



# Dropbox: Powering Remote Work in the Age of COVID-19

For Sylvie Veilleux, Dropbox CIO, enterprise agility and the sudden shift to distributed teams go hand in hand.

Most predictions for the future of work focus on how technology is powering new forms of collaboration and productivity, and Dropbox already stands as a key forerunner. Since 2007, the company's software tools, apps and project management systems have helped define what it means to be an intelligent, digital-first workplace. "Our mission is to design a more enlightened way of working—and we've built software tools, apps and more for that purpose," says Dropbox CIO Sylvie Veilleux.

The company has also modeled these qualities for itself, thanks to a governing mindset of enterprise agility—an iterative approach to cross-functional tasks and processes where feedback is implemented on a continuous basis. At its core, enterprise agility expands principles traditionally used by software development teams to businesses as a whole, driving a greater degree of adaptivity.

"I think of enterprise agility like a rhythm," Veilleux says. "All functions and teams are playing music from the same hymn sheet. You are on the same beat. If one part of your business needs to rapidly respond to an opportunity or a challenge, you can better orchestrate the entire effort."

But even as Dropbox supports customers in nearly every industry around the globe, not

every business has been quick to modernize its approach to work—at least not until COVID-19 transformed the way we work almost overnight. According to research from the Society for Human Resource Management, the percentage of U.S. employees working remotely jumped from 3% to 64% between January and April.<sup>1</sup> While it's too early to say whether the widespread move to work-from-home arrangements will become standard practice in the long term, it has fundamentally changed the way millions of people do their jobs and accelerated long-incubating trends around the future of work.

It has also driven more businesses to turn to companies like Dropbox as they seek new, agile ways of working. In fact, a report in early May of this year noted the spike in remote work has prompted a 60% increase in active weekly users on the company's desktop app, starting in mid-March, and a rise of three times the number of requests using its e-signature platform HelloSign in the recorded levels during the two-month span from January and February to March and April. While countless businesses had already adopted an agile mindset in the pre-COVID-19 era, the ascendance of remote work has shone a brighter light on its potential. For those that hadn't, the scramble to support a distributed workforce with agility-lending tools has called attention to the long-term value of the ethos.

"The pandemic has taken a toll on everyone, so our priority right now is to continue helping our employees, customers and community on a human level," Veilleux says. "There are so many tools and distractions these days, and we're here to help our customers on a journey to creating a quieter, more focused place to do their best work."

For Dropbox, an agile mindset provides the ability to adapt to change with the least amount of friction. Before the pandemic, its business goals were already aligned to technology and practices, using Atlassian tools like Jira across all aspects of product, app and service development and adding greater transparency to planning and resource allocation. Since the tools also foster remote collaboration, they helped ensure the transition was seamless for Dropbox's 2,800-plus employees.

"Jira is a powerful platform that enables developer productivity. It's also a place where we create visibility on the work being done, when it will be shipped and what dependencies exist, as well as status on progress and open risks," Veilleux says. "And it's an excellent planning tool. I have a saying: 'If it isn't in Jira, it does not exist.'"

Meanwhile, Dropbox's own solutions have supported its customers' journeys to enterprise agility. Dropbox Spaces, which launched in 2019, is a collaborative workspace that uses machine learning to surface the most important and relevant tasks, helping teams stay nimble despite being located in different cities, states or countries.

“With the onset of COVID-19, one publishing industry client of ours needed to quickly enable employees to work from home,” Veilleux says. “It was incredibly important to find an industry-adopted solution that enabled them to use best-of-breed tools and integrations to help keep their business functioning. Dropbox was already a known tool at the company, and in the industry as a whole, and by deploying it on a larger scale they were able to get their employees up and running and collaborating seamlessly in just one day.”

No one knows how long this crisis will last, but even if companies ultimately decide to prioritize physical spaces over digital ones, agile principles will most likely continue to be a necessity in the years ahead. The future workplace will be defined by flexibility, whether it comes in the form of remote hiring or broader adoption of AI and process automation, allowing workers to focus on complex tasks and delegate routine ones. Even as employees return to physical offices, the lessons of the COVID-19 era (and the value of an agility-powered approach) will likely continue to resonate.

“We have to continue to change and innovate the way we work,” Veilleux says. “While we’ve all been suddenly forced to work in fully distributed teams due to the pandemic, we certainly think there will be lasting effects beyond when we are physically back to work.”

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