COVID-19 Digital Communications

30th April 2020

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Midlands local champion 2019

Background

- Not a tech expert, (originally a life scientist and then moved into IP and innovation)
- As Director of Innovation at Aston, I have engaged with Engineering/Computer Science/Maths groups Institute of Coding and Think Beyond Data projects
- I was invited to work with WMCA Digital Board with Dave Maclean and the WMCA's Mayor's Office
- Chaired Women's Voice session on the Digital Landscape
- Worked with the WM5G team

- Also my department's Business continuity champion!

- **Digital Leaders** is a global initiative that has created a shared professional space for senior leadership from different sectors promoting effective, long-term digital transformation. Our community includes over 110,000 senior leaders are involved in leveraging technology to promote economic growth, increase social well-being and narrow social gaps.
- **Digital Leaders week is now 12–16th October 2020**

2020 Tech trends survey by Triad

Q: What do you see as the most significant technological development of the last ten years and why?

1	Cloud
2	Mobile/Smartphones
3	AI

4	Data	9	Speed
5	Machine Learning	10	IoT
6	Automation	11	SaaS
7	Blockchain	12	Virtual Reality
8	Voice	13	Agile
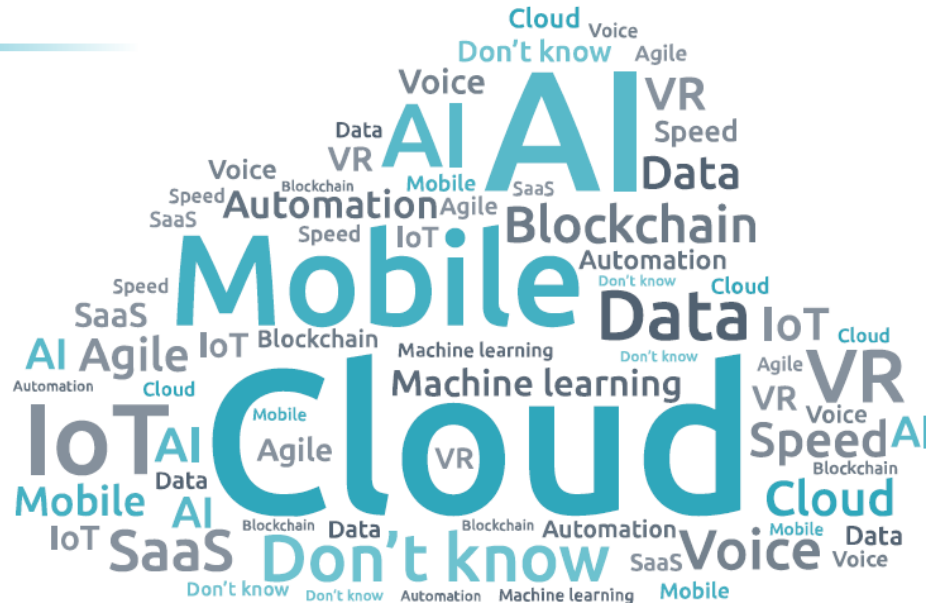
The importance of cloud and mobile

The new homeworking imperative

Our kids are at home taking lessons via Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams.

Our colleagues are working on transformation programmes on an entirely distributed basis.

Our vulnerable are able to order their groceries and essential needs online.

Families are staying in touch through WhatsApp groups.

Covid-19 effects

- Transformation to home working most of the country in 1 week!

- Many organisations had business continuity plans, but no one had really envisaged the full extent of the current crisis.

- Very swiftly staff working in an area that could use digital platforms to operate worked from home

- No face to face meetings – now video conferencing is the new norm
  - Zoom, Skype Webex, Microsoft teams, Google hangouts, Houseparty
  - Innovative virtual team building – competitions, coffee breaks, picture/photo sharing

- Some people aren't able to work at all, others are busier than ever with working from home as well as shouldering childcare responsibilities

Digital Aston

- At Aston we were moving everything onto the cloud anyway

- Online helpdesk called **Solve** implemented and in its first month of operation in March. It now has ~170 knowledge articles published helping staff to help themselves.

- Quickly moved over to using **Microsoft Teams**

- We had to increase the number of VPN licences (for access to certain university systems and data)

- **VPN** now available on a wide variety of operating systems and for both Aston and personally owned machines.

Impact of higher uptake of Digital post COVID 19

Digitally enabled	Outcome	+ Impact	- impact
High % of workers can work from home	More people work from home for more of the week	Fewer journeys Less traffic Offices can be smaller Cleaner air Higher quality of life	Smaller offices with fewer workers in town/city centres may lead to further demise of centres and their businesses e.g. cafes
Less printing as no access to printer	Employees read from screen and don't print	Fewer trees are felled and reduced energy requirements	No break from screens
Less business travel and more video conference	Less travel to centres e.g. London Fewer flights for	Fewer journeys Less traffic Cleaner air	Could impact major infrastructure projects

Other benefits: Medical distancing – rapid uptake of telehealth

- Move to telephone or video appointments to protect GPs and nurses

- May reshape the way health systems work – improve efficiency, reduce infection of health workers with less face to face contact.

- Makes widespread implementation of tech such as 5G a priority

- Need to address lack of digital access in some communities

- Benefit of disincentivising random visits to GPs and A & E - better use of 111

- BUT also people who should be going to A & E are also not going

Prioritise enabling tech e.g. 5G

Move to telecare brought forwards

Digital exclusion – real issue

Efficiencies due to barriers to visiting GP or A& E

Other benefits: Education

- **Higher education** – already offered some online courses. COVID-19 has pushed Universities to enhance their online offerings.

opportunity for positive change in the longer term – more flexible options/ more inclusive

- beneficial for some students with disabilities, caring responsibilities, or those who are experiencing challenging personal circumstances e.g. students attending on-campus learning environments virtually could become the norm rather than the exception.

May also make leadership more inclusive too

- **Schools** – many schools already used google classroom for some homework assignments, but have now had to adapt and move all teaching to learning at home.
    - Opportunities for considering some online provision as part of normal school?
    - Positives of MS teams – homework all in one place.

Challenges - Digital divide & widening inequality

Extremely variable range of teaching in schools – postcode lottery. "The best examples are students who are having lessons delivered live and the opportunity to communicate with their teachers. The worst examples are schools with no online platform who just have a webpage that they have uploaded some word document resources and links to other websites." Some schools are setting too much work, others hardly any work at all.
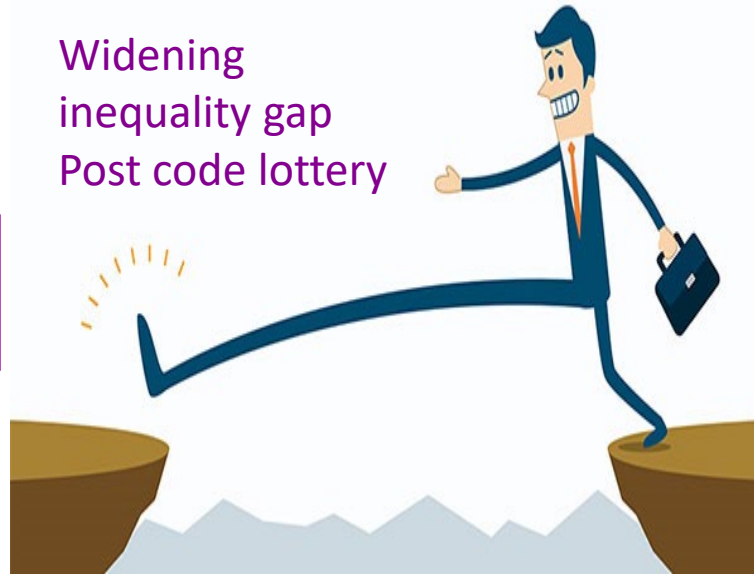**WonkHE**

Good	Widening inequality gap Post code lottery	Bad
MS teams or Google classroom teaching		Lack of access to computer or quiet space
Interaction with teachers		No online resources, no contact

Positives arising from the crisis

- **Innovation always arises when the status quo is challenged**

- **The push some people needed!** The necessity remote working really did test the system and push everyone to move online (when they may have procrastinated or not tried before).

- **The power of digital** using the power of social media and online with members of the public being able to [sign up,](#) quickly and easily, to become NHS Volunteer Responders to support the most vulnerable

- **Opportunities for innovation**: pivoting of existing products to new uses, redesign of business models and supply chains e.g. use of electronic signatures companies using DocuSign and HelloSign

- **#bringbackbetter** – YouGov poll 91% of people don't want things to just go back to how we were

Challenges for Discussion

- How do we make **digital properly inclusive** - ensuring that disadvantaged communities and the less digitally savvy aren't left behind?

- How can we **manage stress/mental health** whilst working from home (of constantly being 'on' and intense back to back MS teams or zoom meetings and childcare responsibilities)?

- **Cybersecurity** – IT staff are now having to go from managing 1or 2 locations for security to 1000s of home offices with variable equipment

- Home working is driving innovation that requires **redesign of business models and supply chains** - How do we make the most of this change to change the way we work and **#bringbackbetter?**

- How do we ensure that post lock down, town and city centres survive and thrive?

Q&A

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