



THE FUTURE OF **BUSINESS IN IRELAND**

A conversation with SMEs

In association with Amárach

VODAFONE OPEN CONVERSATIONS

 **vodafone**

FOREWORD

Regina Moran

Director of Enterprise, Vodafone Ireland



Our small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) sector is the backbone of Irish society. Not only does it make up more than 95% of Ireland's business economy, it generates 56% of its total turnover.

The SME sector provides 70% of all jobs in the non-financial business economy. It also accounts for just under half of all Gross Value Added (GVA). While the sector has seen sustained growth over the last number of years, the UK's decision to leave the EU will have an impact, so it has never been more important for Irish businesses to talk to each other to protect and continue this growth.

Vodafone has 2.3 million customers in Ireland and among those are thousands of SMEs, so it is vital for us to understand the sector to serve it better and contribute to its future sustainability.

Open Conversations is a new initiative from Vodafone Ireland to engage the SME sector and gain insights on the future of business. In an effort to gain a better understanding of the sector, we commissioned research with nearly 600 participants, including SME employers and employees and a panel of SME industry experts and representatives. We talked to them about their growth, ways of working, investment, technology, skills and training. We used the mix of robust research and insights-led conversation to look beyond the present to consider emerging trends and discuss, as a collective, the challenges they may face as well as the possible solutions.

There is an overwhelmingly positive outlook on the future of the SME sector in Ireland. So, along with policy makers and government stakeholders, we must consider what conditions we can put in place to ensure this positivity and growth is protected in an uncertain global environment.

Among many emerging themes, one which stood out was attracting and retaining talent within the sector. What was clearly articulated throughout our discussions with this community is a disconnect between employers, who are trying to attract and retain talent, and employees who now expect to work in a smart or digitally-enabled environment with options around flexibility and new ways of working. We also see the impact that culture has within an organisation, and that it has a significant impact when considering or embracing change.

It would be beneficial to consider the findings presented on the future of business and build on the realisation that significant change in the Irish workplace is happening now.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Regina Moran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Regina" being more prominent than the last name "Moran".

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RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY

Quantitative Research

- 1** Measuring perceptions, attitudes and behaviours
- 2** Isolating key drivers of stakeholder support
- 3** Observing different stakeholder opinions

Qualitative Research

- 1** Understanding attitudes and descriptions
- 2** Determining language and ideas and defining key terms
- 3** Gaining insights about issues and topics of interests

Methodology:

There were two elements to this research:



An online survey of **300 Irish employees**, working in firms with between 10-249 employees.

Industry sector – Employees

Agriculture, forestry and fishing

Arts and entertainment

Banking, insurance and other financial services

Charity, social enterprise or non-profit

Construction

Consulting or other professional or advisory services

Education and training

Health and social care

Hospitality and recreation

Manufacturing

Retail or wholesale

ICT and telco products or services

Technical and scientific services

Transport, logistics and storage

Utilities

Other service industry

Other



Telephone interviews with **250 Irish SME owners, managers and senior decision-makers**, with between 10-249 employees.

Industry sector – Businesses

Agriculture, forestry and fishing

Arts and entertainment

Banking, insurance and other financial services

Construction

Consulting or other professional or advisory services

Education and training

Health and social care

Hospitality and recreation

Manufacturing

Retail or wholesale

Technical and scientific services

Transport, logistics and storage

Utilities

Other service industry

RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY – DEFINITIONS

What is smart working?

Smart working is the combined use of technology with flexibility and agility for employees to work from home, from a hub or using a hybrid model (part-home, part-office). It enables companies to grow by attracting and retaining top talent, reducing overheads, increasing productivity and allowing people to achieve a true work life balance.

Smart working also supports global challenges such as the environment, cost of living, health, lifestyle and diversity.

What do we mean by technology?

When we talk about the technology behind smart working, we mean products or services that support customer engagement and business efficiencies, including:

- Mobile, broadband and converged communications
- Cloud computing

- Artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics
- Software tools and automation
- IoT (Internet of Things)
- VR & AR (Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality)
- Data analytics (workforce analytics, talent acquisition analytics, learning and development analytics)

What do we mean by digital skills?

We mean a set of skills relating to digital technology that enable employees to work more efficiently, share information, analyse data or to engage with customers using:

- Computers and computer applications
- Tablets and smartphones
- Websites
- Other online platforms and software tools



KEY STATS AT A GLANCE

Future growth



87%

of SMEs envisage **growth** in the next 3 years



+50%

of SMEs are **very confident** about the future

60%



of SMEs **plan to increase investment** in the short term, with 71% of those businesses planning to invest in staff attraction and retention

68%

do see **barriers to growth**, 46% from Brexit



69%

of SMEs will **increase technology investment** within the next 1-5 years

74%



of SMEs said technology enables **better decision making** and our reliance on IT and automation results in employees adapting and gaining new skills

22%

of SME employees do not feel they have the necessary **digital skills** for their role

Smart working



9%

of SMEs believe they are **fully embracing** smart working, 38% claim they are not considering it at all



77%

of employees are in **favour of it** but 25% feel their employer is embracing it

41%

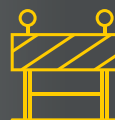
of employees have smart working **options available to them** and are more likely to recommend their company as somewhere to work

33%

of employees **see it as the top priority** in their current job, 50% in future roles and 34% are likely or very likely to move job for it



60%



of employers and 34% of employees believe company culture is the biggest barrier to smart working

67%

of SMEs believe it offers **benefits to the workforce** and 49% of employees feel it improves work/life balance



THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IN IRELAND

Introduction

This is the first in a series of Open Conversations reports on the future of business in Ireland. It has been compiled following extensive research of the SME sector. It has taken into account the views of hundreds of business owners, business management teams and employees across many industries. Vodafone Ireland has carried out interviews and surveys and engaged in a broad ranging debate at an event with industry representatives. It brought together multiple perspectives on the changing business landscape and facilitated a discussion and debate around themes such as business growth, investment, skills and training, smart working and the use of technology.



Future business growth: sentiment, investment, technology & skills

Our SME sector is vital for our economic health now and into the future. It is a diverse and vibrant sector that makes up over 95% of Irish businesses.

“ I think the SME sector is hugely important for Ireland. It's where the groups of five and ten people are employed, it's not Dublin centric – it goes right across the country and it really represents a massive part of employment generally in Ireland.”

• **Bobby Kerr,**
Irish Entrepreneur and Broadcaster

In terms of confidence, there is significant optimism in the sector with nearly 90% of SMEs predicting growth between now and 2021. 60% of employees are also confident in the future prospects of their company. Measures to protect this future growth are viewed as important by those in the sector but also by policy makers with the allocation of €950 million to support business and SMEs in the 2019 budget.

“ The economy is growing and so is Ireland's vital SME sector. Our own SFA research shows that small businesses are planning to invest in people, IT and equipment to stay ahead and continue to grow. However, we need to take measures to protect this growth. Whilst we're seeing confidence amongst our members, we also see concerns around our competitiveness especially in light of Brexit. Challenges like attracting and retaining talent, increasing costs of doing business in Ireland and a tax system that puts smaller businesses at a disadvantage need to be addressed. We must support our SME sector and focus on the small businesses in Ireland so that they can fulfil their potential.”

• **Sven Spollen-Behrens,**
Director, Small Firms Association

THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IN IRELAND



SMEs & Growth

87%

predict growth
between now
and 2021

60%

**plan to increase
investment**
over the next
12 months

71%

of these plan to
invest in **staff
retention &
recruitment**,
followed by sales
& IT/digital tools

68%

see barriers to growth,
46% of these saying from
Brexit followed by 40%
from taxes and rates

THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IN IRELAND

Irish SMEs understand that a more connected world brings increased possibilities for growth both in Ireland, in Europe and further afield. Yet, many SMEs see the biggest growth coming from existing relationships and local markets which suggests an inward view in an uncertain global environment.

A national unemployment rate of 6% brings fresh challenges for business owners. The research finds that SMEs plan to overcome this through significant investment in staff attraction and retention in the next five years, followed by investment in technology and sales. All of these factors indicate a buoyant market that enjoys strong cash flow and access to capital.

Irish businesses are operating at a time when it is difficult to predict the effect Britain's exit from the European Union will have on our economy and their relationship with our largest trading partner – the UK.

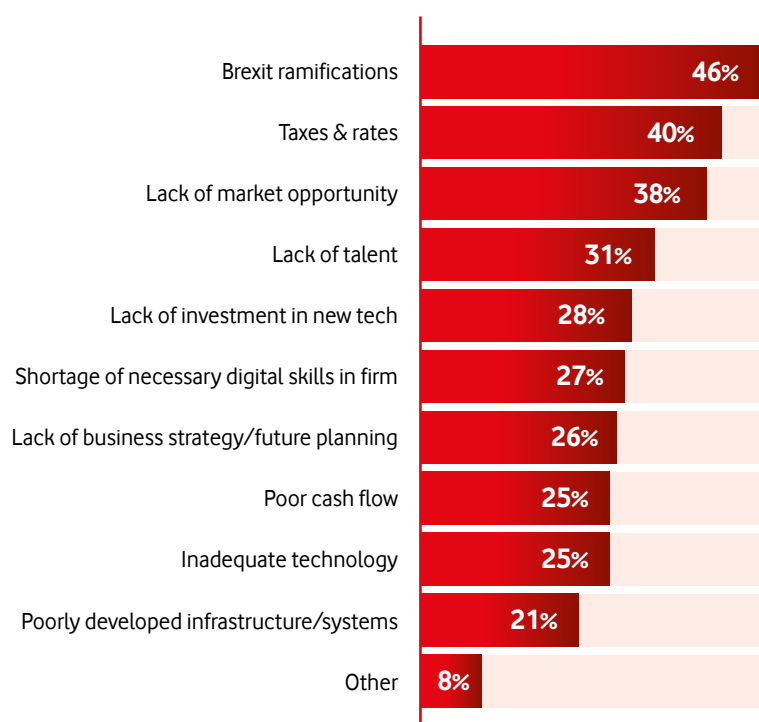
Unsurprisingly, SMEs view Brexit as the greatest threat to business growth, followed by taxes and rates. Sentiment suggests the greatest challenge will be accessing new markets to supplement any blockages to the UK market.

♥♥ On Brexit, in a wider sense, people seem to think that it will be easy for a business which sells mainly to the UK, be it goods or services, to find new markets and change their business models. But in reality that is very hard to do. Brexit is a much bigger challenge than people might think.”

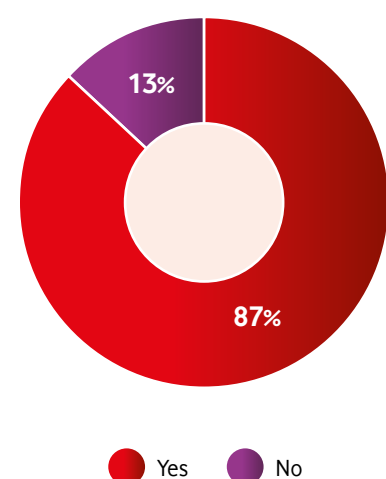
• Bobby Kerr,
Irish Entrepreneur and Broadcaster

The fact that so many SMEs are planning to invest will continue to stimulate the macro economic outlook and offers both job security and opportunities for job creation.

What are the barriers to growth?



Will your business grow in the next 3 years?



THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IN IRELAND

Technology

The trajectory of technology use by businesses is increasingly pointing towards a more connected future, one in which customers expect communication and service to happen in real time with the businesses they interact with. Artificial intelligence, augmented reality and increased automation seem certain to change the landscape of business, with much uncertainty at play in the market.

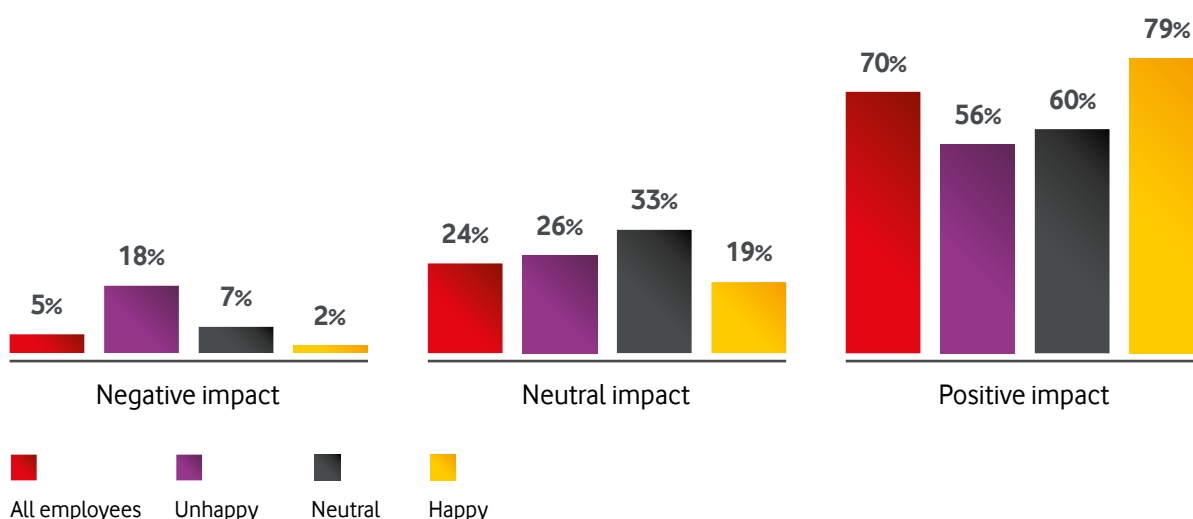
Despite this, both employees and employers from SME businesses see augmented reality or virtual reality as having limited impact on the way they work – instead seeing greater automation as having the most impact going forward. This would suggest there needs to be a wider understanding on how SMEs can benefit from new, more radical but affordable technologies that can have a positive impact on their operations.

While businesses are planning to increase their investment in technology significantly in the future, there is a recognition that businesses have not fully embraced it due to lack of resources, skills and knowledge.

♥♥ For me, the next technology trend Irish SMEs should think about embracing is robotic process automation, or RPA. This emerging form of business process automation involves the use of software with artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities to handle high-volume, repeatable tasks that previously required human input. These tasks include queries, calculations and maintenance of records and transactions. The early adoption would really help businesses to stay ahead competitively and could free up resources for other areas like training and staff recruitment.”

• Pat Lucey,
CEO and Co-founder, Aspira,
a Cork-based consulting and IT company

What is the nature of technological impact on the workplace?



THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IN IRELAND



Technology

69%

plan to **increase technology investment** within the next 1 to 5 years, with a focus on software tools and automation

39%

of firms are '**extremely reliant**' on **technology**, half expect to be 'extremely reliant' into the future

31%

of SMEs believe **barriers do exist** to fully embracing technology including investment, skills and time

32%

of employees agree a **lack of investment** is a barrier to embracing technology

THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IN IRELAND

Skills and Training

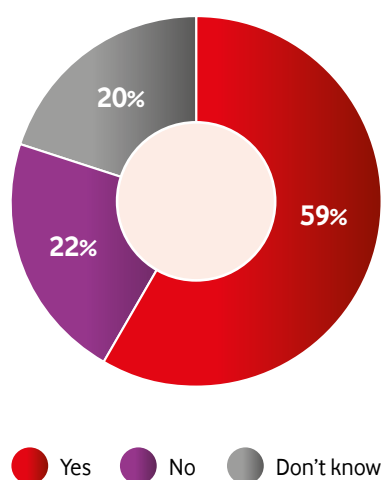
It is not difficult to overstate the importance of ongoing skills development and training for SME employees when it comes to future proofing their businesses. For SMEs to enjoy the confidence of their staff, they should have a plan of action for supporting ongoing training programmes.

- Many companies as they expand are having problems with attracting and more recently, retaining the staff they need. When companies come to us for help, we recommend that instead of investing in bean bags and free food, that they need to invest in training the staff and making them feel valued. Staff members tell us they don't want toys but trust. Company management say to us, 'what if we train our staff and they leave?' Our answer to them is 'what if you don't train them and they stay?'
- Noel Davidson,
Director of Training, Entrepreneurs Academy

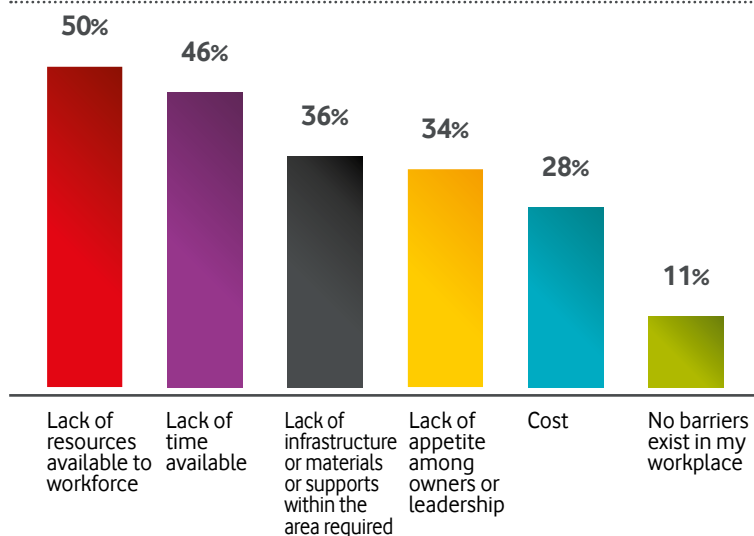
According to the research, 59% of employees feel they have the necessary digital skills for their role, however, according to the European Commission, Ireland has one of the lowest levels of digital skills in the EU¹. It is worth asking, are we focusing on the correct digital training to prepare our businesses for the future? 29% of employees surveyed see advanced IT and programming skills as the most important for the future, which is in line with skills demand coming from larger multinational tech companies, but these are not programmes generally offered at SME level. A lack of resources and time are considered the main barriers to upskilling but those surveyed agreed that digital marketing and data analytics skills are needed now and into the future.

It appears from this narrative that SME employees are conscious of the need to keep their skillsets relevant in the digital economy and will likely discriminate against employers who don't encourage or foster an environment friendly to ongoing professional development.

Do you have the necessary digital skills?



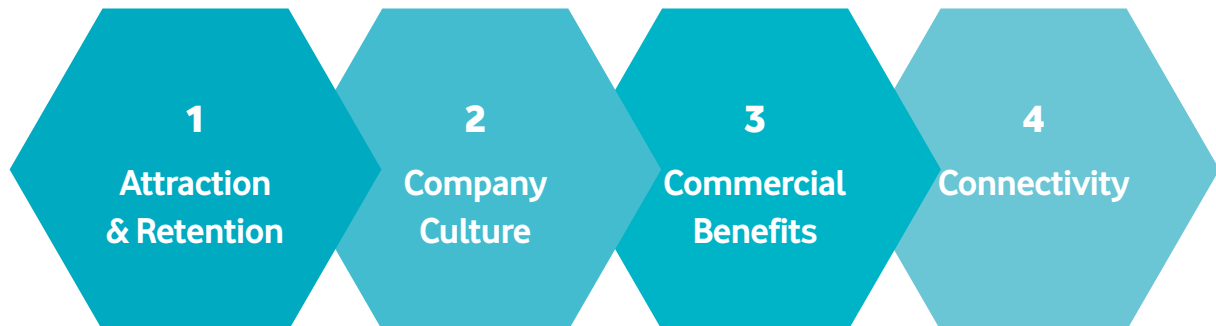
What are the barriers to upskilling?



¹ The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi>



SMART WORKING : THE 4 PILLARS



We are moving towards a single technology ecosystem where 20 billion devices will be connected by 2020.

This connectivity is changing working patterns as new tools and services transform the traditional workplace into a smart one. Smart working is the combined use of technology and connectivity with flexibility and agility for people to work from home, a co-working hub or using a hybrid model (part-home, part-office). With at least 216,000 people in Ireland working from home or from a co-working space², smart working is increasingly becoming a key consideration for Irish SMEs and it is predicted that over 35% of all employees will be smart working by 2022.³

Smartphones, tablets and Wi-Fi devices are all being used by staff that are smart working, whether in sales or deliveries or working from home. This connectivity is helping to create a Gigabit Society across Ireland, where smart working will become a matter of choice, rather than a function of location and broadband availability.

♥♥ Technology, connectivity and the rise of co-working hubs around Ireland has paved the way for a massive increase in people's ability and desire to smart work which is evident in the volumes registering on Abodoo. This will continue to rise as people choose to live outside cities and companies better understand the benefits of smart working."

• Vanessa Tierney,
Co-founder, Abodoo.com

1 : Attraction and Retention

Smart working is one of the most powerful practices available to help with attracting and retaining staff, particularly in areas where there is a lot of competition for the best candidates. Improved work/life balance, employee engagement and increased job satisfaction are seen as the biggest benefits of smart working, but having the technology to enable it first is considered crucial.

Research from Abodoo.com, the smart working careers platform, shows that the Irish co-working industry will double to five million locations by 2022 and that 70% of millennials want the ability to smart work, with this cohort of the population making up 75% of the workforce by 2025.

² Figure derived from the UK statistics and applied to Irish population <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105210705/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lmac/characteristics-of-home-workers/2014/sty-home-workers.html>

³ Abodoo.com

SMART WORKING: THE 4 PILLARS



Smart Working

77%

of employees **are in favour of it** but only 9% of SMEs believe they are fully embracing it

33%

of employees see it as **a top priority** in their current job, 50% in future roles and 34% are likely or very likely to move job for it

34%

of employees believe company culture is the **biggest barrier** to smart working

41%

of employees have **smart working options available** to them. They are more likely to recommend their company as somewhere to work and are also happier in their job

67%

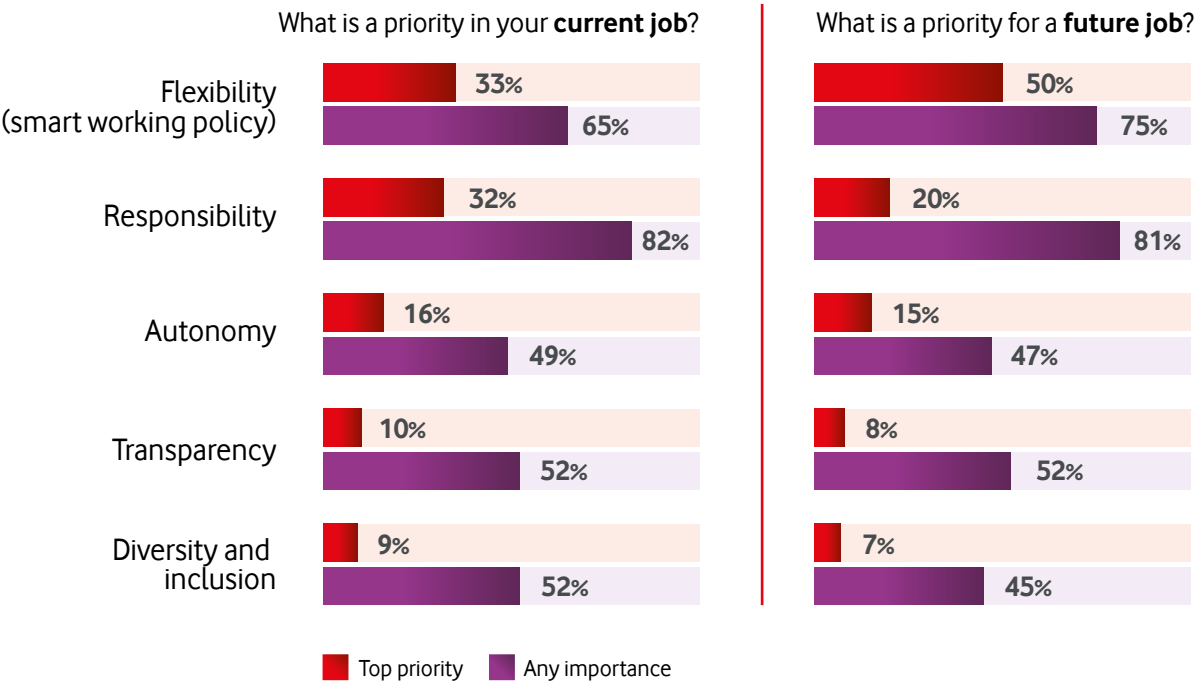
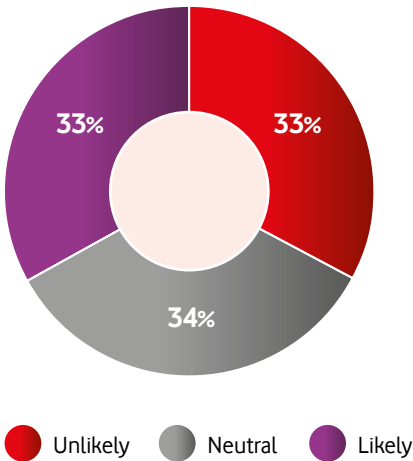
of SMEs believe it **offers benefits to the workforce**, whilst 49% of employees feel smart working improves work/life balance

SMART WORKING: THE 4 PILLARS

- ♥♥ As we get closer to full employment in Ireland, it is getting harder and harder to find the right employees and contracting or remote working can be a way to attract people who have recently retired, need flexibility to facilitate their families or who just don't want a full time job in the workplace. Why aren't we talking about flexibility around that?"
- Jimmy Sheehan, Commercial Director, Contracting Plus, Expert Accountants for Professional Contractors

Interestingly, one third of the employees surveyed see smart working as a top priority in their current job. A further half would look for it in a future role and 34% are likely or very likely to move job for it – highlighting the importance of remote and flexible work practices amongst SME employees.

Would you consider moving jobs for better smart working options?



SMART WORKING: THE 4 PILLARS

2: Company Culture

Despite employee desire for it, very few Irish SMEs are seen to be fully embracing smart working. There is a reoccurring theme within the sector among both business managers and employees that company culture is a real barrier to introducing smart working.

“Going back a few years ago we put a lot of time and money into our company culture and that helped with retention. The type of people we are looking for usually have a choice between working for us or a multinational that offers attractive packages and benefits. The only way we can compete is to give employees a culture that they really enjoy and a working environment that they thrive in – and we have found that flexibility is key to that.”

- **Geraldine Magnier,**
Director and Co-founder of Ildiro Analytics

Some employers have an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ attitude to people working remotely. Their worry is that transitioning from a situation where staff are easily observable to one where they are not will result in a drop in productivity.

“If you’re at home, the thinking goes, the chances are you’re more idle than if you were sitting in an office. But you can be just as productive working from home as you are working from another setting.”

- **Niamh Bushnell, Founder and CEO**
of research organisation TechIreland

According to some observers, it’s a serious mistake to underestimate the importance of the generational shift that is taking place as younger people age into the workforce and into management positions. It turns out there can be significant differences in terms of expectations between employers and their employees when it comes to smart working.

“Any organisation that ignores the generational shift and tries to impose the ideas of an older generation in terms of mobile working is on a hiding to nothing.”

- **John Riordan,**
Director of Support for multinational commerce facilitator, Shopify

For those businesses that have undergone a culture change to support smart working initiatives, the results have been overwhelmingly positive. Moreover, this research shows that 52% of smart workers are women, so engaging in a smart working project can help companies build and support diversity and inclusion in their workforce.

“A few years back, I wasn’t a huge advocate of people working from home. When people wanted to work from home, my reaction was that we didn’t need them at home; we needed them in the office. I quickly reversed that hard line position when one of our best staff members decided to relocate. Through smart working we were able to keep that person’s expertise within the company. It works well and now I don’t care where staff are – depending on the role you can work from anywhere as long as the work is done to a high standard.”

- **Pat Lucey,**
CEO and Co-founder, Aspira,
a Cork-based consulting and IT company

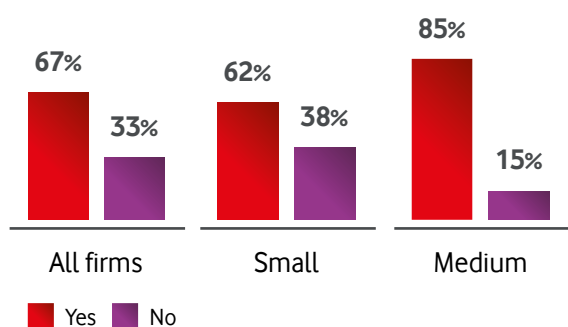
SMART WORKING: THE 4 PILLARS

3: Commercial Benefits

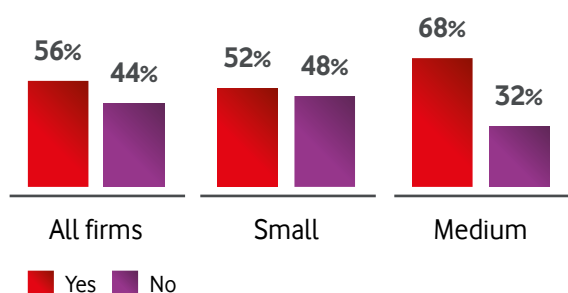
One of the most revealing aspects of the research highlights a discrepancy among business owners and managers in their perception of how smart working can contribute to wider business success – outside of attraction and retention and employee satisfaction.

When it comes to smart working, many business owners believe it benefits the employee more than the organisation. Fundamentally, there appears to be a knowledge gap in terms of the power of smart working in re-imagining operating models across all sectors and creating efficiencies in business. The impression that smart working won't reduce operating costs or increase productivity has led to a lack of motivation to embrace the principles of smart working among SMEs.

Do you believe smart working offers benefits to your workforce?



Do you believe smart working offers benefits to the organisation?



How can smart working benefit the bottom line?

In direct contradiction to what appears to be a common belief within the sector regarding smart working and business benefits, Abodoo.com say that businesses that engage in smart working can expect to benefit by a 15% productivity uplift, as well as a 40% improvement in their staff attrition rate. It also puts the amount of euros saved per employee per annum by those companies that facilitate smart working at €9,500.⁴

While not every business is equally positioned to facilitate remote working, for many there are at least aspects of the employee role that can be streamlined, made less stressful and in turn more productive through the application of smart working principles.

Smart working is also just as much about being able to manage assets more effectively as it is about employees being able to work flexibly. Using converged communications that allow employees to work flexibly – businesses can manage resources much more effectively through IoT devices and greater analytics.

Having smart ways of working, particularly where employees are often field based, offers huge potential for cost savings across businesses. Worryingly, as more and more businesses begin to embrace it as the new way of operating – and realise the benefits in terms of their bottom line – organisations who are slower to adapt will find it more and more difficult to compete.

⁴ Based on a US study that a typical business would save \$11,000 per person per year <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/telecommuting-statistics>

SMART WORKING: THE 4 PILLARS

♥♥ Companies undoubtedly understand the numerous benefits of smart working for their employees but are often challenged to see the positive impact it has to their bottom line. Company benefits include reduced overhead costs, increased employee productivity, retention and well-being, and unlimited access to new talent pools by focusing on skills rather than location. Companies of all sizes need to consider smart working in order to remain competitive and future proof the growth of their business.”

- Vanessa Tierney,
Co-founder, Abodoo.com

4: Connectivity

The power and proliferation of smart devices means that many employees already own the technology they need to do at least part of their work remotely. So having reliable connectivity to support this is important. 53% of SMEs and 60% of employees believe it is crucial for smart working. For instance, of the 62% of SMEs that saw challenges to smart working, 34% of them felt poor broadband connection hampered the introduction of smart working practices. However, only 9% of employees felt the same way.

The wider uptake of smart working is a major opportunity for many SMEs across different industries. The technology to enable smart working initiatives is becoming more and more affordable for smaller to medium sized businesses.

♥♥ Many Irish business owners are of an age where just a single computer was shared among their class, or even their whole year, in school or college. But their employees’ generation have more technology in their phones or watches than existed in a whole university a generation before. This means the people running today’s companies and engaging in digital transformation must rethink the way they do business, even if they personally don’t ‘get’ it.”

- Neil McDonnell, Chief Executive of the Irish Small to Medium Enterprise (ISME) organisation



SMART WORKING IN PRACTICE



Sentiment among both employees and employers was favourable towards the concept of smart working.

However, it was agreed that the right cultural conditions, having adequate technology, and skills and training are necessary for smart working to be fully embraced.

Culture

- Trust
- Responsibility
- Autonomy

Skills

- Data recording
- Analytics
- Digital training

Technology

- NBloT
- Mobile
- Broadband
- Connectivity

SMART WORKING IN PRACTICE

Using a combination of smart devices and flexible working options the following business benefits can be realised for many different sectors.

Construction, Manufacturing, Farming, Services

Progress reporting: Staff onsite can update managers by sending pictures/data and taking direction.

✓ Reduced on-site supervision

Construction, Manufacturing, Farming, Services

Engagement: Field based/onsite staff can manage customer and client interactions better by recording information & sentiment across a range of areas, not just specific to that one service.

✓ Faster/improved customer journey

Construction, Farming, Services

Supplies: Staff can order and manage their own supplies for jobs using smart devices.

✓ Reduced management intervention

Retail, Construction, Professional Services, Manufacturing

Flexibility: Allowing staff the option to work during their most efficient times or hours in the best locations.

Allowing staff to work longer hours when approaching deadlines, and shorter days when they prefer to have time off, means the resources can be flexed when the business needs it most.

✓ Improved use of resources
✓ Improved staff engagement

✓ Better work/life balance
✓ Preferred employer

Retail, Construction, Professional Services, Manufacturing

Data & Analytics: Data gained from smart devices such as tracking info and time spent on jobs can allow better coordination of resources by reducing journey times and gaining a better understanding of resource required on jobs including fuel costs.

✓ Greater efficiency and reduced costs



CASE STUDY: NEARFORM



Evolutionary software. Accelerated.

NearForm is an Irish software development company, founded in Tramore in 2011 and with operations in Dublin, London, New York and Dubai. NearForm is a key provider of open software solutions to companies embarked on digital transformation of their products and services and counts brands such as EY, Condé Nast, The New York Times, Samsung and DPD among their customers. Their team of more than 135 people is distributed in 24 countries throughout the world.

From day one, they supported growth by adopting a smart working approach. This has enabled them to hire the best people, it allows for some of the team to be based nearer clients and creates a rich diverse culture in the company. It also enables very flexible work practices so everyone enjoys a better work/life balance, with no commute and the freedom to live and work from where they want. One of the watch outs from NearForm's experience is making sure people feel part of the NearForm family and that they understand the value of getting people together through team meetups and an annual company get-together.

NearForm has instilled work processes to ensure a collaborative environment and uses a selection of modern communications tools with video calls as a policy. Eimear O'Donoghue, HR Director with NearForm says, "Smart working is our way of life and it brings great benefits to our business, customers and our people. It fits well with our culture of trust, collaboration, diversity and quality in all that we do. We view our culture as our competitive advantage and the foundation of our continued success."



CONCLUSION – THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS FOR SMES

Vodafone Ireland has undertaken this Open Conversation collaboration with SMEs to start a discussion that will go beyond this report, to their future success and also Ireland's economic outlook.

The overall positive sentiment about the future of business in the SME sector was clear throughout this report and in the wider conversation about our economic success and innovative culture. Our economy has recovered. Our headline growth is 7.6% – outstripping our European counterparts. The Irish SME sector is expanding and contributing massively to this success.

However, the reality for many SMEs is that it is getting increasingly hard to find, hire and retain the right people to help them drive their business ambitions. At the same time, Irish employees want more flexibility in their lives; are increasingly savvy about how that can be done and are willing to change jobs to improve their work/life balance.

Companies not currently engaged in a smart working strategy would do well to ask themselves where they see their company in three to five years, can they envisage a scenario where smart working isn't the answer to some of their business challenges and will it help create new opportunities?

At Vodafone Ireland, we believe the future is exciting. This report shows us that many SMEs view technology as key to unlocking future opportunities, engaging with customers, growing a strong base and enabling better decision making and higher productivity levels.



We see connectivity and technology at the core of enabling Irish businesses to flourish, and want to understand businesses so we can develop technology that helps achieve this goal. We want to partner with our customers to help realise their connected ambition and protect and support growth. There is a recognition across industry stakeholders that both education and a sharing of best practices among the Irish SME community is needed in a time of uncertainty but great optimism. We must create an environment of confidence that encourages businesses to invest and evaluate all options available that will allow them to achieve their business ambitions both now and into the future.



APPENDIX: OPEN CONVERSATIONS EVENT



The following stakeholders attended the Future of Business in Ireland: A Conversation with SMEs event at the Iveagh Hotel where a discussion was held on the key research findings. Observations, reactions and recommendations made during the event have been captured within this report.

Name	Title	Organisation
Louise O'Connor	Chief Digital Officer	Abodoo.com
Vanessa Tierney	Co-Founder	Abodoo.com
Daniel Hickey	MD	Allinall Ingredients
Gerard O'Neill	Chairman	Amárach
Pat Lucey	CEO	Aspira
Bernadette Phelan	Head of Advisory Services	Business in the Community Ireland (BITC)
Carol Ann Casey	Managing Director	CA Compliance
Jimmy Sheehan	Commercial Director	Contracting Plus
Noel Davidson	Director	Entrepreneurs Academy
Geraldine Magnier	Director	Idiro Analytics
Neil McDonnell	Chief Executive	ISME
Adrienne Harrington	CEO	Ludgate
Paul Marshall	Head of Sales	Manpower
John Riordan	Director of Support	Shopify
Sven Spollen-Behrens	Director	Small Firms Association
Niamh Bushnell	Founder & CEO	TechIreland
Ken Tobin	Co-Founder	Tralee HQ

Thank you

Vodafone Ireland would like to thank everyone who contributed to this research. Your participation and insights have played a vital role in gaining a clearer understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Irish SMEs in future.



The future is exciting.

Ready?

