

The changing landscape of high-speed connectivity

By [Shane Chorley](#)

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Internet access has come a long way from the R28,000 it cost for a 256kbps connection in 1995. Even prior to the lockdown, almost 500,000 homes and more than 114,000 business premises were connected to fibre according to FTTX Council research from the end of June 2019. Of course, having high-speed access does not necessarily solve all problems.



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Adopting enhanced connectivity, such as fixed-line fibre, has been instrumental to working effectively from home over the past six months. But even though this approach has been embraced, moving forward businesses will likely consider a hybrid environment to maintain social interaction with employees.

Home offices come with their own set of challenges. For one, remote employees have difficulties in unplugging from work. What once required a commute and change of location now involves a walk to the study. This lack of differentiation between home and work environments can significantly impact on the mindset of staff. And on the other end of the spectrum, managers have issues with reduced employee focus and team cohesiveness.

So, while telecommuting has accelerated this year, the rush to do so has sometimes come at the detriment of integrating and aligning the related processes with operational procedures.

Another element of this new way of working is that of virtual meetings. Despite their advantages, much of the personality typically associated with in-person engagements have been lost. This means that even though more work can be done remotely, the lack of the social aspects of a job is frustrating many employees and managers.

What this remote environment has done is to highlight how organisations are no longer limited to employing people living close to the office. If a person has the skills and reliable connectivity in place, then it does not matter if they live in Cape Town or London. The availability of high-speed connectivity has removed geographic barriers to employment.

Decentralising work

The next five years will likely see this decentralised workforce continue to expand. While you will have people still hanging on to living at the edge of cities to remain in close proximity to work, these will change from the major metropolises to smaller ones like Port Elizabeth, East London, Bloemfontein, Polokwane, in search of reduced living costs and quality of life. Further, driving the shift towards decentralisation is the poor public transport of South Africa and the ever-spreading suburbia.

Even though those in manufacturing will always require on-premise staff, the professional sector can perform most job functions away from the office. The difference now is that this is becoming democratised thanks to more affordable connectivity options.

Instead of only the likes of senior management, lawyers, chartered accountants, and others benefiting from remote work, other job levels are starting to get access. Take call centre agents as an example. There is technology available that sees the call centre in its entirety remain functional using only remote employees.

Fundamentally, South Africans require unrestricted access to the digital economy to help build resilience in an uncertain market. Whether it is working remotely or participating in socio-economic activity from home, it contributes to greatly improving quality of life and supporting livelihoods during times of crisis. Driving this is access to abundant internet connectivity.

Different perceptions

More traditionally-minded CEOs might still feel it is vital for employees to be at the office from 8AM to 5PM daily. But this must change if business is not to fall into the same routine of pre-lockdown days. The decentralisation of work is inevitable. It is how it is managed that will make a difference in the workplace of the future.

Those organisations with offices nationwide can easily convert them into hot desk environments. This will fulfil the social engagement needs of employees by having them rotate on a regular basis to work in an office environment. It keeps management happy as teams can be managed more directly while staff have comfort levels in a more flexible work environment.

Connectivity demands

With the younger generation expecting always-on connectivity in everything they do, fibre operators will need to move away from the 'speeds and feeds' approach of the past. Instead, packages need to be designed in more simplistic terms such as

slow, medium, and fast connectivity.

In this way, the consumer market can more easily identify a bundle that meets their specific needs. With high-speed connectivity driving everything from education to entertainment, people are seeing it as a utility. It is opening the door to new ways of communicating and engaging with one another.

Developments of the past several months have illustrated that reliable, fast, and affordable internet access is fundamental to the success of any business with a dispersed workforce. And with digital transformation impacting on consumer's home lives as well, there is no turning back for fibre.

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