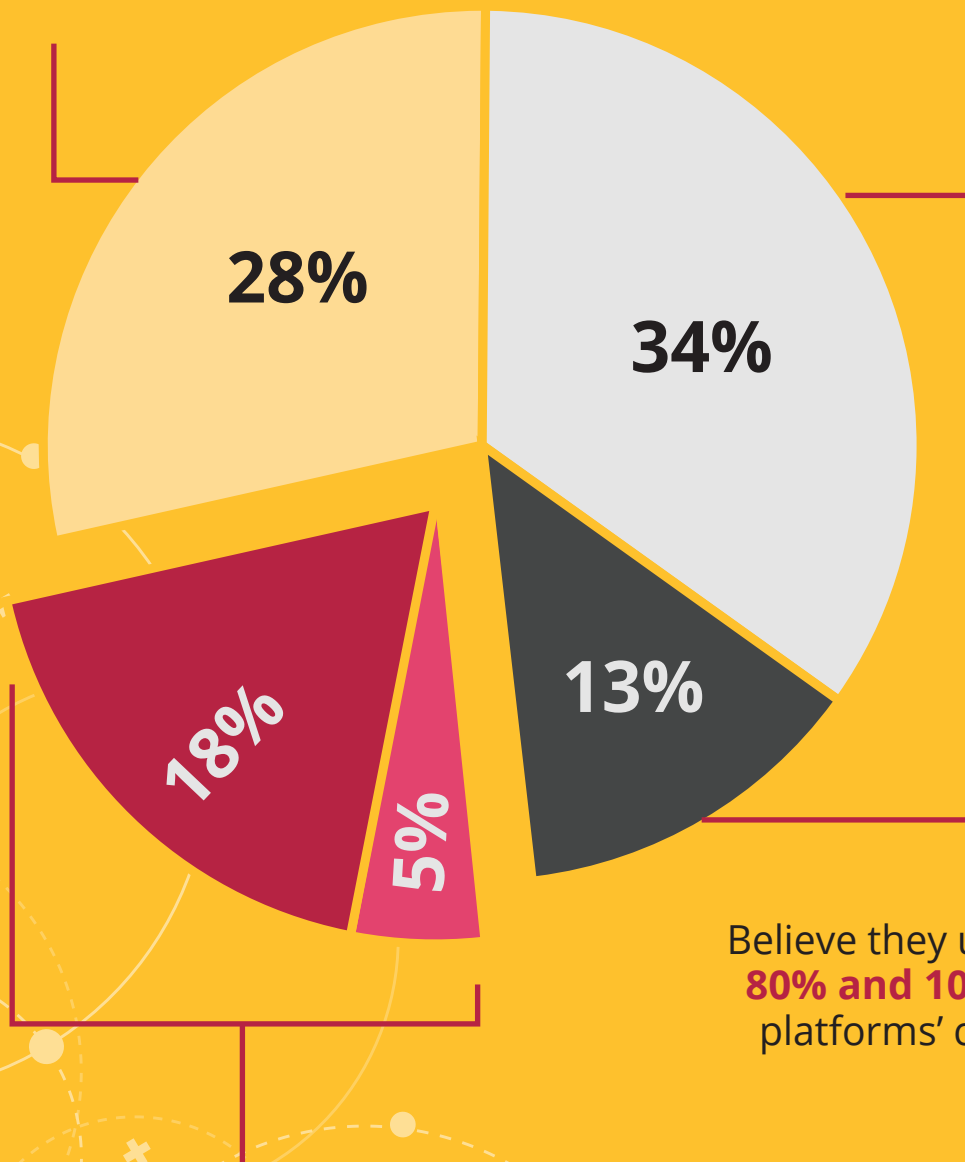
Almost a quarter of IT decision makers believe they are utilising less than 40% of their platforms' full capabilities

This can, in part, be explained by the experience of workers with new technology platforms:

- **20%** aren't clear on features and benefits.

- **17%** lack the confidence to use these platforms.

- **20%** state that their employer gives no support to new technologies.

- **15%** have never even been shown how to use it.

- **38%** have technology that they never use – representing a very poor return on employer investment.

Overall, UK businesses harness just 55% of their platforms' potential. While a worrying figure, it also opens up huge scope to scale and realise greater ROI for very little additional investment.

Realised potential

This research also discovers the reasons behind this failure to fully adopt.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, lack of resource tops the list **(40%)**. Interestingly, other barriers cited include lack of access to the latest tools **(25%)**, a remote workforce **(28%)** and a failure to get the most out of collaboration technologies **(14%)**.

The results suggest that untapped potential is an ever decreasing circle where a lack of widespread awareness of new technologies means that workers are unable to learn more about the capabilities of their technologies.

IT decision makers see that they are central to stopping the spiral, with a role to play in:

Supporting new technologies

New technology training

Equipping and giving workers the confidence they need to explore new capabilities

It's clear from responses that this is an area where modest additional investment in training and support could return significant productivity gains. Once again, the trinity of lack of internal capability, budget and senior buy-in are hampering efforts to progress.

The next wave

Necessity has accelerated the adoption of existing productivity technologies - delivered in weeks, not years. It has allowed IT decision makers to create new but realistic templates for the next wave of innovation, such as Robotic Process Automation (RPA).

Suddenly there is the potential to accelerate roll out and bring technologies, that were perhaps five years out, on stream far earlier than planned. Teleware asked IT decision makers about innovations such as RPA, encompassing AI and machine learning, to gauge capabilities and future planning.

Currently, fewer than one in three organisations believe that they have very advanced AI capabilities — with just over half seeing themselves as "somewhat advanced". There is a clear desire to take this further, with 42% of IT decision makers planning to progress current automation capabilities over the next year.

While the ambition to seize on the opportunities of RPA is there, some familiar themes appear as potential barriers. Of the IT decision makers surveyed:

A third cite a lack of internal skills
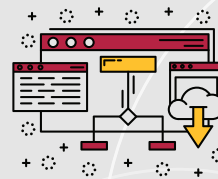
Just under a third mention poor internal processes

Over a third report insufficient budget

And a quarter see a lack of senior buy-in

If the past year has proven one thing in technology terms, it is that where there's a will, there's a way. Many business are getting creative to overcome issues such as a lack of internal capacity — with over half looking to outsourced expertise to fill gaps. Applying this approach to RPA could accelerate adoption significantly.

Strategic disconnect

IT departments and the technologies they have deployed provided a strategic lifeline to thousands of companies across the UK in 2020. Close to a third of IT decision makers believe that IT has made the most important contribution to their companies in the past year.

This contrasts, however, with fewer than one in four believing that the IT director influences decisions at Board level.

Given IT's pivotal role during lockdowns and its unique role in ensuring survival, it is clear that IT needs a more powerful voice in the nation's boardrooms.

Influence, optimise and accelerate

Teleware CEO Steve Haworth explores the ongoing potential of technology to drive productivity, efficiency, worker wellbeing and improved customer experience — together with the actions that organisations can take to realise it.

Through 2020 and into 2021, technology has proven its strategic value as never before. The latest technologies, and the IT departments which have implemented them at scale and pace, have not only maintained organisational capability but in many cases enhanced it.

Technology has allowed some UK businesses to emerge from crisis stronger than their competition. With innovation driving improvements to productivity, profitability, and both employee and customer experiences, there is a very real — and realisable — opportunities to maintain the momentum. If a company can pivot rapidly and introduce new technologies during the pandemic, so why not post-pandemic?

Following the immense efforts to realign businesses in the past 12 months, most of the components are in place to release the next wave of innovation. Successful implementation, however, will demand that companies ensure that the pieces are aligned and that challenges — as explored in Teleware's survey — are addressed and overcome.

Influence

Perhaps the most striking finding of this research is evidence of IT's strategic deficit. Despite ensuring that many companies have not simply survived but thrived, IT Directors are still frozen out of strategic decision making.

This strategic disconnect may be a hangover from the pre-crisis 'normal', but if a tumultuous year is to bring lasting benefits, IT should push for a place at the top table. The evidence for greater influence is clear, recent and undeniable — so now is the time to use it.

This influence can make the realisation of the following all the easier to enact.

Optimise

A surprising result from our survey is the under-utilisation of existing technologies. Overall, UK businesses use just 55% of their full capabilities. This isn't the fault of workers — with a significant number eager to engage — rather a lack of effective training and engagement from companies.

Optimising your existing technology tools makes the case for a fresh wave of innovation — not least with robust evidence of optimum ROI. It's also clear that IT can drive solutions to the under-utilisation problem:

Factor in training budgets when considering technology costs— because the best solution in the world will achieve nothing if people can't use it.

Ensure human and communication resources are available to deliver training —whether that's face-to-face, video tutorials, online courses or a mix. Consider outsourced provision if internal capabilities are stretched.

Bring colleagues with you. Don't simply dump a new technology — advertise it, trial it and use early adopter champions to help share benefits to colleagues, based on how it will improve day-to-day working lives.

If you need evidence of the effectiveness of optimisation, just look at the way that millions of employees have taken to solutions such as Microsoft Teams. Necessity ensured that people explored and used them every day, building greater understanding and the confidence to achieve more than they ever thought possible just a few weeks before.

Providers are learning too, with a pipeline of new features coming on stream so that capability expands to meet developing needs. Teams, for example, has grown to meet demand with noise reduction capabilities, improved meeting experiences, webinar and broadcast functionality and enhanced file sharing.

As well as optimising solutions that work for employees, you can look at retiring those that don't. The survey discovers that well over a third of employees report their company provides technology that they never use. This obviously represents woeful return on investment and could undermine the argument for the adoption of future solutions.

The answer is for IT decision makers to audit technology uptake, effectiveness and return on investment. With this information in hand, the technology menu can be fine-tuned and honed down so

that it represents only the very best in terms of productivity, profitability and employee and customer benefits. Money saved can be redeployed to ensure that these top tier technologies are widely understood, adopted and fully exploited across the business. Ultimately, the aim is to reinforce success, not failure.

Accelerate

With clear strategic influence and optimised existing technology solutions that prove value, now is the time to accelerate systematic, rolling transformations. Identify the next generation of technologies that will benefit your business — and how they will do it.

RPA is one such technology that constantly features in lists of innovations likely to hit in the next five years or so — even though this 'five year future' seems to move further away year by year.

Robotic Process Automation (RPA) might sound mechanistic, but it's actually about fully realising your human assets.

Research suggests that 60% of all roles contain at least 30% of tasks that could be better handled by RPA[5]. It's not about replacing workers but rather ensuring they are deployed where human intelligence delivers most value, and that people are released from repetitive, rule-based and uninteresting roles. Beyond this, RPA has the ability to see across silos, mining valuable data and yet more valuable insights that might otherwise be missed.

The many benefits of RPA will be compelling to companies wishing to, for example, improve productivity and worker wellbeing. These opportunities are likely to explain why a significant 44% of UK companies are actively considering investment here in the next year. Investment now will deliver short, medium and long term gains and bring competitive advantage.

If years were collapsed into weeks and months for collaboration technologies, why can't the same now be true for RPA, and the next wave of innovation, and the next?

The Teleware advantage

Teleware is focused on making IT work harder for businesses, so that they can go on and perform at the highest level. We believe that with the right training and support, we can turn all employees into technology advocates. We can get businesses working more efficiently, increase productivity, help your employees to become more engaged in their roles — and better demonstrate the value of IT.

Working with us, IT decision makers gain the influence they need to optimise the positive impact of technology and drive continual business innovation.

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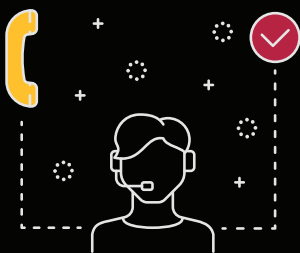
Assess
Gather information on current environment and practices for calling

Art of the Possible
Showcase modern calling capabilities powered by Microsoft Teams Phone

Build the Plan
Build the plan for how to deploy and adopt Microsoft Teams Phone

Get in touch today to register for this free Microsoft workshop.

Register here

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Teleware365

0330 0947430

enquiries@teleware.com