



Technology Platforms Unplugged: **How to prepare for a future beyond the crisis**

Technology platform companies are, by their nature, focused on the digital world. Their cloud-based software and other digital services play a crucial role in building resilient businesses. But the coronavirus pandemic has made them quickly pivot to the health and support of their employees. At the same time, they have had to keep an eye on their clients, recognizing that their priorities have changed dramatically in a short time.



In a recent Korn Ferry webinar, four major industry leaders—**Savinay Berry**, Senior Vice President, Cloud Services, OpenText; **Amit Zavery**, Vice President and Head of Platform, Google Cloud; **Blake McConnell**, Senior Vice President, Employee Workflow Products, ServiceNow; and **Byrne Mulrooney**, CEO of Korn Ferry’s Professional Search, RPO, and Digital business—suggested that some aspects of technology platforms will never be the same. And that means reshaping workforces and helping customers in new ways. Here’s how:

1 When in doubt, overcommunicate.

Berry says, OpenText was successfully ensuring that 15,000 employees could work remotely across 30 countries—but during the process recognized that being open and transparent was essential. The leadership team had daily sessions determining what to communicate with its employees.

At Google Cloud, Zavery says the company found that it was OK for leaders to let their own employees know that they don’t have all the answers. “There’s a lot of uncertainty in people’s minds; you can say you don’t have all the answers, but communicate where you are and where you are going,” he says. “That has helped people feel more comfortable.”

“There’s a lot of uncertainty in people’s minds; you can say you don’t have all the answers, but communicate where you are and where you are going.”



2 Keep your employees engaged and avoid burnout.

Technology platform employees haven't really stopped working during the pandemic—they just worked from home. But the change has increased anxieties. By early May, 73% of American professionals were feeling burned-out, according to one survey of 7,000 professionals, an increase of 10 percentage points from before the pandemic started.

Zavery says it's been difficult for some of Google Cloud's young employees who share living space with others—they all need to find a private space to work. Plus, some of the perks of working for the company, such as free food, laundry services, and other benefits, are gone, so employees have to do these things on their own. "We've had to give people time to get used to it," Zavery says.

At the same time, some technology platform firms believe that one reason for the increased stress is that employees have lost the casual conversations and interactions with their coworkers they would normally have at the office. Some companies have turned over the first few minutes of meetings just for coworkers to interact socially. Others have created virtual happy hours. Besides lowering stress levels, sometimes these so-called "watercooler" conversations can spark new work ideas.

For years, employee engagement may have taken a back seat to taking care of customers, but that was beginning to change, says McConnell at ServiceNow, a company that creates digital workflows. "If employees aren't happy and productive, then they have a real problem on their hands," he says.

Getting managers at all levels to act more like coaches can help with engagement.

"If employees aren't happy and productive, then companies have a real problem on their hands."

”



3 Think about your own workplace situation.

Once OpenText ensured that its employees were safe and able to work remotely, company executives began thinking about what the future would look like. The company closed half of its offices worldwide ... permanently. "It's a testament to the fact that the world will be a lot different for a long time to come," Berry says.

4 Think about your client's workplaces, too.

Even if workers are ready to return to the office, the office may not be ready for them to return. Employers are finding that they don't have ways to monitor employees' health or the right protections in place to ensure social distancing. Worse, they have no way to systematically track either problem. "If the workplace is not ready, it'll be difficult to push forward and move on," says McConnell.

In the last two months, while its own employees were working remotely, ServiceNow developed a set of apps to help customers keep track of how ready they were to have employees back in the office. Individual employees, using one of the apps, could let their employer know whether they were ready to return to an office or whether they had compelling reasons, such as childcare or health issues, to remain working from home.

Other apps focused on the workplace: employers could create a new checklist about what health and safety measures were installed at the workplace and what gaps remained.

"If the workplace is not ready, it'll be difficult to push forward and move on."



5 **Customers care about two things now: COVID and cutting costs.**

The economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been vast, but demand for some services has skyrocketed. There are many companies, particularly in regulated industries, that need to show they are creating a safe, healthy environment for their workers, says OpenText's Berry. Those firms need to have digital workflows and other services to keep track of all of the changes.

At the same time, clients are looking for ways they can cut costs, especially capital and operating expenditures. For instance, firms are finding that trying to have thousands of employees access the company network from remote locations at once can cause costly IT headaches. Many firms are recognizing that moving much of their software to cloud-based services can save them money over the long term, Berry says.

6 **Expect some far-in-the-future projects to get greenlit now.**

Digital transformation is no longer a concept. “They want it immediately, now,” says Amit. And the emphasis on COVID and cutting costs will move multiple projects that seemed like science fiction to the front of customers’ minds.

For example, many companies may worry that employees could inadvertently spread COVID-19 or other illnesses just by grabbing door handles. There are a lot of discussions among facilities managers to install biometric scanners that ensure security while automatically opening doors. “These types of changes that were supposed to happen maybe 10 years from now are happening over the next 12 months,” Berry says.

Even on existing applications, customers want innovations. In telemedicine, up until the pandemic, many healthcare organizations were OK with just having the ability for a doctor to speak with a patient over a video conference call, says Zavery. Now, healthcare organizations want the ability for the doctor to be able to input patient information into the same program that runs the conference call.

“These types of changes that were supposed to happen maybe 10 years from now are happening over the next 12 months.”

7 Customers need new productivity metrics.

Leaders already believe that many of its workers will stay working from home even after the pandemic fades. Indeed, companies such as Twitter, Facebook, and others have said their employees don't have to come back to their offices, while other firms are considering similar decisions. "It won't be called remote work, it'll just be called work," says Zavery.

But leaders want to ensure that their direct reports are indeed working. Customers are asking for better tools to monitor employee engagement and productivity. People want a single dashboard to analyze whether an employee worked and what the output was, Berry says. Metrics don't just have to be around productivity, either. Indeed, firms can measure corporate culture, employee skill levels, employee engagement levels, compensation systems, and other inward-looking metrics to figure out what it can tweak internally. "That additional type of insight could help improve overall performance and engagement with clients," says Korn Ferry's Mulrooney.

"It won't be called remote work, it'll just be called work."

Whatever the metrics are, they should be tailored to the role. Engineers, for instance, will need a different measure of productivity than lawyers or accountants.

8 And they want security and resiliency.

"The tech industry is not a stranger to broad trust issues," says Esther Colwill, President of Korn Ferry's Global Technology Industry practice, so it has to be at the front and center of services during and after the pandemic. Google Cloud has poured resources into security and privacy to ensure that none of its employees have access to customer data. "Customers are appreciating that they are comfortable moving that sensitive information without having to worry about what happens to it," Amit says.

For more information:

Visit kornferry.com/challenges/recovery

**For more about Korn Ferry's work
with technology platforms, contact:**



Esther Colwill

President, Global Technology Industry
Esther.Colwill@kornferry.com



Chris Cantarella

Senior Client Partner,
Global Sector Leader, Software
chris.cantarella@kornferry.com

About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We help clients synchronize strategy and talent to drive superior performance. We work with organizations to design their structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people to bring their strategy to life. And we advise them on how to reward, develop, and motivate their people.