Technology has played a key role as businesses adopt remote operations. Employers are accelerating technology uses to ensure safety in the workplace and enable employees to work productively from home. Employers now are seeking long-term solutions for what they initially anticipated were only short-term needs.

### Health and Safety

Many state and local mandates require employers to conduct daily health screenings, including taking temperatures, and to maintain data to facilitate contact tracing if a workplace COVID-19 diagnosis occurs. Technology companies have developed devices and applications to help meet these needs, such as devices for taking temperatures while maintaining physical distance, and wearable devices to alert users when they aren’t maintaining appropriate distance. Some wearable devices can collect contact data to facilitate contact tracing, and others can even notify a user if they were in close contact with someone reporting a COVID-19 diagnosis. Similar technologies are also available in mobile apps. While these monitoring devices and applications help promote safety, they also raise privacy concerns and other potential legal and employee relations issues.
Many employers wonder if they can require employees to be vaccinated. Lacking a definitive statement on vaccination by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, employers might be able to require employees be vaccinated subject to reasonable accommodations for disabilities and religious beliefs. But this is uncharted territory; an employer’s rights could be impacted by data about the vaccine’s reliability, availability, and other factors. Employers need to stay informed about emerging trends and options.

**Productive Remote Work**

With the first lock downs in spring of 2020, many employers were forced to embrace technology — such as laptops, headsets, monitors, and mobile devices — to support working from home. Many employers have been uncertain as to their financial responsibility to purchase equipment or provide internet services for remote employees. Consider consulting employment counsel because certain states, such as California, place much of the financial burden for purchasing work-related equipment on employers.

Beyond office equipment, technology platforms have played an important role in the shift to working from home. Employers want to keep employees engaged in the new virtual working environment. Video conferencing platforms like Zoom or Google Meet have been used extensively to conduct business. Employers also have used technology to provide wellness programs and conduct surveys to gauge employee engagement and assess feedback. Technology interwoven with communications strategy can help employees stay engaged and connected, and avoid feeling isolated.

A McKinsey & Company survey of employers¹ found that COVID-19 accelerated the permanent adoption of digital technologies by several years. Respondents reported that remote working and cloud migration were becoming more cost-effective. If your business has not yet embraced new technology, consider taking steps in this direction. While the course of the pandemic is uncertain, the workplace may be forever changed due to employer responses to the pandemic.

Reach out to industry peers to hear about their innovations implemented and lessons learned about what does and doesn’t work. Regular surveys of your employees and clients can also provide insight about their needs, preferences, and top-of-mind concerns, such as at-home office needs or contactless delivery of products and services. This workplace evolution may result in a reduction of your physical footprint and therefore require further technology investment. It may also result in new, permanent business models. If nothing else, the pandemic has taught us the importance of embracing change.