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▶ Taking Stock of the Digital Dividend

Where are EBMOs on the
digitalization journey and
what's next?

“The Effective Employers’ Organization –
A series of hands-on guides to building and
managing effective employers’ organizations”

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Taking Stock of the Digital Dividend: Where are EBMOs on the digitalization journey and what's next?

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 **FOREWORD**

The global business community is nothing if not resilient. And representative employer organizations are setting the tone through their ability to adapt and seize new opportunities. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the harnessing of digital technology to create new frontiers in the way that they operate, in the services they provide and in the impact they make. There has never been a more important time to take stock of where employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) are on their digital journey and of what comes next.

This publication complements others recent ILO guides on areas such as resilience, effective membership strategies and making better use of data. The core aim of this suite of materials is to support EBMOs as they ramp up activity and take a lead on economic and labour market recoveries as we grapple with evolving COVID19 challenges and look ahead to a post-pandemic era. At the heart of this is recognition that agility and adaptability are non-negotiable features of a successful 21st-century EBMO and an increasing appetite to innovate and challenge the status quo. Accelerating digitalization is a clear manifestation of this dynamism and growth mindset.

Creating a modern business environment requires cooperation; digital tools provide a means of building coalitions and alliances. They also provide new opportunities to engage members at pace, to create compelling and data-driven solutions to emerging policy challenges and to spread the word on the positive role of business in society. The big picture is about seizing the opportunities that effective digitalization presents; it is about reframing the role of EBMOs within the national political, social and economic ecosystem. It is also about taking a lead on what kind of (digital) future of work we want to create. This in turn holds the key to elevating the voice and reputation of private sector employers across the world.

Of course, EBMOs are at very different stages in the digital journey. But this makes learning from each other even more of an opportunity. An overriding objective of this guide is to learn lessons from different approaches and initiatives taken forward by EBMOs across the globe and to distil these examples into practical and usable tips.

We would like to thank the main author of this report, Tom Hadley, for his expertise and leadership on this evolving issue, as well as Jeanne Schmitt from the ITCILO ACT/EMP Team, who has provided substantial inputs to the report and contributed to the drafting and good practices collection. Thank you to all the ACT/EMP colleagues who have contributed to the report in various ways and especially to Christian Hess from ILO ACT/EMP for his coordination work. A big thank you to all the EBMOs which participated in the interviews and provided case study examples and practical insight. The digital journey is never-ending, but we want this guide to provide a valuable pit stop, a chance to take stock and take a breath before embarking on the next stage with resolve and optimism and in the knowledge that the global EBMO community will provide support along the way.

Deborah France-Massin

Director, Bureau for Employers Activities
(ACT/EMP), ILO

Jorge Illingworth

Manager, Programme for Employers Activities
(ACT/EMP), ITCILO

▶ INTRODUCTION – DIGITAL IN CONTEXT

Digitalization is one of the priorities for employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) across the globe. The stakes are high: getting this change process right holds one of the keys to delivering effective member services, which will in turn drive retention and new-member acquisition. It is also a means of amplifying advocacy voice, driving innovative campaigns and finding new ways of showcasing the positive role of business in society. Harnessing digital technology is also a way of driving internal efficiencies, developing better processes, boosting internal skills and enhancing productivity.

A word on terminology

Within this report, we have adopted the following working definitions which are consistent with other International Labour Organization (ILO) reports, particularly with regards to using data as a strategic asset (The DaaSA project¹):

- ▶ *Digitization* – converting information into a digital format
- ▶ *Digitalization* – the adoption of data technologies to find better, quicker ways to solve problems and, as such, to rely more systematically on the collection, management and use of data (it's focused on processes, not information)
- ▶ *Digital transformation* – transformation of an organization's business model, strategy and organization around digital technologies, thereby fundamentally changing how organizations operate and deliver value

Where are we on the digitalization journey?

Eighty per cent of EBMOs across the world have renovated and adapted their service delivery, according to the survey conducted by ILO's Bureau for Employers Activities (ACT/EMP) and International Organisation of Employers (IOE).² Digitalization is at the heart of this change. The majority of EBMOs surveyed are now offering virtual advisory, legal and consulting services (83 per cent), with over 50 per cent moving their training offer to an online platform. The feedback from EBMOs around the world has also underlined one key fact: organizations are at different stages of the digital journey and have different priorities going forward. This is reflected in the core questions we are seeking answers to in this guide, such as how organizations with little or no digital infrastructure can take steps forward and create some quick wins and how EBMOs with an established digital offering can drive continuous improvement.

80% of EBMOs across the world have renovated and adapted their service delivery

Digitalization can support the core strategic and commercial priorities of EBMOs, including member engagement, membership growth, enhanced communication, advocacy impact and diversified revenue streams. The way forward for harnessing the full potential of digitization is to build digital skills and mindset by learning from each other and exchanging information on what works and what does not. These apply to specific elements of an EBMO's offering (for example, how best to digitalize training

¹ Information on the initiative can be accessed here: https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_757375/lang--en/index.htm

² Survey conducted by ACT/EMP and IOE in May–June 2020. Information can be accessed at: https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS_749379/lang--en/index.htm

services and enhance remote learning opportunities) to wider-ranging strategic reviews (for example, how best to future-proof the organization through effective digital transformation).

 **As digital technologies increasingly pervade different spheres of business activity, businesses and EBMOs alike will need to develop new capabilities to respond and innovate at the pace of constantly changing technology and market conditions.³**

► Dr Deborah Soule, University of Massachusetts Lowell's Manning School of Business

How is the external environment accelerating change?

The COVID19 crisis has been a seismic shock to the way we live, the way we work and to the way we view the world. EBMOs across the globe have been at the forefront of helping the businesses they represent to weather the storm; the digital delivery of services has been a key element of this response. Practical examples of digitally-driven COVID19 resilience is a core element of the recent ILO ACT/EMP 'Leading business in times of COVID crisis' report.

The pandemic has accelerated digitalization trends for EBMOs. In some instances, the pandemic has tested and validated investments in digitalization made before the COVID19 crisis. For other EBMOs, the crisis shone the light on urgent need to digitalize core services. In the words of Phil O'Reilly, former Chair of the OECD Board for Business: 'EBMOs have had to deal with questions they have never had to deal with before; they have had to pivot and build new capability fast.' The acceleration in digital adoption is a theme across the wider business community, with a Twilio study on digital engagement showing that 97 per cent of companies have sped up their digital transformation, and 68 per cent saying the pandemic sped up their digital transformation 'a great deal'.

97 per cent of companies have sped up their digital transformation, and 68 per cent say the pandemic sped up their digital transformation 'a great deal'.


Aims of this report

The aim of this report prepared by the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) and the Programme for Employers Activities of the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO) is to explore what digitalization looks like in practice for EBMOs, through a global stock-take of experiences to date. Highlighting (first) lessons learned will also help provide a roadmap for future changes. The publication is based on practical examples of innovative digital practices that have made a tangible impact, but we do not shy away from the challenges ahead and the risks inherent with the digital era. What are the potential limitations to digitalization, barriers and reality checks? How can we measure the progress and impact of digitalization (and justify the investment)?

³ Part of a blog for the ILO: https://www.ilo.org/actemp/news/WCMS_762495/lang--en/index.htm

This report is intended to support and complement other guides for EBMOs such as the recent Manual on Membership strategies and policies⁴ published by the ITCILO and the Dutch Employers Cooperation Programme (DECP), the forthcoming ILO-ITCILO ACT/EMP Guide 'Driving up Resilience' as well as the ILO ACT/EMP project on data as a strategic asset for capacity-building of EBMOs (DaaSA). Our focus is on finding answers to the three following core questions:

1. **What works?** What are the latest drivers of digitalization and what is the current state of play in terms of digital adoption within the global EBMO community?
2. **Why does it work?** What are some of the common themes and implementation tips we can extrapolate from specific examples of digitalization in the areas of governance, products and people?
3. **What's next?** How will digital and data technology evolve over the coming years and how can EBMOs ensure that they are ahead of the game and in tune with changing member needs? How can they ensure that new channels work alongside traditional service delivery models and maximize new opportunities?

 **People want to access information when they need it, which is why digital delivery will become even more important. This is the opportunity to deliver a 24/7 service to members.**

▶ Kristine Ringstad Vartdal, Director of Digital Services, NHO (Norway)

 **Digitalization is transforming the world of work. Faced with the multiplicity of technologies, major challenges include ensuring the right investment and developing the internal skills that are needed.**

▶ John Nkono, Secretary General, FEC (Democratic Republic of Congo)

This report is based on collective intelligence from the ACT/EMP team (ILO and ITC-ILO) and specific insight from EBMO leaders, digital experts and business transformation specialists. The aim is to take stock of current trends as well as to look ahead, based on the written and oral input from over 30 business organizations across all regions of the globe. We have also used this collective feedback to draw immediate lessons and make practical recommendations for the future.

⁴ Membership strategies and policies – A Manual for EBMOs, Jeanne Schmitt, Paolo Salvai, Arnout de Koster, 2021, <https://www.itcilo.org/resources/membership-strategies-and-policies-manual-ebmos>



PART I



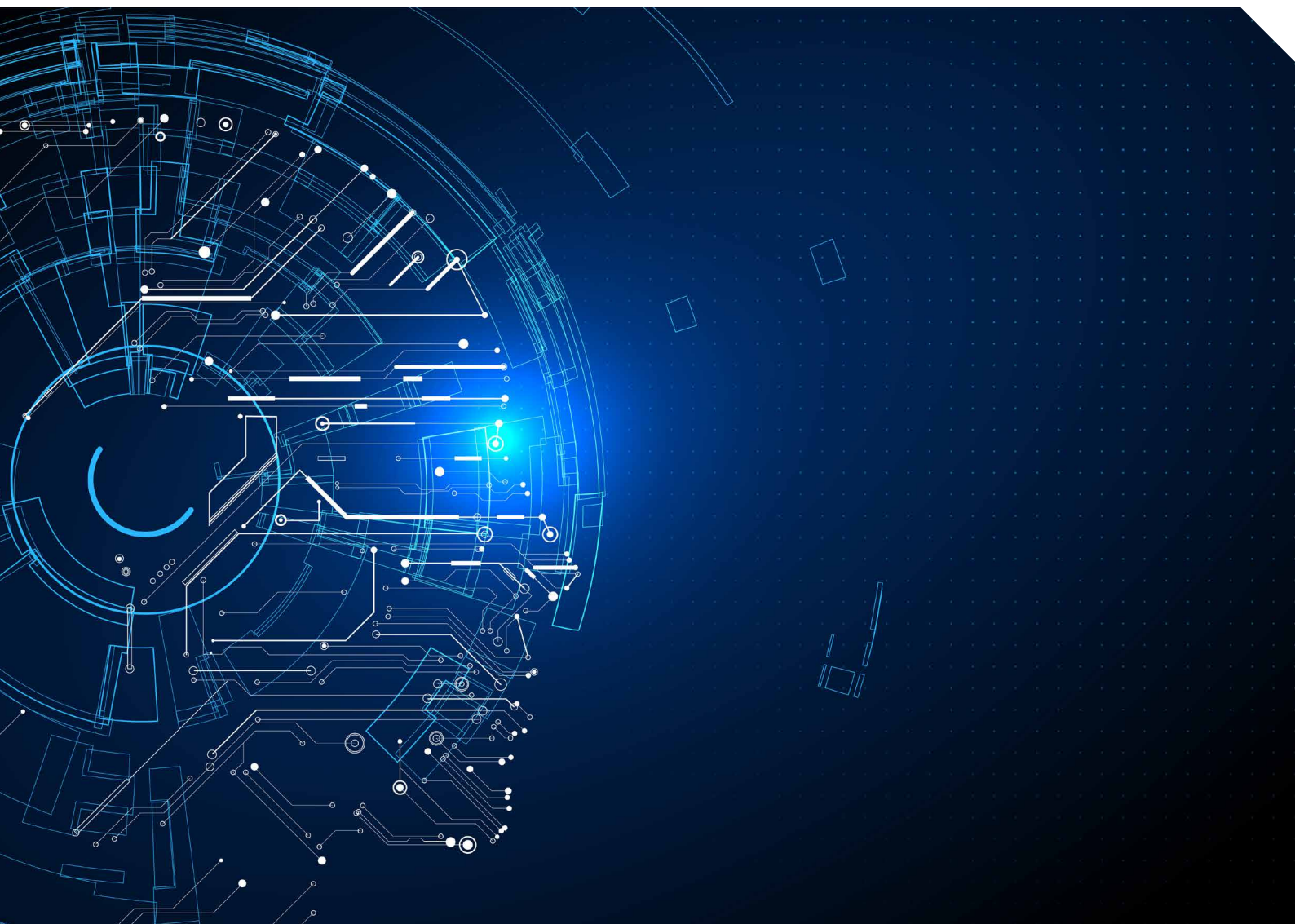
What works?

▶ PART I – WHAT WORKS?

What are the latest drivers of digitalization and what is the current state of play in terms of digital adoption within the global EBMO community? How can digitalization assist in harnessing data for value-creation underpinning the core inward-looking and outward-looking components of EBMO activities, around member services and external advocacy and campaigning?

In this section, we take stock of what works (and what does not) in the following three areas:

1. **Internal procedures and efficiencies** – How are digital tools and new technology being used to facilitate process improvement within EBMOs as well as internal cooperation and project management?
2. **Member services** – How is digitalization supporting innovation, adaptation and expansion of EBMO services such as training and mentoring, legal guidance, business support, events, peer networks and commercial partnerships? What tangible benefits are being delivered to members and how are these being measured?
3. **External impact** – How is digitalization supporting EBMOs to boost external impact, drive member engagement into surveys and consultations and enhance advocacy and campaigning activities? What new ways of building relationships with policy makers, journalists and other influencers are emerging and how can digital channels be used to impact wider public opinion?



▶ 1. What works? – How is digitalization boosting internal procedures and efficiencies?

The challenge for many EBMOs is a perennial one: how to position the voice of business at the forefront of an increasing range of pressing social and economic issues, while simultaneously leading proactive campaigns and ramping up practical support to members. And all this with flat or diminishing revenues and limited resources! Making any kind of step-change within this context relies on harnessing external support and practical tools in a way that enhances capacity and impact in a cost-effective and time-efficient way. This is where data is an asset and digital tools are needed to harness them.

The increasing use of digital tools to enhance internal procedures and management cuts across a range of functions and disciplines, including finance/accounting, HR/recruitment and marketing/communications. Harnessing digital tools is also making an impact on project management and internal cooperation, both within departments and across the whole organization. Digitalization also ups the ante on data security and the need to safeguard confidential EBMO communication and internal databases against viruses and other forms of external manipulation. We will consider all of these opportunities and risks below.

▶▶ The core aims of our digital transformation have been to improve our internal governance, strengthen the effectiveness of our advocacy activities and enhance member services.

▶ Vincent Kouette, Deputy Executive Director, GICAM (Cameroon)

Internal processes

Digitalization is an ongoing process; most EBMOs are at a relatively early stage. Their digital journey is a mirror of private companies' ones, but take into account the specificities of EBMOs' membership-based structure and ways of working. The feedback from EBMOs around the world is that investment in digital tools, such as customer relations management (CRM) or membership management systems, is resulting in some tangible improvements and efficiencies. This is something that can be built on going forward. Being clear on how these improvements will be measured and quantified is an important step from the outset as this will ensure that benefits can be demonstrated and the investments justified.

Specific (and quantifiable) examples of how digitalization has enhanced internal processes within the secretariat include:

- ▶ *Increased speed of processing and online purchasing* – For example, online booking systems for training and events and for renewing annual membership have saved time and resources for members as well as for EBMO staff. Enabling members to download and print their own membership certificates rather than having these sent out by post is another practical example of this. The focus for EBMOs has been on making it 'easier for member to do business with us'. Online shops enable members to purchase training and other services that are not included as part of the membership package. Progress here is measured in increased take-up of these additional services and additional revenue streams.
-

- ▶ *Improved accessibility* – Website improvements have enhanced navigability and made it easier for members (and external stakeholders) to find the information they need. Progress is being measured in page views and number of downloads as well as in fewer inbound calls from members who cannot find what they are looking for! This opportunity for increasing awareness is also based by using other platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram to complement information accessed through the main website or refer back to it.
- ▶ *Self-service facilities* – Business leaders will often want to access information outside of regular working hours or at the weekend. Using chatbots⁵ and other mechanisms for answering basic questions and signposting members to where they can find the information they want is an important way forward. Some EBMOs have also made it possible for members to change their own contact details when these change or to add additional contacts within their organization to mailing lists and specific interest groups, or to their CRMs.
- ▶ *Member insight and feedback* – EBMOs are increasingly using digital tools – including social media and live online webinars – to capture the insight and thoughts of business leaders. This is an effective complement to traditional emailed survey forms and provides a way for EBMOs to ‘get closer’ to their members and understand how their needs and priorities are evolving.

In summary, investment in digitalization is being manifested in increased automation and efficiency as well as in a more user-friendly experience for members. More people inside the EBMO secretariat can have access to data when digitalized and shared, which in turn leads to a better understanding of member needs and new opportunities for deepening relationships.

Digital tools (such as CRM) also have the capacity to store much more information about members, which allows EBMOs to work with potentially more contact persons within their member associations or companies. Relying on one primary contact creates potential risk, particularly if the contact leaves or the relationship sours with that individual. A successful multi-contact approach entails getting buy-in from the central contact point to avoid any source of conflict and to ensure transparency. Making sure that the right people can directly receive the most appropriate information also means that more individuals within the member business understand the work of the EBMO and are advocates for remaining in membership. At the same time, ensuring that governance rules around all data collection and sharing are adhered to will remain a priority for EBMO leadership and management teams.

Internal cooperation and project management

The feedback from EBMOs around the world is that delivery of member services as well as external advocacy activities increasingly require cross-functional teams and effective cooperation across the organization. Using collaboration and communication tools like Slack, Teams, Zoom and WhatsApp are playing a role in breaking down silos and creating more fluid project-based work that deliver positive outcomes for members and a more vibrant and varied work environment for EBMO employees. This was a first for many EBMOs when the first lockdown measures were announced and staff had to work at least partially from home. However, this is fast becoming a usual work method and will be a lasting legacy of the crisis.

For many EBMOs we have spoken to for this guide, there is an increasing focus on creating ‘integrated projects’ that are not driven independently by individual departments or individuals, but rather draw on different parts of the organization working together from the outset. For example, integrated advocacy campaigns will often include a focus on generating bespoke data, creating compelling stories, building coalitions, making an external impact with policy makers, reaching a broad audience through media coverage and harnessing social media channels, actively engaging members in the activity and generating revenue through sponsorship and commercial partnerships. The multifaceted nature of these integrated campaigns makes smooth internal cooperation between different teams and departments essential. This is where the adoption of the digital tools flagged above can make a tangible difference and contribute to the development of a strong culture of internal collaboration and agility. An example of this is the development of a digital collaborative platform by GICAM in Cameroon which has allowed

⁵ A chatbot is a software application used to conduct an online chat conversation via text or text-to-speech, in lieu of providing direct contact with a live human agent.

members of their Digital Economy Commission to exchange views and share documents more easily, particularly in the context of the pandemic, where traditional modalities for collaboration were disrupted. Recent 'digital meet-ups' organized by the Digital Economy Commission⁶ have focused on boosting digital infrastructure and digital literacy, developing regulations that enable people to sign contracts online and on seizing new opportunities linked to e-insurance.

Digital technology can be used to design new insurance products at a competitive cost and to reach more people, even in the rural areas.

► Reine Mbang Essobmadje, First Vice President of GICAM and President of the Digital Economy Commission⁷

Using digital tools is also helping EBMOs to work across different geographical areas within the country. A good example of this is FEC, who are using digital channels to enhance exchanges between the different FEC offices spread over the whole DRC territory (see Box 1). The debate on regional devolution on policy issues such as skills and active labour market policies may increase the need for EBMOs to have a strong presence and voice on regional and national policy issues, at the same time. Digital tools can provide the means of embedding a bespoke regional presence whilst maintaining cohesion and a consistency of approach across wider EBMO activities. A stronger regional voice can also be used as a member recruitment tool, without opening and maintaining a large regional office or extending the services of existing regional offices.

BOX 1: Using digital tools to enhance internal communication and project management

- **FEC (DRC)** has used digital platforms as an alternative to physical meetings to enhance exchanges between the different FEC offices spread over the whole country's territory. This has improved consistency and speed of decision-making.
- **REC (UK)** has made use of WhatsApp to share information quickly with the senior leadership team and to speed up decision-making on emergency issues.
- **CGEM (Morocco)** has taken a lead on a series of high-profile issues by establishing bespoke 'Commissions' involving both members and external stakeholders – for example, the Human Capital Commission and the [E-Government Commission](#). Digital platforms provide a means of managing and coordinating these multi-stakeholder initiatives.

Data as a source of business intelligence

Data is perhaps the most powerful, yet underutilized and poorly managed organizational asset EBMOs have today. In most EBMOs, data is fragmented across business functions, and few EBMOs apply policies that explicitly recognize data as an asset, with systems and procedures in place to ensure its appropriate stewardship. Effective EBMO decision-making at the operational, management and strategic levels relies on data as sources of information, knowledge and insights. This is at the heart of ILO ACT/EMP activities to position data as a strategic asset.⁸ Why does this matter? Ultimately, getting this right will

⁶ Examples of specific themes covered by the Digital Economy Commission can be accessed at the following link: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202105280166.html>

⁷ Speaking at the meeting of the Digital Economy Commission in May 2021.

⁸ For insights, strategies and practical tools on positioning data as a strategic asset, visit: https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_757375/lang--en/index.htm

enhance services and grow membership. The strategic collection, management and use of data will also support EBMOs in their decision-making, generate new sources of income, and improve organizational efficiencies in ways that not only keep pace with changes, but predict them.

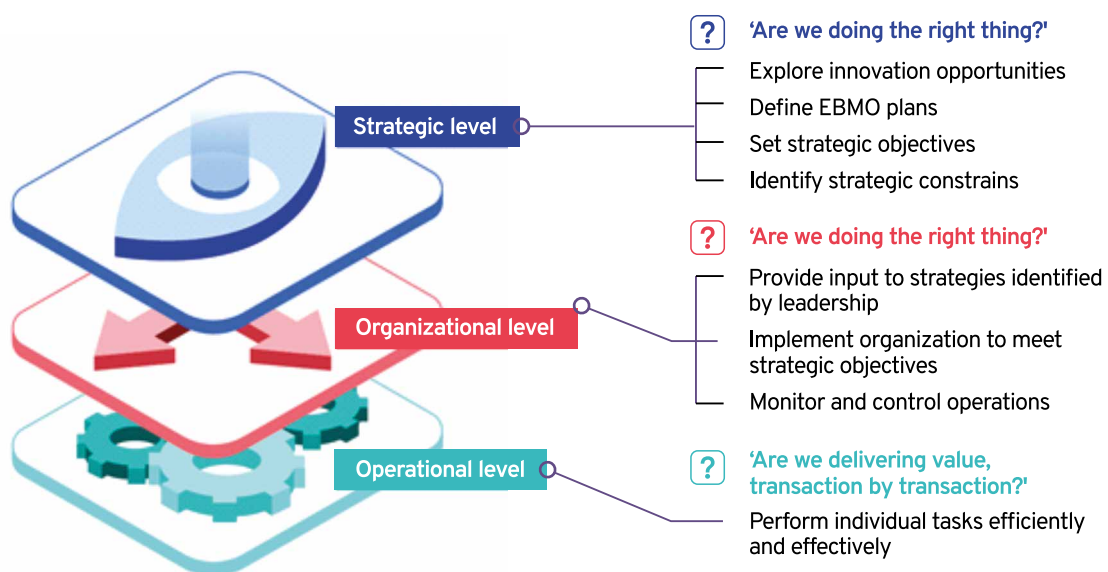
EBMOs already collect original data on members and their interests, needs, and policy concerns. They also generate original data on internal activities, operations and performance. What can be done differently? Moving forward, better prioritization of data and investment in its collection, management and use is essential for successful digitalization; digital tools and technologies use and generate data that can produce indicators measuring changes in mindsets, practices and resources. Data is the 'raw material' that digital tools and technologies need to function.

BOX 2: Data as a strategic asset (DaaS) – Overview of ILO ACT/EMP Initiative

More effective use of data can lead to better business intelligence, analysis-based decision-making, and real-time information about operations. It can also provide meaningful insights and intelligence to members, and ultimately to have more influence over policy outcomes. The ILO ACT/EMP/initiative aims to deepen insights and build capacity among EBMOs to:

- ▶ identify strategic opportunities to provide data-driven value for their members in the changing world of business through policy work and services;
- ▶ achieve operational efficiencies through implementing more data-driven business practices in key EBMO business units;
- ▶ develop guidance notes, reference material and practical tools to support EBMOs to innovate as organizations, through data-based structural design and human resource development initiatives.

Positioning data as a strategic asset involves recognizing the potential value of data and its role in providing EBMOs with a competitive advantage. The initiative supports the ILO's work in the area of [Transforming EBMOs into data-driven organizations](#), which includes a study of current data management practices, challenges and opportunities for EBMOs.⁹ Other outputs include a transformational readiness assessment tool (a self-audit tool to evaluate current EBMO use and management of data), a practical handbook with case studies, guidelines to support EBMOs in positioning data as a strategic asset and the development of a new training programme in this area.



⁹ The study published in July 2021 is available here: https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS_814714/lang--en/index.htm

Data collection: Challenges and opportunities

EBMOs rely on members' input to decide on their organizational strategies, policy orientations or services development. The most common way of collecting input and bespoke data is through surveys, but a number of EBMOs have mentioned 'survey fatigue' as a major challenge, with response rates declining. This jeopardizes the validity of the data and diminishes the robustness and impact of the research offering. In addition, it creates a huge drain on resources, as EBMO staff have to send several reminders and make follow-up calls. Using digital tools – including social media and live online webinars – to capture the insight is an effective alternative – or, at the very least, a way of complementing traditional e-mailed survey forms.

Finding new ways of driving input and harnessing new tools is crucial. For example, Qualtrics is already being used or piloted by some organizations to collect and analyse data. One other way forward flagged by some EBMOs is using a 'dripping' strategy which involved collecting regular insight and data throughout the year, rather than focusing on an annual thick data collection exercise. This is where digital tools come to the fore, with EBMOs making use of mobile apps to enhance data collection on an ongoing basis. For example, the Lewiatan Confederation (Poland) uses a voting function on its app to facilitate ongoing member input into live government consultations.

Apart from the data and sentiment collection, EBMOs are looking to have 'off the shelf' tools that can help to collect, analyse, and showcase data. A good example of this kind of support is the practical research and analytic tool made available to EBMOs through [ILO ACT/EMP](#) during the COVID19 pandemic. As well as providing a means of capturing bespoke data, the tool facilitates the analysis, presentation and 'packaging-up' of the findings into visual dashboards and real-time reports, thereby maximizing impact while saving significant time and budget for the EBMO. Taking the pulse of what is happening in the private sector and using this evidence base to support key asks to government has never been more important. This is just one area where practical support and user-friendly tools can help EBMOs scale up activities despite capacity and resourcing restrictions.

Moreover, digital tools are helping EBMO leadership teams and governing boards gather data that can in turn be used strategically to make better, evidence-based decisions. Tools such as CRMs are increasingly being used to gather data and create regularly updated dashboards on member renewals, levels of member engagements and overall member satisfaction, which are informing both tactical short-term responses as well as longer-term strategic planning. One trend is building the CRM for integration with survey tools or analytic tools such as Qualtrics. In addition, increasingly EBMOs are able to track what members are looking at on the organization's website, how long they are spending on specific web pages and what the open rates are for specific types of information. This data can be reviewed on a monthly and even on a weekly basis.

A practical example of digital tools being used to generate and collect data to inform urgent tactical decisions includes the use of financial software to track discretionary spend on areas like training and making quick cost-cutting decisions when data indicated a squeeze on member spend due to a worsening external business environment. An example of EBMOs using digital tools to support informing more strategic decisions is the use of statistical software or business intelligence platforms to track trends on the size of businesses within membership as well the geographical and sectoral mix in order to make longer-term decisions on new member services.

Risk and crisis management

An ongoing priority for EBMOs around the world is to develop comprehensive risk management frameworks and to continuously enhance crisis management expertise. These elements form an integral part of building resilient organizations, which is the core aim of the recent ACT/EMP 'Driving up Resilience' guide for EBMOs. This enhanced resilience will be a further legacy of the COVID19 crisis, which found most of us unprepared. How can digital tools form part of this important risk and crisis management agenda? Enhancing future capability in this area will encompass two core areas:

- ▶ *A better understanding of member needs in crisis situations* – Using digital tools will facilitate this and provide a means of generating better data on evolving membership needs as external risks come to the fore. This will include a focus on the evolving external landscape in specific sectors – especially sectors where we can expect intense scrutiny from policy makers, media and the wider public.

- ▶ *The ability to provide solutions quickly* – The need for a proactive approach was flagged by a number of EBMOs; this includes using digital platforms to engage with members at the earliest opportunity in crisis situations (including generating data and feedback to support response activities and agreed collective messages). Other solutions include using social channels as a listening and intelligence-gathering exercise in order to better pre-empt and prepare for potential crisis situations. EBMOs are also recognizing the need to support their members in developing their own risk management strategies in areas that are likely to be front of mind for company leaders in the post-COVID19 world, such as market risk, technology risk, workforce risk, reputational risk and regulatory risk.

A core conclusion of the [ILO/IOE Changing Business report](#) is that innovation and adaptability are more important than ever in these volatile times. A good test of this increased agility will be tangible progress in the way that EBMOs – as well as the individual businesses they represent – harness new technology and digital tools to respond quickly and effectively to crisis situations.

EBMOs will need to further adapt and innovate to help shape the future for people, businesses and society as a whole.

- ▶ ILO/IOE Changing Business report

RECAP – Digitalization starts ‘at home’

Digital tools are already playing an important role in driving internal efficiencies within EBMO secretariats. This cuts across a range of internal functions and disciplines. Harnessing digital tools is also making an impact on project management and internal cooperation, both within departments and across the whole organization.

A number of EBMOs underlined the fact that significant internal step-changes are being driven by a recognition that there is no option but to move forward at pace. In a disrupted economic and business landscape, EBMOs are facing new sources of competition, evolving member needs and an intensifying challenge of cutting through in an age of massive over-communication. All this lends itself to a digital ramp-up and to learning from each other to build solid digital foundations and nurture a mindset based on innovation and agility. Embracing the importance of data as a strategic asset for EBMOs is a must to be successful on the digitalization journey.

▶ 2. What works? – How are member services evolving in the digital age?

Increasing the use of digital channels to deliver services and information was a priority for EBMOs pre-pandemic; the crisis has radically accelerated this process. Necessity is the mother of invention; it has also been the mother of rapid implementation.

The most commonly cited benefits of digitalization within the broad member services arena include:

- ▶ *Better and more streamlined communication with members* – This has been most commonly manifested in website redesigns and the creation of specific information ‘hubs’ on the most pressing issues for members. Other approaches have included creating mobile apps to boost visibility and accessibility of information.
- ▶ *Understanding members and improving relationships* – A further building block for EBMOs is gathering the best possible membership intelligence through strategic use of electronic membership management (CRM) and business intelligence software. This is key to making better decisions on services and investments, improving relationships, forecasting retention rates and understanding evolving member needs.
- ▶ *Creating new member communities* – Using digital tools to create and enhance peer-to-peer networks has been a priority for some EBMOs. These peer exchanges have been especially valued during the pandemic and will play a key role in helping members to seize new opportunities during the recovery phase.
- ▶ *Ensuring financial sustainability* – All of the above is aimed at boosting member retention and acquisition. There is an urgency around this, with 8 out of 10 EBMOs globally reporting a drop in income according to the 2020 [ACT/EMP and IOE survey](#).¹⁰ This drop was linked not only to membership fees but also to declining revenue from training, events, and legal and advisory services. Looking ahead, 77 per cent of EBMOs expect further reductions in membership. Although these trends and data points can be linked to the initial impact of COVID19, they also underline potential financial vulnerabilities that EBMOs can face.

8 out of 10 EBMOs globally report a drop in income, linked not only to membership fees but also to declining revenue from training, events and legal services.

Digitalized services seem a ‘must have’ to boost outreach and sustainability. But what does this brave new world of digitally-enhanced members services look like in practice? For most EBMOs the main aim is to improve existing digital tools, and notably their websites, in order to provide added value for members. The reality is that organizational websites remain the core information and communication platform; learning from good practice in terms of web design and navigability is a basic but fundamental priority. But we are also seeing a desire from some EBMOs to innovate further, which we reflect in the case studies below.

Website redesign and creating information hubs

A common response during the pandemic was to create bespoke COVID19 information hubs. Amidst the media ‘wall of sound’ on all COVID-related issues, it was crucial for business to have access to the most relevant and up-to-date information.

From the onset of the crisis, the absolute priority for EBMOs around the world was clear: provide practical support to members and provide it fast. This sense of urgency ensured that companies were equipped with the up-to-the-minute information they needed to make the right decisions for their survival.

¹⁰ ILO ACT/EMP and IOE survey: https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS_749379/lang--en/index.htm

There is a huge acceleration in the adoption of technology and the provision of digital services. The focus now must be on increasing the effectiveness of how the technology is used.¹¹

▶ Elaine Zhang, Secretary General, CAFST (China)

It also drove the dialogue with national governments, which gave birth to the emergency grants and schemes that ultimately saved millions of businesses and jobs. Without digital channels, none of this would have been possible. The crucial role of EBMOs as curators, filters and interpreters of the latest information and what it means in practice for business leaders has never been more important. The role of EBMOs as proactive intermediaries between government and business has been demonstrated time and time again during the COVID19 crisis.

The concept of better signposting and segmentation on EBMO websites predates the pandemic. For example, EBMOs have used bespoke hubs to drive member engagement and awareness on specific regulatory and taxation challenges (these will usually be members-only portals) as well as on proactive thought leadership campaigns on big issues of the day, such as youth employment, skills, productivity, mental health, technology adoption and the future of work. These are more likely to be accessible to the wider public as the aim is to position the business community's role and thoughts on these issues to as wide an audience as possible.

With the pandemic, both national business organizations and sectoral organizations have become increasingly adept at creating such bespoke hubs on their websites on the most pressing issues for members. A good example of this is the web-based 'Corona Calculator' developed by the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW).

BOX 3: Creating bespoke hubs and issue-specific web pages

- ▶ **SEIFA (South Africa)** have created a number of independent web portals, covering areas such as [targeted support for SMEs](#), [training](#), [industry awards](#) and the [collective agreement](#) between employer organizations within SEIFA membership and trade unions.
- ▶ **NHO (Norway)** have a dedicated portal called [Arbinn](#) for employer-related information. Through Arbinn, NHO members have access to practical guidance on topics such as the recruitment, employment and termination of staff, collective agreements and health, safety and environmental requirements. Members can make use of templates and sample contracts that have been drawn up by in-house lawyers and also have access to risk management tools on occupational health and data protection.
- ▶ **REC (UK)** developed a specific web hub to provide regular updates and implementation guidance for members on new tax legislation (IR35) impacting on freelancers and contractors.
- ▶ **VNO-NCW (Netherlands)** '[Corona Calculator](#)'¹² helps businesses navigate the COVID19 crisis with regular updates on allowances, credit options and tax deferrals available. It also enables employers to check their liquidity position and quickly identify what support they are entitled to, from financial institutions as well as from government.

¹¹ Speaking on the 'World Views on the World of Work' podcast hosted by the World Employment Confederation: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1417132>

¹² The Corona Calculator can be accessed at: <https://www.coronacalculator.nl/>

Developing innovative mobile apps

Some EBMOs are using mobile apps as a way of bringing the latest updates and news together and helping members to access information easily on mobile devices. These are also a way of boosting active engagement from members (for example, via online voting systems) and of promoting forthcoming events and consultation deadlines. Mobile apps are also being used as platforms for hosting videos, surveys and statistical tools. As well as providing a navigable 'one stop shop' for all EBMO activities and news, mobile apps have also been developed to focus on a specific area of EBMO activity.

As an alternative to creating a bespoke app, some EBMOs have used existing external messaging platforms to enhance their digital presence. One example of this has been the use of the open source Telegram app. This can be customized and used to drive both internal and external communications as well as creating two-way conversations. Unlike WhatsApp Business, Telegram is cloud-based and is not tied to a SIM card, making it possible to connect from different devices and to create very large communities of thousands of users/members.

BOX 4: Developing mobile apps and harnessing external platforms

- ▶ [GICAM \(Cameroon\)](#) launched a new mobile application called [MyGicam](#), which is available to download on PlayStore and AppStore. The app enables employers to join and become members in just one click and provides ongoing news on GICAM activities in areas such as the business environment, competitiveness, vocational training, taxation and business ethics.
- ▶ [The Lewiatan Confederation \(Poland\)](#) mobile app includes regular news alerts and updates on its activities, consultations and parliamentary work. Members receive a weekly report every Monday, can view social media feeds and can contact Lewiatan experts. The app also provides a voting function for members to feed into live consultations.
- ▶ [MAI \(Israel\)](#) make use of their own Telegram page for real-time updates, as a means of raising awareness of their activities and of engaging with both members and non-members as well as with external stakeholders and partners. MAI have nearly [3,000 members](#) signed up to the app.
- ▶ [CCILCI \(Ivory Coast\)](#) created a WhatsApp group to improve communication and engagement with members. The aim is to share important information and circulate urgent updates at speed; it is also to drive better interaction with members. So far, the response rate on this WhatsApp group is 10 times higher than it was when information was circulated purely on e-mail. Specific internal protocols have been established to manage the flow and volume of information, with only three CCILCI staff authorized to post messages and an initial filter applied to responses from members to ensure that these are relevant and useful. CCILCI now run additional WhatsApp groups for members in specific sectors such as cosmetics, plastics and the food industry.

Member communities, peer networks and thought leadership platforms

Using digital tools to create and enhance peer-to-peer networks has been a priority for EBMOs. These peer exchanges have been especially valued during the pandemic and will play a key role in helping members to seize new opportunities during the recovery phase. An emerging trend is building on this to create genuine communities around specific priority issues within the membership base. Both websites and online community platforms offer possibilities for online discussion forums, which provide a place for members to come together and exchange views and approaches. Online communities have a host of other features like blogs, resources libraries, and numerous other ways to engage members and offer them added value.

The role of representative business organizations as a 'knowledge hub' for their members as well as for policy makers has never been more important.¹³

► Geraldine King, CEO, NRF (Ireland)

Business leaders need support and guidance in a wide variety of fast-changing areas, including technology and AI, occupational health, productivity, business development, sustainable flexible working patterns, workforce planning and skills mapping, recruitment and risk management. EBMOs can provide some of the answers but also play a vital role in providing their members with access to experts in these and other highly topical fields. Digital tools and channels are enhancing this curation function; they provide an opportunity to identify global external expertise (location no longer being an issue) that members can benefit from and facilitate the creation of new networks and partnerships across the business community. The role of EBMOs as convener is illustrated by the 'MSME Hospital' case study from Mexico (see Box 6 below).

This concept of EBMOs as a knowledge hub will be increasingly important and will continue to provide members with a tangible benefit – access to expertise in emerging priorities for their business. A collateral benefit for EBMOs is the opportunity to build a network of business partnerships with specialist suppliers that create additional revenue streams.

The digital journey is creating a further opportunity for EBMOs to provide members with a tangible and timely benefit – namely a platform for demonstrating their own thought leadership. Employees and the wider public increasingly expect business leaders that have a view on the big issues of the day.¹⁴ According to the [2021 Edelman Trust Barometer](#), business is the most trusted institution (ahead of governments, NGOs and the media) with a 61 per cent trust level globally. There is a high expectation on business to address major social and economic challenges. Digital platforms and social channels – including those managed by representative business organizations – are a means of amplifying the voice of private sector employers and of showcasing the positive role of business in society.

EBMOs have always provided a platform for industry leaders to engage with policy makers, to take forward their views and demonstrate their own thought leadership. This is a means of boosting personal and business brand. Digitalization – including specific areas featured in this guide such as creating online hubs, developing bespoke mobile apps and making the most of social media channels – provides a means of taking this to the next level.

Business is the most trusted institution, with a 61 per cent trust level globally. Digital platforms are a means of amplifying the voice of business and of showcasing its positive role in society.

Smart use of data to reinforce members' services

External support has enabled a number of EBMOs to enhance their CRM systems. For example, FEC harnessed the support of the ITCILO to successfully customize its existing platform, resulting in an improved system for managing member relations and real-time consultation. Thanks to this enhanced CRM platform, the FEC is in its fourth year of producing its Business Directory, which is promoting the Federation's activities and provides details of its members. This also constitutes a source of additional income thanks to advertising insertions.

¹³ Speaking on the 'World Views on the World of Work' podcast hosted by the World Employment Confederation: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1417132>

¹⁴ The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer shows 92% of employees saying CEOs should speak out on big issues of the day.

A further concrete example of improved CRM capability is SEIFSA's investment in the 'Active Campaign' CRM platform, which includes marketing automation software and serves a multifunctional role: a database, bulk-emailer and sales pipeline tracker. This has enabled SEIFSA in South Africa to drive traffic to its various website portals (see Box 5).

BOX 5: Measurable progress through CRM investment

- ▶ **SEIFSA (South Africa)** Through Active Campaign, SEIFSA drives traffic to all the websites through daily email campaigns and this has resulted in increasing SEIFSA's sales conversion rate (turning new leads into confirmed sales) by 488% in six months – yielding an average of 34 new contacts daily to the website. SEIFSA's new reporting capacities also indicated a 28% engagement rate on all e-mail campaigns – more than double the industry standard.
- ▶ **FEC (DRC)** used enhanced CRM capability to build an SMS database to provide members with real-time 'alerts' on specific tax deadlines in order to avoid financial penalties. As well as providing members with crucial support, this sends a positive message to government and the wider public on the role that the EBMO plays in driving awareness and compliance.

Virtual training and events

What are some of the other ways EBMOs have harnessed digital channels during the pandemic? Specific examples include virtual meetings (with members but also third parties), member engagement and data collection, remote working, 'open' webinars (to discuss COVID19-related issues with members as well as non-members), video briefings and podcasts. Tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx and customized online training have become embedded as crucial channels for delivering information and guidance and for driving member engagement.


Physical events (eg conferences and seminars with exhibition opportunities and lead sponsors) have historically also been an important source of commercial revenue for EBMOs. Can this income stream be replicated in a more digital era? Are suppliers prepared to sponsor digital events in the same way that they sponsored physical events? Will members be prepared to pay to take part in virtual events? On this last point, the challenge is that business leaders have become used to accessing online webinars and virtual forums at no (or little) additional cost. Generating revenue through delegate fees is still proving possible, but this requires a clear articulation of the added value that participants will derive from the event. Some EBMOs are focusing primarily on sponsorship as the income generator and there has been a reinvention of what a virtual conference looks and feels like. The slicker the production, the more opportunities for interaction with participants, and the greater the volume and seniority of delegates, the more chance there is of creating a viable offer for potential sponsors.

For some EBMOs, the aim is simply to cover costs, so commercial income from events isn't the main concern. And one of the benefits of hosting online events is that it provides a platform for promoting some of the organization's fee-paying services such as training. There are other specific benefits to virtual events, including the opportunity to attract more delegates with travel time and costs no longer an issue and – crucially – the opportunity to capture data (in compliance with data protection rules!) on participants that can be followed up on post-event.

Perhaps the most common use of digital tools to transform member services can be found in the delivery of training services. Significant changes to training provisions were under way well before the COVID19 crisis broke, with some EBMOs looking at blended learning models that provide a mix of traditional classroom training with a strong component of virtual and online delivery. The pandemic has accelerated this evolution and we look into the outlook for online training in more detail in Part III ('What's next?').

This evolution not only reflects the new options that digitalization presents, but also the evolving preferences of individuals and employers for how they want to access training. This includes more 'bite-size' learning modules that participants can go through in their own time but also a desire to maintain a certain level of interaction between participants. This is where online learning platforms (ie learning management systems, LMS) have come to the fore, as well as an effective use of platforms like Zoom that include opportunities for break-outs and peer-to-peer exchanges between participants. Other digital media such as Facebook have recently enhanced their online learning functions, presenting a low-cost opportunity for EBMOs to reach members with training content.

The need for a digital evolution of training services is about more than simply changing delivery mechanisms or digitizing material; it is creating opportunities for evolving radically the content of learning programmes, with more choice and flexibility for the participants. On the technical side of things, EBMOs are making use of LMS such as Moodle (open source) or other more commercial products that are accessed through a subscription model. This is an area where ITCILO ACT/EMP's support activities are delivering tangible progress through the installation of Moodle-based eCampus platforms within EBMOs – a great example of this comes from [ECOP in the Philippines](#).

 **Focusing on the end-user is always key. For online training this involves everything from making payment as easy as possible to sending written and video guidance on how to enrol and helping with any technical issues that participants have on the day.**

▶ Ray Tadeo, Training & Development Manager, ECOP (Philippines)

Digital platforms also make it possible, and in some ways easier, to blend 'pure' learning activities with other types of activity such as mentoring and coaching. Besides the knowledge development component of such programmes, the direct and practical application of knowledge is emphasized and supported. This represents an interesting added value for end-users.

BOX 6 – Using digital channels to weather the COVID19 storm

Digital channels provided a vital outlet for EBMOs during the COVID19 crisis; they underpinned the crucial role that EBMOs play in cascading information down through its membership base and in informing public policy responses.

- ▶ **BUSA (South Africa)** has worked closely with the National Department of Health to disseminate factual information on the virus to their members and has hosted COVID19 updates on its [website](#).¹⁵ A feature of the online support to members has been the use of bespoke video content on return-to-work guidelines and implementing business continuity plans.
- ▶ **ANDI (Colombia)** created a virtual hub for information on regional and national responses to COVID19, focusing on areas such as remote working, protective equipment, transport and work organization (eg shift patterns). The online support also included a foreign trade bulletin with updates for ANDI members on developments in other countries impacting on overseas trade.
- ▶ **FEC (DRC)** used enhanced CRM capability to generate updated intelligence on the COVID19 impact through online surveys and webinars. All the messaging with more than 3,000 affiliated members is digitalized thanks to the extensive use of applications hosted on Google servers through a subscription contract.
- ▶ **CCJ (Mexico)**, in partnership with the University of Guadalajara, developed the 'MSME Hospital' initiative providing micro, small and medium-sized companies with free advisory sessions (offered digitally) from experts in areas like finance, leadership, marketing, HR and strategic planning. This played a vital role in helping companies navigate the COVID19 crisis.
- ▶ **ECATT (Trinidad and Tobago)** used digital channels to deliver awareness-raising and training activities for its member companies on a range of issues, including updates on the national, regional and international situation, practical guidance on travel policies, OSH considerations, business continuity planning and work-from-home policy templates.
- ▶ **CNPB (Burkina Faso)** used Facebook to deliver awareness-raising and training to enterprises in the construction sector on Quality Apprenticeships. The activity was organized in the framework of [RIPAQUE](#), a capacity-building project led by the ITCILO and implemented by CNPB and five sectoral member associations.

RECAP – Digital is enhancing the convening role of EBMOs as well as member support

Member services are receiving a digital makeover, with the need for more effective and streamlined communication and with members being one of the major drivers. This is most commonly being manifested in website redesigns, the creation of specific information hubs and mobile apps.

EBMOs have used webinars and virtual events as a replacement for physical meetings during the course of the pandemic. There is a question mark as to whether this represents a lasting change; the general feeling is that the priority will be to find the right mix between online and 'in person' gatherings.

Creating new member communities forms part of EBMO engagement plans going forward, but as with many things, it's not just about what you do; it's about how you do it. This is where the people, culture and skills elements that are covered in Part II really come to the fore. On a general level, there is real consensus on the role of EBMOs as conveners and curators – as well as providers of practical support and guidance – and on the impact that digital tools will continue to make in embedding these functions within the DNA of the services to members.

¹⁵ The BUSA website can be accessed at: <https://www.businessforsa.org>

▶ 3. What works? – How are digital tools enhancing external reach and impact?

How are EBMOs using digital tools to better understand member needs, interests and priorities and to deliver high-impact advocacy and campaigning activities? What new ways of building relationships with policy makers, journalists and other influencers are emerging? Digital tools are being used to build 'campaign coalitions', reach a mass audience and, ultimately, enhance visibility and the capacity to influence public opinion. The feedback from EBMOs is that enhancing external awareness and visibility is also a means of making progress on a perennial priority for EBMOs: reaching beyond their current inner circle to attract new members and grow the membership base.

Reaching a new audience (and attracting new members)

Driving member acquisition and promoting the take-up of additional services remains a priority for EBMOs around the world. Digital channels are providing the platform for a new and proactive approach to raising awareness and visibility and to building relationships. This is encapsulated in the concept of inbound marketing, as an alternative to traditional, purely outbound marketing.

So, what is this about in practice? Inbound marketing is essentially focused on attracting customers through relevant and helpful content (for example, via blogs, social media and search engine optimization) and adding value at every stage of the 'customer's buying journey', or in EBMOs terms, the 'membership cycle'. This approach is a way of building trust, credibility and reach for EBMOs around the world. Some are already radically overhauling their digital marketing approach to drive new member recruitment and increase take-up of products and services. Inbound marketing does not need to 'fight' for potential customers' attention, unlike outbound marketing. It is all about creating content designed to address the problems and needs of target customers (ie members or potential members), in a way that attracts potential members who are searching for answers online, and trying to decide if they really need the services offered by the EBMO.

By regularly aligning published content to the interests and needs of business leaders, EBMOs will naturally attract inbound traffic that can be converted into increased take-up of services and member recruitment. The challenges lie in:

- ▶ identifying and articulating the right 'hooks' that will speak to the EBMO's target audience;
- ▶ having the internal skills and capacity to sustain the regular generation of topical content and to 'curate' and filter information;
- ▶ effectively using search engine optimization to drive inbound traffic;
- ▶ capturing data through this inbound traffic and effective follow-up processes.

Of course, there is still a huge need for outbound marketing and inbound isn't meant to replace this; it is meant to enhance and supplement it. It is also interesting to note that the broad concept behind inbound marketing – creating compelling and relevant content that draws people in – applies to other priority areas for EBMOs, particularly campaigning and advocacy and showcasing the positive role of business in society. EBMOs can use the information and insights gathered through influence and representation activities, as well as regular contact with decision-makers, to both curate relevant content and create content responding specifically to new needs (created by new legislative proposals, for example). Ultimately, the aim is to drive membership growth. The ITCILO recently published a Manual¹⁶ for EBMOs on membership strategies and policies, which provides specific insight on how to adapt marketing strategies to enhance member recruitment, retention and engagement.

¹⁶ Membership strategies and policies – A Manual for EBMOs, Jeanne Schmitt, Paolo Salvai, Arnout de Koster, 2021, <https://www.itcilo.org/resources/membership-strategies-and-policies-manual-ebmos>

NEW OUTREACH APPROACHES: INBOUND vs OUTBOUND MARKETING	
<p>INBOUND MARKETING</p> <p>Inbound marketing is a business methodology that attracts the attention of prospects and new customers, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ creating strategic content and experiences that are tailored to unique needs; ▶ forming connections, answering questions, and solving problems; ▶ using this quality content to pull people IN to your business and brand and build lasting relationships. 	<p>OUTBOUND MARKETING</p> <p>Traditional marketing methods are about creating outbound messages and collateral, which involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ buying advertising and e-mail lists to distribute these outbound messages; ▶ using other channels such as cold-calling, or sponsoring booths at trade shows; ▶ pushing marketing messages OUT to a given audience, hoping for a response, leads, and new business.

Boosting advocacy and stakeholder engagement

The COVID19 crisis has acted as a reminder of one of the core functions and roles of EBMOs – harnessing the collective voice and input of business to inform policy developments. Around the world, EBMOs have worked with governments to co-create policy responses to evolving pandemic-related challenges. This has also involved bipartite and tripartite agreements as well as partnerships with other business organizations, NGOs, research institutes and trade unions. What lessons can we learn in terms of how digital tools can enhance the advocacy impact of EBMOs?

94 per cent of EBMOs have increased their advocacy activities during the crisis, despite having to strip back their financial and human capacity.¹⁷

A survey of 127 EBMOs conducted by ILO-ACT/EMP and the IOE in 2020 shows that – despite having to strip back their financial and human capacity – an overwhelming share of EBMOs (94 per cent) have leveraged available resources to increase their advocacy activities during the crisis. This has involved a multi-layered advocacy effort with governments, as well as increased press coverage and increased presence on social media. Importantly, these efforts in the assessment of EBMOs have largely proven to be effective or very effective.

Digital channels have provided a way of engaging with members and rapidly identifying the most pressing challenges as well as proposed solutions. Digital tools have also provided a means of enhancing direct engagement with policy makers – for example, from a purely logistical standpoint, it is easier to arrange an open discussion between a minister and a selected group of EBMO members if the meeting is a virtual one rather than a physical meeting. Creating a regular ‘engagement point’ between members and external stakeholders is also facilitated through digital tools – an example of this is the ‘CBI at 10’ bi-weekly webinars (see Box 7).

¹⁷ ACT/EMP and IOE survey conducted in May–June 2020. More information can be accessed at: https://www.ilo.org/ACT/EMP/news/WCMS_749490/lang--en/index.htm

BOX 7: How are digital channels boosting advocacy and stakeholder engagement?

- ▶ **FKE (Kenya)** produced wide-ranging digital survey¹⁸ across its membership which proved crucial to better understanding how businesses can emerge from the pandemic and the type of support required from government. Cash flow was the most urgent concern for 84 per cent of businesses, with 75 per cent also flagging the impact on supply chains. Overall, 70 per cent felt that the government has not done enough to help. Digital tools also provided a means of generating qualitative feedback which informed specific policy proposals to government such as reducing corporate taxes, setting up a 'Wage Support Fund', and developing a framework for loan repayments and credit facilities.
- ▶ **CBI (UK)** host the 'CBI at 10' webinars twice a week (Mondays and Wednesdays) as a means of driving regular engagement between members and policy makers (as well as other external stakeholders). Although the core themes have obviously been COVID19-focused over the last year, the webinars have also focused on other priority issues for members, including the net-zero agenda, inclusion and diversity, Brexit developments and international trade. The benefits of these regular webinars have included enhanced member engagement as well the ability to inform and influence policy makers on the calls.
- ▶ **FEU (Ukraine)** developed, in partnership with **Danish Industries (DI)**, a Business Confidence Index Tool to assess the confidence of Ukrainian enterprises with regard to development and preservation of existing jobs and potential for the creation of new jobs. This provided a unique platform for engaging with policy makers. Digital tools provided the means to use 'a dripping strategy' – ie collecting regular insights and data throughout the year rather than focusing everything on annual data collection.

Direct access to policy makers and journalists and influencing wider public opinion

EBMOs are also using digital channels to engage and build relationships with journalists as well as with other influencers. This fits with the broader agenda of influencing wider public opinion and challenging negative pre-conceptions around the role of business in society. Based on conversations with representative employer organizations around the world, here are examples of digital channels being used to nurture relationships and reach out to a wider audience:

- ▶ Using social media channels to engage directly with journalists (for example, tagging them into tweets on subject matters that are of known interest to them) and building the relationship by following and commenting on their own posts.
- ▶ Using social media channels to engage directly with politicians and government departments. This is less common, but some politicians are active on social media and will be receptive to some positive interaction. An example of a positive outcome is politicians using the EBMO's own data and research in public policy debates.
- ▶ Launching online discussion forums to stimulate debate with external audiences beyond the membership base. For example, discussion forums on LinkedIn and other platforms have been set up to engage on a range of topics such as youth employment, entrepreneurship, skills and employment, the future of work, diversity and inclusion, and mental health.
- ▶ Feeding into existing external online discussion forums to gain different perspectives and reference the EBMO's position on key discussion topics. Online forums can provide a new platform for reaching new audiences but can also create a capacity risk (there are thousands of relevant forums, so choices have to be made!) as well as a reputational risk (having an active voice on external forums means putting your head above the parapet and possible backlash!).
- ▶ A proactive approach to online events and conferences. EBMOs are often invited to speak and contribute to third-party events, but it is worth being proactive in contacting conference organizers and other stakeholders to make the most of the proliferation of online platforms that are out there and that provide opportunities for reaching new audiences.

¹⁸ Details on the FKE survey can be accessed at: <http://www.fke-kenya.org/site/index.php/news-and-media/press-releases#>

BOX 8: Using digital channels to spread the word and reach wider audiences

- ▶ **CBI (UK)** developed the 'Business Heroes' initiative, which focused on encouraging employers and employees to share positive examples via a dedicated inbox that the CBI could then collate and shine the light on through their digital communications and social media channels. Specific 'stories' included businesses helping in the redeployment of people, support to families in hardship and helping people maintain their mental and physical wellbeing.
- ▶ **CCIU (Uzbekistan)** organized an online competition ('COVID19 Challenge 2020') to stimulate innovative tools and solutions to mitigate the consequences of the COVID19 pandemic. People from all over Uzbekistan were invited to collaborate, combining technology and entrepreneurial skills, to develop innovative approaches to specific challenges in areas such as health, education, helping the most vulnerable, supporting small businesses and providing community support. The CCIU published the winning project ideas¹⁹ on their website.
- ▶ **ECATT (Trinidad and Tobago)** included a proactive approach to social media channels as well as to traditional media from the outset of the COVID19 crisis. This proactive media and communication strategy resulted in press interviews and succeeding in raising awareness of the impact of COVID19 on the workplace and the need for government support.

Unlocking 'unique data' and informing advocacy campaigns

One of the best ways for EBMOs to influence public policy is by collecting bespoke data and evidence to support their core arguments. In the same way that digital tools are proving vital for collating insight and feedback from members on internal issues (for example, feedback on EBMO services and activities), they are also making a difference in terms of generating data and intelligence to drive external advocacy activities and campaigns. For example, the majority of EBMOs conducted enterprise surveys to assess the impact of COVID19 and used these as the evidence base for policy advocacy and for shaping support measures for business. Digital channels are providing EBMOs with a suite of new 'positioning tools' with government and policy makers.

In a volatile and fast-changing landscape, having access to robust data and research will also be increasingly important in helping industry leaders make strategic decisions for the future of their business. This can include research on evolving consumer and employee expectations, future skills needs, demographic change and technology adoption. This horizon-scanning – in conjunction with peer-to-peer exchanges to take stock of what emerging 'megatrends' mean in practice – constitute an important element of the EBMO 'offering'. As companies look to make sense of the fast-changing external environment, access to unique and timely data (generated via digital tools) will be a huge hook for retaining existing members and acquiring new members.

How has research and data helped EBMOs to make an impact during the crisis? The ability to survey members at short notice first and foremost enabled EBMOs to get a clear idea of the situation member enterprises were facing and to prioritize key asks to government and support provisions. Specific tools used to generate this input include Kahoot, Padlet, Qualtrics and Mentimeter, as well as basic tools such as Survey Monkey and online webinar survey functions.

This data-based, evidence-led approach also underpinned the persuasiveness of EBMO advocacy activities from the very beginning of the crisis. Practical data-gathering tools – including those provided by ACT/EMP – have enabled EBMOs to not only generate timely research but also to present it in a way that ensures maximum impact. For example, research conducted by the FKE quantified the initial impact of the pandemic on jobs in Kenya, including the specific finding of 8.3 per cent of employment in the formal private sector between March and July 2020 (amounting to over 170,000 jobs) being lost. The fact that only 30 per cent of responding companies had enough resources to meet wage obligations in the next six months underlined the crucial importance of government support to help enterprises and safeguard jobs. The use of digital tools was essential in collating this information at speed and impacting government's response.

¹⁹ Information on the projects taken forward in Uzbekistan can be accessed here: <https://chamber.uz/ru/news/6164>

As post-lockdown economic and employment challenges come to the fore in most countries, timely economic and labour market data will remain crucial. Policy decisions cannot be made on stats that were collected months ago! The global business community has a huge role to play by providing policy makers with speedy, accurate data and insight from the front line of the labour market. Sector-specific intelligence will be especially important in helping policy makers make decisions on the need for ongoing support in specific industries. An example of this is the rapid assessment work undertaken by EBMOs across four Western Balkan countries,²⁰ which highlighted the impact on businesses and jobs as well as solutions for resuming operations, in partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Building partnerships and campaign coalitions

Specific activities over the course of the COVID19 crisis have highlighted the role that EBMOs can play in galvanizing collective action, driving innovation and building collaborative engagement with government, academic institutions and other stakeholders. Examples from EBMOs around the world also include building alliances with sectoral representative bodies to create a strong and unified business voice. Digital channels have provided the means of facilitating all of these partnerships and campaign coalitions. Looking ahead, digital channels will continue to provide new opportunities for EBMOs around the world to drive solidarity, innovation and collaboration.

BOX 9: Using digital tools to build partnerships and campaign coalitions

- ▶ **ANDI (Columbia)** launched the #UnidosSomosMásPaís²¹ ('United We Are More') initiative to create a virtual marketplace to match supply and demand for services and products and help large buyers connect with local producers, independent professionals and entrepreneurs. The aim is to create new opportunities for hundreds of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises who register on the platform. A further example from ANDI involved using digital tools to create mass mobilization of volunteers from over 20 academic institutions – as well as funding from the business community – to manufacture and distribute crucial medical devices such as ventilators. This led to direct support to 337 intensive care units across 10 municipalities.
- ▶ **EFC (Sri Lanka)** developed 'The Skills Passport' in partnership with the Tertiary and Vocational Educational Commission (TVEC) of the Ministry of Skills Development, Employment and Labour Relations and the ILO. The initiative provides a common platform for returnee migrant workers to demonstrate their expertise, experience, skills and qualifications as well as references. The Skills Passport can be linked with a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) platform and is essentially a 'gateway' to finding a job and accessing further training for reskilling and upskilling. Overall, the Skills Passport facilitates the matching of skills to opportunities in a way that benefits both employers and workers in Sri Lanka and supports government job-creation initiatives.
- ▶ **ECATT (Trinidad and Tobago)** used digital channels to feed National Tripartite Advisory Council (NTAC) discussions on preparing workplaces for COVID19. Several ECATT recommendations were included in the final NTAC submission to government, with all the discussions and negotiations having taken place through digital channels. ECATT also used digital tools to conduct awareness-raising and training activities for members on OSH developments, travel policies, business continuity planning and work-from-home policy templates.
- ▶ **CPC (Chile)** developed the website-based Solidarity and Business Innovation initiative (SiEmpre²²), which brought together companies, entrepreneurs and business groups with a clear common goal: to help Chile build back better. SiEmpre has raised over \$100 million to support the country's food distribution and health efforts. Digital tools facilitated the building of a coalition of sector-specific bodies in manufacturing, mining, construction, agriculture and financial services to create an emergency fund to help meet the pressing health and food challenges facing the population. This resulted in the delivery of boxes with basic foodstuffs for at least 125,000 families from the most vulnerable segment of society.

²⁰ Details on this assessment work in the West Balkans can be accessed here: https://www.ilo.org/budapest/whats-new/WCMS_754190/lang--en/index.htm

²¹ Information on the ANDI initiative in Columbia can be accessed here: <http://www.andi.com.co/Home/Evento/47-unidos-somos-mas-pais>

²² Information on the SiEmpre initiative in Chile can be accessed at the following link: <https://siempreporchile.cl>

RECAP – Data and stories can boost advocacy impact, showcasing the positive role of business

As well as using research and robust data to change hearts and minds, EBMOs have engaged policy makers and the wider population on a more emotional level by promoting tangible examples of the business community going the extra mile to help at a time of crisis.

With reputation management identified as a major priority for the business community in most countries, the pandemic has created a platform for EBMOs to 'show', rather than 'tell'. A good example of this 'showcasing' role is the CBI's 'Business Heroes' initiative in the UK and the CCIU's 'Challenge 2020' competition in Uzbekistan (see Box 8 above). While COVID19 has accelerated use of digital tools by EBMOs, their use in enhancing external reach and impact will only accelerate in the post-pandemic era.



PART II

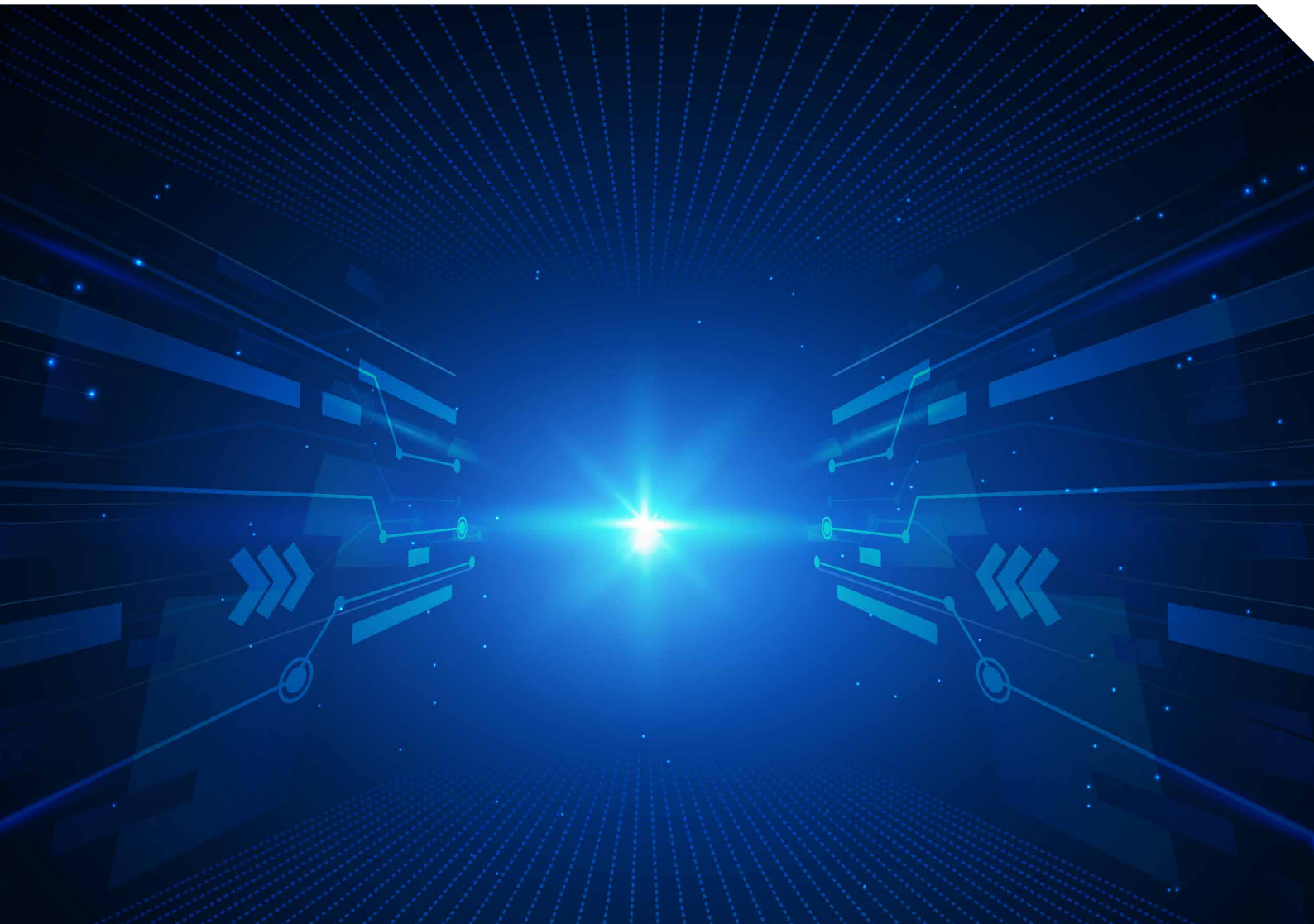
▶ Why does
it work?

▶ PART II – WHY DOES IT WORK?

What are some of the common themes and implementation tips we can extrapolate from the specific examples of 'what works' in Part I? We will break this analysis down into the following priority areas:

1. **Governance** – What governance and decision-making infrastructure do EBMOs need for an effective and sustainable digitalization? What does an EBMO decision-making roadmap for digitalization look like?
2. **Products** – What have EBMOs done to determine what specific EBMO products and services are most amenable to digitalization? What new types of products and services are emerging? What infrastructure is needed?
3. **People** – How have EBMOs managed internal capability and capacity issues around digitalization? What are the implications for skills, EBMO leadership and organizational culture?

In this section, we will also look beyond the EBMO ecosystem at digital lessons and experiences we can reflect on and learn from. Regularly reviewing how individual businesses, governments, trade unions and NGOs are harnessing digital tools and driving innovation can provide vital insights as EBMOs plot the next stages of their own digital journeys.



▶ 1. Why does it work? – Good governance is a key building block

Effective governance and decision-making infrastructure is needed to drive effective and sustainable digitalization. This is what underpins the kind of dynamic capability that EBMOs need in the fast-changing digital era. Strong strategic planning with clear milestones and a focus of incremental progress have also been flagged as big success factors by representative bodies at the forefront of making digital change happen.

The digitalization roadmap

How are representative bodies navigating the digitalization roadmap? Based on the aggregated feedback from EBMOs around the globe, below are practical steps that organizations have taken along the digital journey and lessons learnt in the process.

- ▶ *Getting the green light* – The investment needed for digitalization means that strategic plans and budgets will need to be approved by EBMO governing boards and committees. Discussions at the board level will sometimes include whether the organization's reserves should be used. For some EBMOs there has been a shared sense of urgency between the executive and non-executive with regards to digital investment as a means of future-proofing the organization. For others, it has been harder to make the argument for significant change. Where this has been the case, the tipping point has been the presentation of a clear plan and an aspirational vision for how digitalization will ultimately benefit members (see below) and ensure the long-term viability of the EBMO.
 - ▶ *Starting from the right place* – Digitalization is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end. And that end goal is invariably to provide better services and representation for members. This creates a clear 'anchor' as organizations go through digital upgrades and introduce new ways of working. The recurring question is, 'how will this benefit members?' Absolute member-centricity must remain the driving force for all EBMO activities, whether digital or analogue!
 - ▶ *Building the plan* – This is a multi-phased process and can take some time – particularly with regards to getting formal endorsement from the board. But it is important to invest the time needed to have the right internal and external conversations. EBMO strategic and operational plans for digitalization (or wholesale digital transformation!) will typically include a clear vision of what the end destination looks like, staging posts along the way, clear key performance indicators (KPIs), realistic timescales and budgets, contingency plans and risk management procedures. As part of the planning phase, learning from EBMOs who have been through a similar process can make a significant difference and ensure that common mistakes are avoided.
 - ▶ *Ensuring collective buy-in* – As well as obtaining the necessary board-level endorsement, EBMOs have ensured buy-in from the wider membership and – crucially – from EBMO staff. Any digital evolution will have implications for internal skills needs and tasks; for changes to work, it is crucial for staff and members to understand why they are being made and what difference they will make.
 - ▶ *Understanding the current state of play* – EBMOs must be absolutely clear on where they are now and where they want to get to. Getting this right involves having the right conversations with the right people at an early stage of any new digital revamp. Understanding evolving member needs and expectations and the practical benefits but also added values and limitations of latest technology developments (and how these apply to existing or new products) are core parts of the process.
 - ▶ *Staying in step with the membership base throughout the process* – Member associations and companies may not always have the infrastructure to make the most of any new digital offering put forward by the EBMO. How can business organizations ensure that they remain in step with the membership base? The way forward here is to ensure that progress is steady but not frenetic and to regularly check in with members (and to not scare members by moving too fast!).
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Business organizations can afford to be one step ahead of their members. But they cannot afford to be two steps ahead.

▶ John Cridland, Chair of Worldskills UK Skills Taskforce and former CBI Director General (UK)

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- ▶ *Measuring progress* – Extensively digitalizing internal operations will support continuous measurement and monitoring of activities. It will also help EBMOs to make data-driven decisions on a systematic basis. Robust data collection and analysis, learning from the results, and quickly innovating at scale can make a huge difference to the long-term sustainability of the EBMO and accelerate change in terms of overall mindset and organizational culture.

A key part of the process is to proceed in small steps, always looking for improvements and learning every day.

▶ Mohammed Touzani, CGEM (Morocco)

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- ▶ *Continuous improvement* – Digital technologies offer novel possibilities for generating value in the form of new products, services, solutions, and ways of working. But making the most of these possibilities means regular adjustments to skills, re-allocating resources and making changes to operational delivery. A genuine culture of continuous improvement is more important than ever and is at the heart of EBMOs becoming fully fledged digital organizations.

Don't be fooled by some of the buzz out there; digital transformation is a business discipline or company philosophy, not a project.

▶ Katherine Kostereva, CEO and managing partner of bpm'online²³

Managing the risks of digitalization

Good governance in EBMOs is about democratic and efficient decision-making but also effective risk management. And this is especially important within the context of the potential financial and reputational pitfalls associated with digital projects. One of the priorities for EBMOs is to take a lead on promoting compliance and ethics within their membership, which in turn helps with the ongoing mission of boosting the reputation of business. As part of this, helping member organizations meet their own data protection responsibilities²⁴ is an important service that EBMOs can provide.

What are some of the specific risks that increased digitalization can create for EBMOs themselves? Cyber security and data protection were the most cited concerns, in particular with regards to evolving legal requirements around the sharing of data. How are organizations looking to mitigate this risk? Training and

²³ Quote featured in an article for the Chief Executive Network:
<https://chiefexecutive.net/real-meaning-digital-transformation-increased-agility/>

²⁴ Specific analysis of these data protection issues can be accessed in this ILO report: https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_760271/lang--en/index.htm

awareness-raising amongst internal EBMO staff is just one of the potential mitigation responses. As one EBMO leader pointed out 'when it comes to cyber security and data protection, any organization is only as strong as its weakest link'. The message is that compliance with data protection requirements and cyber-security protocols is everybody's job; it is not just a priority for IT and tech teams within the organization.

The table below picks up on some of the other risks and concerns flagged by EBMO leaders, as well as examples of mitigation responses. One of the legacies of the COVID19 crisis will be renewed focus on overall risk management; this is an area where support is already being provided to EBMOs via ITCILO training and leadership programmes.

MANAGING AND MITIGATING DIGITALIZATION RISKS FOR EBMOs	
RISK	MITIGATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Cybersecurity (risk of being hacked, risk of members being hacked) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Reputable IT partner to help manage risk and conduct regular reviews ▶ Crisis management protocols and contingency plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Data protection breach by the EBMO (ie non-compliance with legal requirements, unauthorized use of data from CRM) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Staff training, regular reminders and briefings ▶ Using external data protection experts to review current procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Data protection breach by members, resulting in reputational damage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Member guidance and regular legal updates ▶ Codes of practice and internal disciplinary procedures ▶ Media management expertise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Budget over-spend and unforeseen costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Effective and realistic budgetary planning ▶ Clarity in contractual terms with external providers ▶ Contingency budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Obsolescence, emerging technical problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Due diligence on technology partner ▶ Clarity on 'break clauses' with technology providers ▶ Horizon-scanning on emerging digital tools and options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Lack of internal skills and capability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Internal skills audit and recruitment of right staff and skills to address gaps ▶ Upskilling and retraining for existing staff ▶ Use of contract/contingent labour

Identifying the right technology and external providers to work with

Good governance also involves conducting due diligence on potential partners and leading a thorough tendering process. For most employers, and for EBMOs themselves, one of the biggest challenges is finding the right technology or digital experts to work with. EBMOs can play a central role in educating the demand, aggregating potential support and creating economies of scale. EBMOs can also set the general tone and mood music for how members approach digital transformation. For most businesses, it is about finding the right balance between seizing new opportunities and managing potential risk. But the EBMO can also help drive innovation, in particular by showcasing examples of successful new approaches within their membership.

The feedback from many EBMOs is that it is easy to be seduced by technology experts promising 'off the shelf' solutions. One of the challenges here is that many digital consultancies and tech experts do not really understand the unique role and services that EBMOs provide. Digital solutions that may well work for regular business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) companies may not deliver for specific needs of membership organizations.

Conducting a thorough tender exercise is a time-consuming but important step; this is an opportunity to check cultural fit as well as their understanding of specific needs. This also helps to clarify relations and ensure fair competition between member companies, who may provide digital services and be interested in providing them for the EBMO. A further important consideration is to be very clear on how any new digital infrastructure can subsequently be changed and evolved. If any new product is 'out of the box', it may not be flexible enough to evolve over time. There is also a risk that the EBMO becomes wholly dependent and reliant on their technology provider as they are the only ones that can make future changes happen. This may be inflexible and costly in the long term, so having a clear understanding of how incremental changes can be managed is important. Many representative bodies have learnt this the hard way and have become embroiled in difficult technical and contractual discussions with tech providers.

BOX 10: Harnessing external expertise: Practical tips

Based on the experiences of EBMOs around the world, here are some practical tips on how to identify and select external experts to work with:

- ▶ **Run a competitive tender exercise** – whilst this may be time-consuming initially, this can also play a key role in demonstrating due diligence and in selecting the external providers to work with. Typically EBMOs will identify a shortlist of three or four potential suppliers.
- ▶ **Be clear on the selection criteria** – what are you really looking for from your external providers? This will usually include evidence of 'cultural fit' and a clear understanding of the needs of a membership organization as well as a proven track record and expertise.
- ▶ **Be clear on budgetary constraints** – this may mean that some suppliers opt out of pitching for the work, but it is crucial to be clear on budgets from the outset. Pre-empting potential risks and external factors that could cause delays and overspend is also a key element to bear in mind when selecting who to work with (ie how have they responded to setbacks and unforeseen obstacles in other projects they have worked on?).
- ▶ **Take up references** – speaking to existing or previous clients is an important part of the process. One of the challenges is ensuring that at least some of these external clients have similar needs and budgets to those of the EBMO. The key here is to ensure that the level of service provided is replicable and will meet the very specific requirements of a membership body.
- ▶ **Be clear on who you will actually be working with** – the success of the project will ultimately come down to the individual person or people leading it from the provider's perspective. Often this is not the same people as those who are actually pitching for the work. It is crucial to have confidence in the individuals who will be working with you on a day-to-day basis and to be reassured that they will work well with the individuals leading the project from the EBMO side.
- ▶ **Pre-empt maintenance and support provisions** – with most digital technologies, vendors make most of their money through the after-sales maintenance and support. For example, building a website is a one-time sale, but maintenance will be needed for years. It is easy to underestimate these costs; EBMOs need to factor this into initial discussions with potential external providers.

Using EBMO membership as a 'badge of ethics' and compliance and as a key differentiator

One of the hot discussion topics for many EBMOs is around how they can best promote compliance and ethics. This partly involves working with governments to ensure effective and fair enforcement of established regulations in a way that protects not only the interests of workers but also the interests of compliant businesses who can be undercut in the market if enforcement mechanisms are not in place.

But EBMOs are also driving their own activities to show that businesses within their membership are abiding to the highest standards and ethics. As part of this topical agenda, what role can digital channels play in making it more feasible for EBMOs to monitor and authenticate the professional standards and internal compliance mechanisms in place within their membership?

The benefits for EBMOs of getting this right are two-fold:

- ▶ It shows that the business community is stepping up and helps in the ongoing mission to enhance public perceptions of the role of business in society.
- ▶ It provides a powerful hook for businesses to join the EBMO, as this now provides a badge of quality and a recognizable label.

One way that digital channels can enhance this process is through very practical initiatives such as self-assessment and online compliance tests, which check a basic understanding of regulatory requirements and an awareness of relevant codes of practice. This creates a certain base level of compliance certification which can build on good practice initiatives and the general promotion of business ethics. As well as using digital channels to drive compliance and ethics in a cost-effective manner, the concept of EBMO membership as a badge of quality and ethics is also one that could in future lend itself to bilateral cooperation between employer and worker organizations.

This is predicated on the premise of shared objectives and a common aim alluded to above: employers who routinely and knowingly flout their regulatory obligations and industry standards are working against the interests not only of workers and consumers but also against the interests of legitimate compliant businesses who risk being undercut by unscrupulous competitors (for example, employers using illegal migrant workers or flouting OSH requirements).

RECAP – Digitalization is test of governance and risk management procedures

Effective governance and clear decision-making infrastructure are needed to drive effective and sustainable digitalization. This includes clear milestones and a focus on incremental progress. For EBMO leaders and secretariats, there are a number of 'crunch areas', such as getting initial board-level green light for digital investment, ensuring collective buy-in (from staff and from the wider membership) and being clear on success measures and on how these will be measured.

EBMOs recognize potential risks of digitalization, with cyber security, data protection, budget over-spend and lack of internal skills the most cited concerns. External guidance on these specific areas and learning from the experiences of other EBMOs are important ways forward and will also support wider EBMO risk and crisis management strategies. One other common theme raised by EBMOs looking to tap into external expertise is the challenge of identifying the right technology and external providers to work with. Conducting a thorough tender exercise is a way of checking cultural fit as well as an understanding of the specific needs of membership organizations.

▶ 2. Why does it work? – Products, services and the digital makeover: Common success factors

Regularly taking stock of the current state of play – in terms of products, services and channels that are used and valued by members and those that are not – is the crucial starting point. For many EBMOs, the digital journey is still at an early stage and the focus is on quick wins and incremental changes to what is already in place. At the same time, forward-looking EBMOs are alert to innovation and potential game-changers. Regular exchanges on the global level will remain a crucial way forward for EBMOs looking to identify and adopt new types of services and digital products. Even if wholesale digital transformation can seem a remote target, can we identify why some digitalization projects have more chances of success than others?

Taking stock of the current state of play

The most important thing for all organizations is to be really clear on where you are now and where you want to get to. Getting this right must involve having the right conversations with the right people at an early stage of any new digital revamp. In particular, this must involve:

- ▶ Conversations with members, including members of different sizes and from different industrial sectors. What is your experience engaging with the EBMO? What would improve your membership experience and how can we make things easier for you to access information and services?
- ▶ Conversations with EBMO staff across all departments. What frustrations and 'blockers' do you currently experience in your day-to-day work? What would make your working life better and easier?

These two elements will help to answer the 'where are we now?' question. Representative organizations have used other tools and mechanisms for gaining practical insight on the effectiveness of current processes and information flows. Examples include the forthcoming ILO ACT/EMP-produced Transformation Readiness Assessment (TRA) tool for EBMOs to assess their readiness for significant organizational change, or mystery shopping (pretending to be a member to see how quickly and effectively requested support and information is dispatched) and making sure that internal staff are included on member mailouts to ensure clarity on what members are receiving and when.

▶▶ The most important thing for employer organizations is to be really clear on where they are now in terms of their digital offering and how members are experiencing it. This will help set the course for where you want to get to.

▶ Kate Shoesmith, Deputy Chief Executive, REC (UK)

Regular member surveys can track satisfaction with current offerings and can also be used to evaluate progress being made. Some EBMOs have also made small but important changes to existing services to ensure that more regular feedback and insight is captured. Examples of this include ensuring that each and every member event provides opportunities for two-way discussions and feedback. This can be as basic as simply ensuring that one of the agenda items at the end of the meeting provides space

and time for members to give their views, not just on the meeting or event they have just taken part in, but also on the ongoing services and support being offered by the EBMO. Collating and reviewing this kind of qualitative feedback is a great way of ensuring that any digital revamp of services, products and communication channels meets the ongoing needs of members. This requires the ability and practice of valuing, collecting and analysing data.

What other innovative approaches are representative organizations adopting to take stock of the current state of play and to really understand the member experience? Using tracking tools like Google Analytics or Hotjar (see Box 11 below) to complement surveys and qualitative feedback from members can help to create a fuller picture of the current state of play. This is a crucial first step for any digitally-driven improvements going forward.

BOX 11: Taking stock of current digital products and services

- ▶ **REC (UK)** used the [Hotjar](#) tool to track how members were currently accessing and navigating the organization's website. The tool essentially helps to 'shadow' members using the site to clearly map their browsing through the site and to identify any accessibility issues.
- ▶ **SNEF (Singapore)** use social channels and digital tools as a 'listening' mechanism, to review the member experience and understand what is working and what can be improved in the future. This ongoing feedback loop is crucial as the view is that EBMOs have 'no choice' but to continue driving digital adoption to remain relevant.

Improving what is already in place

For many EBMOs we have spoken to, the focus is on making incremental progress on products, services and communication channels by building on what is already in place. The lesson here is about being realistic about what is achievable whilst still building a culture of continuous improvement. There is also a focus on horizon-scanning and keeping tabs on the evolving technology landscape.

The [2020 McKinsey global technology report](#)²⁵ flagged a notable shift across the wider business community, with respondents half as likely to lead significant digital modernization, compared with the previous three annual surveys. But representative bodies do not necessarily follow the investment cycles of the businesses they represent; some EBMOs have made the point that now is precisely the right time to significantly upgrade the digital offering. According to McKinsey, for those businesses who are still looking to invest, the focus is on digitalization of the end-user experience, scaling of data and analytics, and enhancements of IT architecture. This mirrors some of the priorities of representative EBMOs (see below). Keeping a close watch on the digital strategies and evolving priorities of members is an opportunity for EBMOs to provide added value – for example, through targeted events, research and toolkits, access to technology experts and peer-to-peer exchanges.

²⁵ The full McKinsey 2020 survey on technology and digital trends can be accessed here: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-COVID19-has-pushed-companies-over-the-technology-tipping-point-and-transformed-business-forever>

BOX 12: Practical tips for delivering quick wins and making incremental progress

Based on the latest feedback from EBMOs around the world, the most common areas for incremental progress include:

- ▶ **Getting social** – Enhancing visibility and presence on social networks and adapting existing publications for digital platforms.
- ▶ **Visual impact** – Using more 'dynamic' graphics and visuals to grab attention and make an impact, including using high-quality photos to enhance visual impact and convey the personality and culture of the EBMO.
- ▶ **Video and live streaming** – Making more use of video to convey messages as an alternative (or to supplement) written updates and live streaming of member meetings and events on Facebook, YouTube and other platforms.
- ▶ **Refining online training and blended learning** – Continuing to refine and enhance delivery of online and blended training, with the aim of increasing uptake, revenue and positive feedback from participants.
- ▶ **Segmentation** – Better segmenting of member support services, to reflect specific needs of different types of member (for instance by sector, size or growth aspiration) and targeting specific functions within these businesses or member associations – for example through the creation of targeted portals, networks and support services.

BOX 13: Improving advice to members through better targeting

- ▶ **BUSA (South Africa)** partnered with the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), the independent dispute resolution body, to develop a new web tool aimed specifically at small business leaders and providing up-to-date information on latest employment law changes, as well as contract templates and information sheets. Small business owners can also access guides on how to recruit; how to manage employees and build sound workplace relationships; how to end the employment relationship in a fair manner; and much more. The initiative recognizes the fact that many small businesses do not have in-house labour law expertise or the financial resources to comply with the complex administrative burden of hiring and managing staff.
- ▶ **FCEF (Fiji)** have helped to develop a bespoke support offering for small businesses to help them navigate these challenging times. The Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE) is focused on supporting MSMEs to grow their businesses. In partnership with [Market Development Facility Fiji](#) and [Australia Pacific Training Coalition](#), this initiative includes free online business coaching and counselling services as well as a business webinar series designed to help businesses seize new opportunities as well as weather the pandemic-related uncertainty.
- ▶ **EFP (Pakistan)** run a series of member forums targeting experts on industrial relations, HR and occupational safety and health (OSH) working for their member organizations. The aim is to provide a tailored platform for member organizations' experts to interact on priority issues, including through WhatsApp groups, which enable 'real-time' exchanges of views as well as regular updates on EFP activities in these areas.
- ▶ **OEM (North Macedonia)** developed a new [salary survey tool](#) to support enterprises in determining competitive pay levels for specific job categories. The survey provides useful benchmarking information for comparing salaries and benefits by job classification, sector or region. This helps companies to align their workforce plans and policies and provides a means for the EBMO to target and actively engage individuals and HR teams within member companies who have specific responsibility for recruitment, retention, and pay and benefits.

Supporting adaptation to the 'new workplace'

Seismic changes to the world of work – particularly with regards to digitally-facilitated remote working – is another area where EBMOs can play a core leadership and educational role. Specific guidance has been produced by representative bodies around the world on how best to manage remote working and how to implement effective e-learning programmes. This fits within the broader agenda of EBMOs taking a lead on the future of work and consistently looking at new products that will benefit their members and can be delivered via digital tools.

Almost all EBMOs around the world have produced digital toolkits, guides, training and events linked to the implementation of new working patterns since the start of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. There is an important role for partners like the ILO and ITCILO ACT/EMP to play in supporting EBMOs and showcasing different approaches taken across the globe. This can include examples of new products and services that are proving successful in other countries ('hey, why don't we try that?!') as well as information on delivery mechanisms. This kind of practical and 'lived' intelligence can help EBMOs focus on developing the most appropriate platforms and getting these to market faster. The feedback from some EBMOs is that existing external support can be built on, with organizations like ITCILO potentially developing tailor-made turnkey platforms that EBMOs can use for their own needs rather than having to start from scratch, as is already the case with CRM and LMS products. The philosophy of learning from each other and increasing collaboration will be one of the legacies of the pandemic and fits in with the ethos of a circular economy.

RECAP – EBMOs are making incremental changes to products and services

For many EBMOs, the digital journey is still at an early stage and the focus is on identifying 'quick wins' and making incremental changes to what is already in place. At the same time, forward-looking EBMOs are also alert to innovations and potential game-changers. Identifying why some digitalization projects have more chances of success than others is an important way forward; regular exchanges on the global level will remain a crucial way forward for EBMOs looking to identify and adopt new types of services and digital products.

Being absolutely clear on where you are now and where you want to get to remains a vital starting point; this must involve active engagement from the outset with members and internal secretariat staff. Making use of practical support tools such as the ILO's Transformation Readiness Assessment (TRA) tool provides a means for EBMOs to assess their readiness for significant organizational change. Regular member surveys and qualitative insight from member conversations are being used to evaluate progress being made.

Most common areas for incremental progress flagged by EBMOs are enhancing visibility and presence on social networks, making an impact through more 'dynamic' graphics and visuals as well as video, live streaming of member events, continuing to refine and enhance delivery of online and blended training and better segmenting of member support services. In terms of content and substance, EBMOs are helping their members adapt to seismic changes to the world of work – particularly with regards to digitally-facilitated remote working.

▶ 3. Why does it work? – People at the heart of change: Skills, leadership and the digital mindset

One of the biggest success factors in any tech-driven change is not about the technology itself: it is about getting the people side of things right. This is a consistent theme raised by EBMOs around the world and at different stages of the digital journey. It is also a common concern across the wider business community with demand for digital skills, external expertise and implementation support growing exponentially. Digitalization has significant implications for organizational culture and structure as well as for the skills and attributes of senior leaders as well as other staff.

In this section, we seek answers to the following questions:

- ▶ What does ongoing digital evolution mean for internal skills needs and for how EBMOs are structured?
 - ▶ What global networks can EBMOs tap into for good practice intelligence on people-centric issues such as recruitment, internal skills development and leadership?
 - ▶ What are the wider implications of digitalization for the culture of EBMOs and their ability to stay relevant at a time of accelerating change?
-

▶▶ Talent remains the holy grail of technology transformations. The need to address talent is universal and urgent.

▶ McKinsey Global Technology Report

Matching skills needs today and in the future

Ensuring that the right internal skills are in place and creating effective project teams to implement or enhance digital services are two major priority areas for EBMOs. The fast-changing skills landscape is also a priority for the wider business community; as the latest [McKinsey global technology report](#) makes clear, 'talent remains the holy grail of technology transformations'. Top-quartile businesses are more than three times likelier than their bottom-quartile peers (41 per cent, compared with 12 per cent) to say they have pursued a transformation of their talent strategy in recent years. Respondents to the McKinsey survey believe that more than 40 per cent of their workforce will need to be either replaced or fundamentally retrained to reflect emerging skills gaps. This has huge implications for EBMOs as well as for the employers they represent.

40 per cent of their workforce will need to be either replaced or fundamentally retrained to reflect emerging skills gaps

BOX 14: Practical tips for addressing internal digital skills needs

The insight from EBMOs across the globe has identified a range of proactive responses to the internal skills challenges that form an integral part of the digital journey:

- ▶ **Conducting internal 'skills audits'** – The permanent secretariat within many EBMOs is relatively small, but reviewing what skills can be tapped into or built on to facilitate the implementation of increased digital delivery is an important step for organizations of all sizes. This can be done through a process of self-assessment. For larger representative bodies, line managers have been tasked with reviewing digital literacy and technological skills within specific teams and departments. Organizations with an internal HR function have used this to conduct a full skills audit to identify gaps and training needs.
- ▶ **Evaluating collateral skills needs** – Digitalization not only intensifies the need for technological expertise and specific digital skills; it creates a series of collateral skills needs. For example, the more digital channels are used to capture data points, the more scaling up data analytics expertise becomes paramount as an enabler of increased revenue and targeted member engagement. Adapting communication skills to suit increasing use of digital channels (including the whole 'Tone of Voice' evolution highlighted in Part I) is a further example of the domino effect on organizational skills needs.
- ▶ **Creating a reality check** – Skills issues are not just an after thought; in some instances they will be a determining factor in whether an organization gives the green light to any new digital project. This is a theme across the wider business community and is seen as one of the main 'drag factors' on digital adoption and technology-driven transformations. For example, 42 per cent of respondents to the McKinsey global technology report say they have stuck with the digital status quo because of the huge difficulties in sourcing the talent they need.
- ▶ **A gradual approach to reskilling** – Making incremental steps forward has been a way of boosting the internal skills and ensuring that progress on digital implementation is sustainable over time. Specific examples from EBMOs include initially training one staff member up to the required level of expertise, before rolling out development opportunities to other colleagues. Other examples include promoting internal sharing of expertise, through internal briefing sessions and 'working lunches'.
- ▶ **Harnessing external expertise** – To compensate for a lack of internal skills and expertise, the option for organizations is to use external consultants or contract staff who are bought in for a limited period of time to manage the implementation of a new digital initiative. The challenge of finding the right external expertise to help at the initial strategic development stages of a digital project are outlined in Part 2.1. Using contract and freelance staff for ongoing implementation of activities or specific projects is also an option.
- ▶ **Recruiting new staff** – Some representative organizations have recognized the need to recruit new permanent staff with the technological and project management expertise needed to drive effective implementation and continuous improvement. Digitalization is also impacting on the recruitment and selection criteria for more traditional roles with EBMOs – for example, marketing and communications staff with a track record of harnessing digital tools or events staff with specific expertise in running online events. The challenge for EBMOs is how to compete for skills and expertise that are in high demand across most sectors of the economy.

People and skills (particularly digital skills) will be at the heart of economic and jobs market reboots. In addition to reskilling, redesigning job descriptions and conducting skills mapping exercises will be a priority for many employers. This equally applies to EBMOs themselves. Good recruitment and people management practices are as important to representative organizations as they are to the individual businesses within membership. EBMOs are also having to compete in this frenzied market for digital competencies, which is why attracting, developing and retaining key staff is so crucial.

BOX 15: How are EBMOs approaching evolving skills needs?

- ▶ **SNEF (Singapore)** have instigated a reverse mentoring program (ie young people mentoring more senior ones) so that skills and awareness can be spread across the organization and to ensure that senior leaders are up to speed with digital trends. The concept of internal skills transfer also applies to established competencies such as communication, relationship-building and influencing skills. SNEF see digitalization as a means of enhancing internal infrastructure and of modernizing the organization in a way that helps to attract new talent; this ties into key SNEF organizational values of being forward-looking, innovative and professional.
- ▶ **CGEM (Morocco)** have boosted internal skills as a means of managing the digitalization process and ensuring that progress is sustainable over time. This has been a case of making incremental steps forward, by initially training one staff member up to the required level of expertise. The aim is to build on this by then training up other colleagues across the organization. Developing a good mix of internal expertise – for example having some colleagues focusing on managing potential risk factors with others focusing on opportunities for further innovation and change – will ensure that new digital approaches are embedded over time.
- ▶ **ECOP (Philippines)** have not only focused on skills development for internal staff, but also on the evolving competency needs of associates – particularly trainers delivering ECOP training programmes. Online delivery has created a need for new approaches, not only linked to the practicalities of digital delivery tools but also linked to the challenge of maintaining participant engagement when training is delivered on online platforms rather than face to face.

Seizing reskilling opportunities

Any sustainable step-change towards digitalization requires a culture of learning and internal skills transfer. Although the current priority is around digital skills, this also applies to more traditional (but still essential) competencies, including effective communication, relationship-building and influencing skills. For EBMOs clearly it is not just about buying in new skills and competencies (which in a competitive market for skills may be difficult anyway), it is about building the internal skills base.

▶▶ Helping people to acquire in-demand technical and digital skills and be redeployed into new roles and industries not only helps individuals, it will accelerate recovery for businesses in the post-pandemic era.

- ▶ Murielle Antille SVP, Head of Government and Industry Affairs, LHH & Member of [WEC's Career Management Group](#)

Upskilling is a priority across the global business community as we look ahead to post-pandemic recovery. Innovative approaches will be essential for all employers; for EBMOs this provides an opportunity to fully harness the potential that digital services offer going forward. As part of this, EBMOs should look to access national government funding that is set aside to boost digital skills and the wider reskilling agenda as part of the post-pandemic plans for economic revival. Successful EBMOs will also be at the forefront by encouraging national governments to put such plans in place (if they are not already being developed) and by ensuring that ramping-up of the digital skills base is a core element of national roadmaps for recovery.

So, an important part of the digital journey involves mapping out what skills and internal competencies will be needed going forward to effectively implement the new strategy, to deliver new services and to regularly re-evaluate the impact being made based on the ongoing data and qualitative feedback from members. EBMOs have always been active on skills development issues – particularly in relation to

anticipating skills needs at a sector level, informing skills policy and working with education institutions and helping close the skills mismatch. They can build on this expertise within the context of intensifying digital skills needs within an evolving technology landscape.

Answering the culture question

People strategies within EBMOs (and the employers they represent) are underpinned by organizational culture. The values, behaviours and practices that create this culture will naturally need to evolve as organizations embrace technological change and become fully fledged digital organizations. Although it may seem hard to draw comparisons with leading digital pioneers like Amazon, Netflix, Hubspot and others, the reality is that all organizations (ie EBMOs and the employers they represent, both large and small) have common 'check-in' points along the digital journey. And one of the most important check-in points is a recognition that organizational culture is the foundation for any sustainable organizational transformation.

Clearly, the thing that's transforming is not the technology – the technology is transforming you.

▶ Jeanne W. Ross, MIT Sloan's Center for Information Systems Research

In addition to establishing a positive workplace culture with their own organization, EBMOs can facilitate change across the business ecosystem they represent. A topical manifestation of this is ensuring that opportunities for under-represented groups are enhanced in the digital era and that the business community champions a culture of inclusivity. In his [message to the Internet Governance Forum](#), [UN Secretary-General António Guterres issued the following rallying call](#): *'We urgently need to address the growing digital gender gap and put digital technology to work for those who need it most: the vulnerable, the marginalized, those living in poverty, and people suffering from discrimination of all kinds.'* [This call for action is also picked up in the recent report by the ILO Global Business and Disability Network \('An inclusive digital economy for people with disabilities'\)](#), a joint publication developed within the framework of Disability Hub Europe, a project led by Fundación ONCE and co-funded by the European Social Fund. ITCILO also made an analysis of the power of inclusive artificial intelligence (AI) for training²⁶ [as a means of tackling bias and promoting equality](#).

We have an opportunity to try and make sure that the use of this technology is steered towards shaping the kind of equitable future that we want.

▶ Stephen Cave, Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, University of Cambridge

What does a culture of digital inclusivity look like in practice and how are EBMOs taking a lead on this topical agenda? A concrete example comes from the work of EFC in Sri Lanka to help their members to make reasonable adjustments and ensure that websites are accessible to all. Other examples include EBMOs playing a leading role in ensuring that the digital era creates more opportunities for under-represented groups. This includes working with government to bridge the 'digital divide' and ensure that people from poorer backgrounds (including school children) have access to technology and digital literacy support.

²⁶ Full analysis of the role of inclusive AI for training is at: <https://www.itcilo.org/stories/power-inclusive-artificial-intelligence-training#toc-tackling-bias-and-promoting-equality-in-ai>

The business community can take the initiative to set their own voluntary targets and learn from each other in terms of effective approaches to diversity and inclusion. This should include building on existing initiatives taken in the framework of corporate social responsibility (CSR), responsible business conduct (RBC) or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiatives. Digital tools can help by showcasing what works and by galvanizing industry leaders around this crucial agenda.

Innovative tools such as the [Malkia App](#)²⁷ and training programme (aimed at supporting the career progression of women first-line managers) and stimulating global exchanges on specific debating points such as unconscious bias and the potential impact of AI and automation on the equality agenda are further examples of the galvanizing role that EBMOs can play in this hugely important area.

Digital tools can make a difference on supporting equality, but the key is to ensure that the underpinning foundations are truly inclusive.²⁸

▶ Ife Onwuzulike, Head of Diversity and Inclusion, CBI (Confederation of British Industry)

BOX 16: Six signs of a positive workplace culture

What are some of the aspirations of EBMOs in terms of the types of values and underlying culture that they want their organization and their people to embody? The feedback from EBMOs around the world has identified a number of common features, including the following cultural markers:


- ▶ **Openness** – Learning from each other, willingness to share ideas, knowledge and expertise. This is also typified by a recognition that mistakes will sometimes be made, but these will be learnt from, not covered up.
- ▶ **Connectivity** – Digital organizations will increasingly dismantle silos and adopt a more project-based approach with multi-functional teams coming together from across different departments.
- ▶ **Customer-focused** – Understanding and systematically responding to client and member needs. For EBMOs this is encapsulated in the concept of 'absolute member-centricity'. Digital adoption is not an end in itself; it is predicated on improving the member experience.
- ▶ **Speed** – Expectations are evolving, the need for speed is paramount. Digital tools are an enabler, but people are key to embedding a sense of urgency and agility in the way that organizations respond to member needs and external developments.
- ▶ **Ownership and autonomy** – People take accountability and ownership, are prepared to act independently and show initiative. This drives innovation and helps to ensure that the full potential of digital investment is realized.
- ▶ **Continuous improvement** – A volatile external environment and fast-changing digital era requires constantly evolving skills and a growth mindset that benefits individuals as well as organizations.

²⁷ Information on the Malkia initiative can be accessed here: <https://www.itcilo.org/projects/promoting-womens-empowerment-malkia>

²⁸ Speaking on the 'CBI at 10' webinar on diversity and inclusion in June 2021.

BOX 17: How are EBMOs promoting a culture of digital inclusivity?

- ▶ **EFC (Sri Lanka)** promotes equal opportunity in employment by helping organizations to make reasonable adjustments to employ persons with disabilities with a specific focus on web accessibility audits and on mobile apps and assistive devices that improve opportunities and the inclusive working environments.
- ▶ **CBI (UK)** have a dedicated Head of Diversity and Inclusion. As well as working with government and external stakeholders to drive change through public policy interventions, the role focuses on helping businesses create significant step-changes – for example through inclusive hiring and internal progression procedures. The aim is also to ensure that internal cultures provide a foundation for sustainable change and that external developments such as increased digitalization create new opportunities for all.
- ▶ **MEDEF (France)** produced an online guide to promote the integration of injured military personnel in companies. The guide was developed in collaboration with the armed forces' health service and is aimed at managers and HR directors. It promotes awareness and understanding of the different types of injuries and health conditions, and highlights practical measures that can be taken to facilitate the integration of ex-military staff into the workplace, such as immersion training and company work experience placements. Digital tools are the means of promoting good practice on inclusive hiring practices; developing in-demand digital skills are one of the best ways of ensuring that ex-military personnel can integrate and progress within the workplace.

 **There is an acceptance amongst business leaders that we will not return to where we were pre-pandemic. The focus is on innovation and embracing change. The crisis has opened people's eyes about what can be done in terms of swift responses and an agile mindset.**

▶ Jacqui Ford, CEO, APSO (South Africa)

Tackling leadership and management challenges

Digital evolution creates another challenge for EBMOs and for all employers looking to embrace and accelerate change: a leadership challenge. And top of the list is ensuring that senior leaders within the organization and on advisory or governing boards have enough understanding of digital issues to make the right strategic calls and create an infrastructure and culture that delivers effective implementation. Senior leaders also set the tone for the whole change process, which is essential for representative bodies, as well as for any plotting their way through a digital journey.

Ensuring synergy between overall organizational strategy and technology strategy is a challenge across the wider business community. One of the conclusions from McKinsey's '[Seven Lessons on Technology Transformation](#)²⁹' report is that bridging the business–technology chasm is critical to performance, with top-quartile companies nearly three times as likely as their bottom-quartile peers to adopt a 'co-creation' approach to developing strategy and delivering new technology responses. This includes ensuring business-oriented success metrics are used, including end-user satisfaction, time to market, and financial impact.

On an operational level, organizations have sought to raise awareness of digital trends and technology developments amongst senior leaders. As we have seen before, some EBMOs have instigated reverse mentoring programmes to ensure that senior leaders can be brought up to speed through regular

²⁹ Full McKinsey Seven Key Lessons on Technology Report can be accessed here: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/seven-lessons-on-how-technology-transformations-can-deliver-values>

exchanges with the younger, more digital-savvy cohort of EBMO staff. The underlying priority for EBMOs around the world (as for the wider business community) is to find the answer to the following question: what do effective leaders look like in a digital era and within the context of less hierarchical and more agile organizations? This is something that EBMOs running leadership development sessions can reflect in their own programmes aimed at current and future leaders within their membership. For EBMO leaders themselves, the implications of leading in a digital era is a further area where the support of ITCILO and ILO ACT/EMP can come to the fore.

Technology requires constant hands-on management to ensure that the business is adapting to the change in its DNA.

► Maria Martinez, Chief Operating Officer, Cisco

The feedback from EBMOs has highlighted the benefits of digital tools as the mechanism for building a genuine community of industry leaders. This is a way of addressing one of the perennial challenges for membership organizations: how to engage with CEOs and other senior leaders within member companies. Getting this right provides value for members through peer-to-peer exchanges at the senior level as well as benefits for the EBMOs and wider employer community through the creation of a stronger collective voice on the big issues of the day.

BOX 18: Using digital tools to drive the leadership agenda

- **ECAM (Malawi)** created a new digital platform for industry leaders in Malawi³⁰ to work closely with existing board members to ramp up impact with government and labour unions. The CEOs involved represent a section of key sectors, including telecommunications, financial services and food manufacturing. This new leadership 'community' was launched just before the COVID19 crisis, but stepped up to this 'baptism of fire' and has been influential in limiting economic damage and plotting a way forward for the country's economy.

Managing people through change

One of the main people-centric implementation challenges for EBMOs (and for the employers they represent) is as follows: how to develop and implement plans for digital adoption whilst allaying fears of staff that this will mean potential job cuts or a significant change in current roles. Any change can create anxiety; the aim is to ensure that this does not create a barrier to digital adoption and does not put organizational cohesion at risk. This is an integral part of the 'people-centric' approach at the heart of any successful digital rollout.

It is only by integrating a people-centric and culture-centric approach with a techno-centric approach that leaders can ensure smooth and successful rollouts.

► Helena Boulton, EMEA Head of Organizational Change Management, Wipro

³⁰ An overview of ECAM services for businesses in Malawi can be accessed here: <https://www.ecammw.com/ecam-services/>

Some organizations are in a position to address these concerns by underlining the fact that the core driver is improving services to members rather than cost reduction. Better services also equate to membership growth, which is ultimately the best possible way of safeguarding jobs. There is another potential upside for staff: digital adoption can reduce the need for repetitive, mundane tasks and free up time for more added value and more specialized activities. A good example of this comes from NHO (Norway), with AI and bots being seen as a means (over time) of answering the most common queries and ensuring that those working within the in-house legal team can hone their expertise on some of the more specialized and difficult legal challenges facing business leaders. A further example is the Amelia 'Virtual Assistant' chatbot developed by MEF in Malaysia to answer employment law questions of MEF members.

RECAP – People strategies fuel the digital journey

The latest insight from EBMOs across the globe has underlined the following message: any sustainable digital strategy must be underpinned by a strong people strategy. As we have seen above, the people element of the digital journey covers a multitude of interconnected priorities, including:

- ▶ ensuring that the right skills are in place within the organization and that these are regularly refreshed;
- ▶ actively engaging staff (as well as members) from the very outset – the message people need to hear is that 'digital change is being done for you, not to you! and your views matter';
- ▶ recognizing the scale of the leadership challenge, whilst remaining excited by the opportunities for dynamic change;
- ▶ ensuring that the way changes are implemented supports and builds on other organizational priorities, particularly the nurturing of a positive and inclusive workplace culture which has continuous improvement at its core.

In the words of the philosopher and author Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *'our objective must be to become more human, and we have the machine to do the routines that we can then preserve ourselves from.'* This fits with the aspiration of a 'human-centred' future which applies to how successful EBMOs and the millions of employers that they represent manage the ongoing digitalization process.



PART III



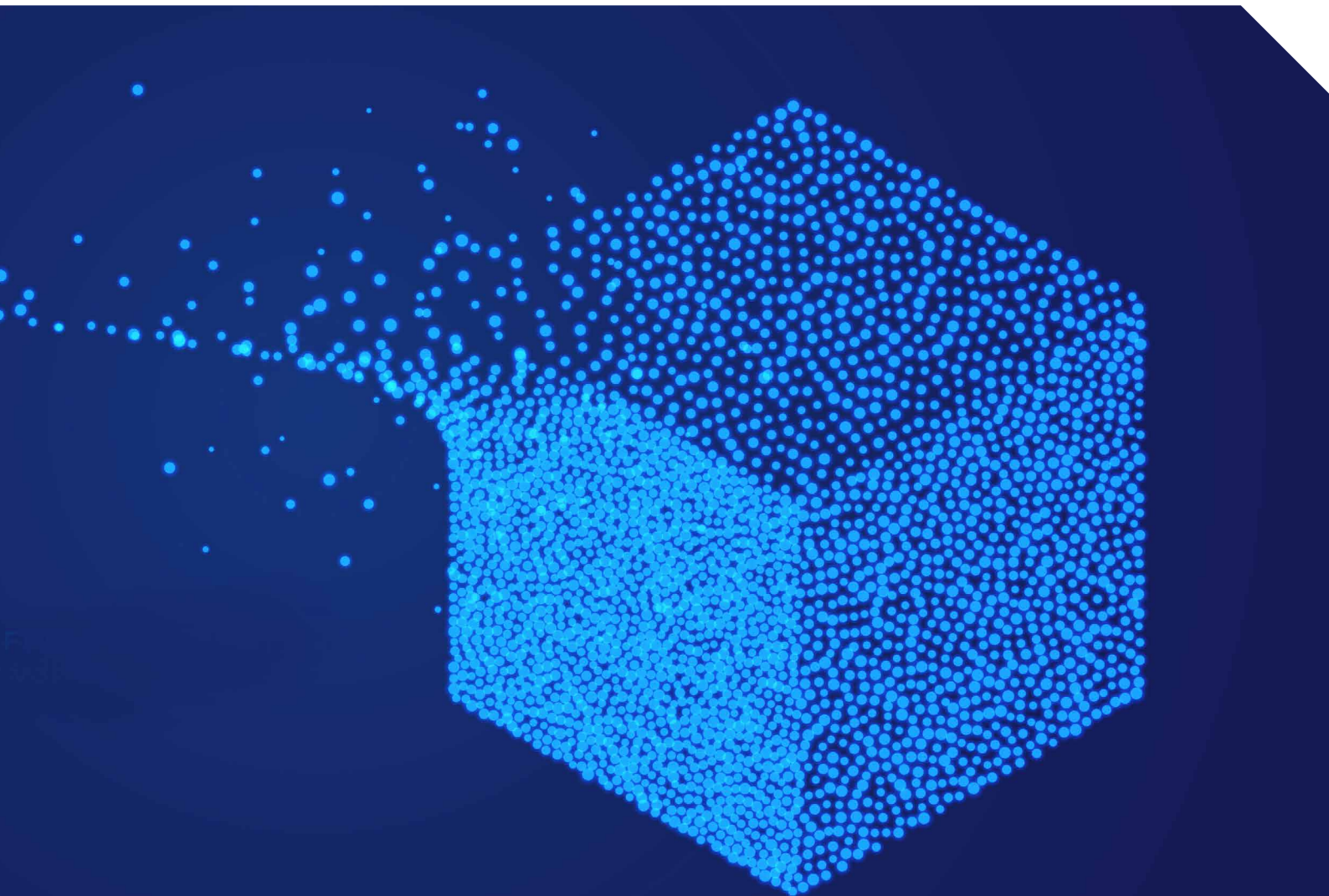
What's next?

▶ PART III – WHAT'S NEXT?

How will digital technology evolve over the coming years and how can EBMOs ensure that they are up to speed and even ahead of the game? Discussions with business organizations around the world have underlined the importance of pre-empting new delivery channels as well as evolving needs of members. For many EBMOs the short- and longer-term priority for the future is ensuring that new digital channels can work alongside more traditional service delivery models and maximize new commercial opportunities.

▶▶ **To remain strong, independent and effective representatives of their members, EBMOs should strive to be role models for members and reflect their members' best business practices.**

▶ Dr Deborah Soule, University of Massachusetts Lowell's Manning School of Business




In this section we focus on three future-focused priorities:

Priorities for future digitalization – What's next on the change agenda for EBMOs and what specific services and procedures are likely to see a digital makeover in the next few years? Online learning platforms will continue to evolve and EBMOs have also flagged future opportunities linked to enhanced social media presence, faster delivery of services and more streamlined payment mechanisms. One of the drivers of sustainable change going forward will be to facilitate bilateral or multilateral exchanges between EBMOs at different stages of the digital journey, building on existing peer-to-peer support mechanisms and providing hands-on training and guidance facilitated by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), the ACT/EMP teams in the ILO and ITCILO or other like-minded organizations.

Taking a lead on the (digital) future of work – The practical implications of a fast-changing world of work for employers, workers and for policy makers has been a hot topic for several years. This was a core theme of the ILO ACT/EMP-IOE report on Changing Business and Opportunities for Employer and Business Organizations.³¹ But, the global pandemic has radically accelerated the pace of change and radically intensified the focus on workplace trends and the role of digital innovation. This presents a multifaceted opportunity for EBMOs to not only ensure that the voice of business remains at the forefront of the future of work debate, but also to use latest intelligence on digital trends as a practical service to members as well as a means of informing EBMOs' own digital strategies.

Recommendations for action – Based on the feedback and emerging challenges flagged by representative business organizations around the world, what are some of the actions that EBMOs, in cooperation with national governments and international institutions, can take to ensure that digital adoption drives inclusive and sustainable growth? The collaborative activities taken forward over the course of the global pandemic must be built on during the recovery phase to ensure that the digital era is one in which EBMOs and the employers they represent can thrive.

 **The current focus on digitalization signals a profound shift in attitude and outlook within many EBMOs. It is about adopting a new mindset predicated on the fact that change is inevitable and will only accelerate.**

▶ Mohammed Touzani, CGEM (Morocco)

³¹ The IOE / ILO report can be accessed here: https://www.ilo.org/ACT/EMP/areas-of-work/WCMS_679582/lang--en/index.htm

▶ 1. What's next? – What are the priorities for future digitalization?

What's next on the change agenda for EBMOs? Embedding and enhancing online learning platforms will remain a priority in many countries – especially as this provides a crucial additional revenue stream. The latest feedback has identified a number of other specific services and procedures that will be targeted for a digital makeover within the next few years.

Digitalization as part of the wider digital transformation

Digitalization will continue to form part of the wider fundamental transformation process of how organizations operate and deliver value – a process EBMOs increasingly recognize as necessary in order to remain relevant in a fast-changing business and social landscape. Organizations will need to continuously innovate and adapt. But digitalization is not necessarily the starting point in this journey and technology alone will not ensure organizational success.

As a rule of thumb, the ILO's [DaaSA](#) research found the '60/30/10 rule' to be commonly accepted by EBMOs as reflecting the experience of success: 60 per cent of the recipe being the result of people buy-in for new ways of working, 30 per cent the result of adjusting business processes, and 10 per cent the result of finding the right technological solution. This echoes the findings in the 'Why does it work?' section of this report. The common themes and implementation tips identified in that section will help EBMOs drive success in the area of digitalization as well as their wider organizational transformation.

What's next for online learning?

Is remote learning a sustainable concept going forward? Yes, particularly as the shift to online platforms predates the pandemic. In the words of Lisa Lynn, Senior Executive of Operations and Projects at Ibec, *'online delivery is here to stay, so hybrid and blended learning must be built into technology strategy'*. At the same time, EBMOs have underlined a number of emerging challenges linked to costings, content, quality of the online delivery (including training the trainers) and adapting to some of the potential barriers to active participant engagement that is inherent in remote learning models.

▶▶ **Digitalization in practice is an ongoing process, including technology upskilling for internal teams and enhancing digital skillsets of trainers. Check-ins and feedback from delegates and trainers is also critical.**³²

▶ Lisa Lynn, Senior Executive, Operations & Projects, Ibec (Ireland)

On the costings front, some EBMOs feel under pressure to show a clear price decrease for courses that were previously delivered in a classroom and that will be delivered online in the future. One of the ways forward is to remain firm by reframing the cost debate around outcome rather than income: the quality and value of the learning is what really matters, not how the learning is delivered. At the same time, increased online delivery will create some additional costs – for example, licences for online tools as well as upskilling, segmentation and tailoring of the offer.

³² Speaking on the ITCILO webinar on online training in April 2021

The table below highlights some of the proposed solutions to these potential 'road-blocks' to the successful rollout of online learning programmes:

DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE ONLINE TRAINING MODELS	
Emerging challenges	Potential solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Cost – Participants may not be prepared to pay the same for online course as for traditional classroom-based training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Reframe the cost debate to focus on outcome: the quality and value of the learning is what really matters, not how the learning is delivered. ▶ Demonstrate added value of online learning models, eg: access to customized guides, simulations, ability to check progress through online tests. ▶ Some small concessions can be made (eg cost of refreshments and lunches stripped out). ▶ Continue to enhance the offer through systematic review of participant feedback.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Trainer capability – Delivering online courses requires specific skills and technical knowledge. Will the training delivered by the current roster of trainers meet the needs and expectations of participants in the new virtual format? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Technical briefings and train the trainer sessions on adapting delivery for digital channels. ▶ Provide hands-on technical and digital support on training days. ▶ Refresh roster of trainers, bringing in a new cohort of trainers who are comfortable with online delivery. ▶ Accelerate development of asynchronous learning programmes (see Box 19 below).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Internal skills and capability – The shift to online delivery requires new skills and creates new knowledge needs internally. Internal staff with responsibility for events and training delivery cannot be expected to adapt to the very different world without support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Internal skills audit to identify upskilling and retraining needs for existing staff. ▶ Use of external contractors or contingent labour with the necessary skills to cover short-term needs. ▶ Review job descriptions to ensure clear focus on online delivery.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Lack of participant engagement – The concern is that the training 'experience' will be devalued for all if there is less active engagement with the trainer and between the participants themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Make the most of the tools provided by digital platforms for virtual breakouts, mini-surveys and whiteboard sessions. ▶ Adapt structure of training that will now be mostly delivered virtually, including more breaks and pre-planned 'check-in' moments with participants. ▶ Develop and promote participant protocols on issues like having cameras on and sharing views and experiences throughout the course.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ New sources of competition – Delivering online training means going head-to-head with other providers, including colleges and commercial training providers with an established track record of virtual training and a robust digital infrastructure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Focus on providing the best possible service and using awareness of member needs to target new offers and content. ▶ Use key unique selling propositions (USPs) – such as strong links with government from ongoing advocacy work – to differentiate. ▶ Develop mutually beneficial commercial partnerships with established online training providers – particularly in areas where the EBMO is not seen as a market leader. |
|---|---|

How will progress on online training programmes be measured going forward? Participant satisfaction rates, increased income, member take-up rates and repeat business will be the most obvious success measures. To date, the picture remains mixed, with some EBMOs reporting a drop in training income, whilst others have reported an overall increase in the take-up of training programmes. This may to some extent be linked to the sheer urgency that businesses need to access guidance and training on areas such as health and safety and business continuity, but it is creating a 'new normality' of accessing knowledge and skills through digital platforms. Looking ahead, there will be an increasing need for support measures such as the current ITC-ILO's Digitalizing Training Services programme, turnkey e-learning platforms ([eCampus](#)) and practical guides specifically targeted at the EBMO community, such as the [ITCILO/DECP Guide on Training Methodology](#) for EBMOs.

BOX 19: How are EBMOs planning to take online learning to the next stage?

- ▶ **IBEC (Ireland)** move to remote delivery included harnessing tools for online voting and active engagement (Kahoot, Padlet, Mentimeter, Mind Mapping), conducting a resources review (inclusion of mixed media, videos, Ted Talks and articles), optimizing delivery materials and reframing of activities, structure and course duration. Digital delivery has also included a focus on participation etiquette.
- ▶ **ECOP (Philippines)** will continue to drive delivery and active engagement through the pioneering eCampus platforms that were developed in partnership with ITCILO. Future plans include the development of asynchronous learning programmes. These differ from traditional instructor-led training programmes and other synchronized learning programmes in the way participants interact with the content. In asynchronous learning, the learner leverages technology to interact directly with the content, on his/her own schedule, without real-time interaction with a facilitator or trainer. Similar eCampus platforms are being used in ECATT (Trinidad and Tobago), PIPSO (Pacific), EFI (India) and will be soon installed for EBMOs in Bahrain and Kuwait.
- ▶ **CGEM (Morocco)** have instigated a number of new initiatives in the training arena, with a specific focus on peer-to-peer learning. This includes the launch of a social academy that will be largely driven by digital delivery. Other initiatives include a new academy for entrepreneurs, which will be a hub for sharing new ideas and providing support to new start-ups and to the next generation of business leaders in Morocco. Digital tools provide the means of delivering these new initiatives in a way that drives benefits for participants and raises the profile of CGEM activities.
- ▶ **FEC (DRC)** are looking to build on the online programmes delivered since the outbreak of the global pandemic, including training aimed at senior executives from different economic sectors. Managing the virtual ecosystem is creating notable challenges, particularly with regards to holding the attention and actively engaging with participants in virtual classes and e-learning modules. The expectation is that some return to traditional classroom training will be embraced once the health crisis has abated.

The new frontiers: artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), blockchain and self-service models

One of the benefits of digital adoption so far has been to create outlets and resource libraries that members access whenever they want to. As well as providing members with access to information at any time, some EBMOs are looking at how members can ask questions (and get a response!) at any time and on any day. Improving self-service facilities is a future priority for many representative business organizations, as a means of driving 24/7 member services and enhancing responsiveness. At the same time, it is important to note that many members will still want direct personal contact. For example, 150 calls a week come into the legal team at NHO from members who want to double-check that they are doing the right thing and whether specific legal requirements apply to them.

Looking ahead, could chatbots powered by artificial intelligence (AI) provide this kind of confirmation and reassurance on relatively common legal queries? There are many things to consider with this, particularly with regards to insurance that covers legal advice (would this also cover AI-generated advice questions?). And would it engender the necessary trust to satisfy members in need of reassurance? On a broader level, the feedback from representative organizations around the world is that there will be a need to find the right balance between digital, online, AI-driven advice and maintaining the kind of personal touch needed to maintain trust.

How might other high-profile forces of change like blockchain impact on the work and services of EBMOs? Blockchain refers to a system in which a record of transactions made in bitcoin or another cryptocurrency are maintained across several computers that are linked in a peer-to-peer network. Blockchains are resistant to modification of their data because, once recorded, the data in any given 'block' cannot be altered retroactively without altering all subsequent blocks. As well as the more obvious impact on accounting, cyber security and supply chains, blockchain has potential implications for human resources management, in areas such as background and employment history checks, employee data security, certifications, smarter contracts for temporary workers (where hours worked may vary from week to week) and payroll management.

Blockchain will not only impact IT, but every function.

▶ Jackie Wiles, Associate Director, Gartner³³

To date, there is little evidence of blockchain being used directly by EBMOs for the management of their own transactions, data and people. However, the potential for significant disruption across the wider business ecosystem is summarized in the following quote by Vitalik Buterin, Co-Founder of Ethereum: *'Whereas most technologies tend to automate workers on the periphery doing menial tasks, blockchains automate away the center. Instead of putting the taxi driver out of a job, blockchain puts Uber out of a job and lets the taxi drivers work with the customer directly.'* Whether the extent of predicted disruption will come to pass may be open for debate, but EBMOs must recognize the potential implications for the businesses in their membership and stay close to the latest developments. An example of adoption benefits is the ITC-ILO's own use of blockchain technology to certify its digital certificates, using the [Accredible platform](#).³⁴ This is potentially something that national EBMOs could use for their own training and qualification certifications.

³³ This was the theme of Gartner's Expert Insight Video on Building Resilient Organizations: <https://www.gartner.com/en/conferences/hub/hr-conferences/insights/building-resilient-organization>

³⁴ Information on the Accredible platform can be accessed here: <https://www.accreditable.com>

▶ **Anything that you can conceive of as a supply chain, blockchain can vastly improve its efficiency – it doesn't matter if it's people, numbers, data, money.**³⁵

▶ [Ginni Rometty, former CEO of IBM](#)

It is also difficult to understand today if augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) will be a part of day-to-day operations of EBMOs in the future. As Michael E. Porter and James E. Heppelmann explain *'while AR superimposes digital information on the physical world, VR replaces physical reality with a computer-generated environment. Though VR is used mostly for entertainment applications, it can also replicate physical settings for training purposes. It is especially useful when the settings involved are hazardous or remote. Or, if the machinery required for training is not available, VR can immerse technicians in a virtual environment using holograms of the equipment. So when needed, VR adds a fourth capability—simulate—to AR's core capabilities of visualize, instruct, and interact'*.³⁶ AR and VR are said to have the greatest impact on business functions such as training, work collaboration, service delivery and engagement with customers. These are strategic areas of work for EBMOs. Initial examples of how AI is already being used to enhance member services and information are flagged in Box 20.

BOX 20: Using AI to enhance member services

- ▶ **MEF (Malaysia)** – The Amelia 'Virtual Assistant' chatbot is geared up to answer questions that MEF members have pertaining to employment law and regulations. The underlying aim is to promote well-being and equality in the workplace and to ensure that 'fair and just practices are being carried out by all employers'.
- ▶ **NHO (Norway)** – As part of the work to provide members with access to information whenever they need it, NHO is looking at AI-driven chatbots as a means of answering most common legal and regulatory questions.

▶ **AI-powered chatbots are a means of complementing the work of industrial relations experts and of providing member companies with easy access to information on employment law and regulations.**

▶ [Musfirah Liyana Mustapa Kamar, MEF \(Malaysia\)](#)

What are the other priorities for digital evolution?

In addition to the fast-moving online learning landscape and the new frontiers of AI, AR, VR, blockchain and self-service models, what other future priorities is the global EBMO community flagging with regards

³⁵ Quote included in APAC Entrepreneur article in 2020: <https://apacentrepreneur.com/why-you-should-invest-in-learning-blockchain-technology-in-2020/>

to digital adoption? Below are some of the most common priorities and drivers of change flagged by EBMOs across all regions of the world:

- ▶ **Faster response times** – COVID19 has been a catalyst for change, with members looking for specific advice and guidance and wanting to receive this as quickly as possible. Expectations have been raised! The priority for business organizations will be to ensure that the digital infrastructure and internal skills are a regularly refreshed place for being able to respond at pace to revolving member needs.

- ▶ **Better use of data** – Across the business community, the focus will increasingly be on how best to interpret and use the data that enhanced digitalization has helped to produce. For EBMOs specifically, this provides a means of customizing information to specific types of business and being able to segment the membership effectively – for example, by size, sector and growth aspirations. Better data analysis created a further skills need within EBMOs as well as across many of the employers within membership. This is one of the drivers for EBMOs to equip themselves with state-of-the-art digital customer relations systems (CRMs) supporting the secretariat in data management across departments. As part of this, the [ITCILO CRM installation and training project](#) has supported over 75 EBMOs across the world since its launch in 2012.

- ▶ **Creating new advisory structures** – As well as ensuring that digital adoption is increasingly featured on the agenda of board meetings and advisory committees, EBMOs are prioritizing other mechanisms for keeping the digital journey on the right track. This includes cross-departmental digital delivery teams, more regular and qualitative 'check-ins' with members, establishing 'shadow' leadership groups and 'future leaders' networks as a way of harnessing the input of the next generation of business leaders (who will hopefully form the next generation of EBMO members).

- ▶ **Culture, mindset and skills** – The current focus on digitalization signals a profound shift in attitude and outlook within many EBMOs that will gain momentum as we go forward. It is about adopting a new culture and digital mindset (see Box 21) predicated on the fact that change is inevitable and will only accelerate. This is an important philosophical step-change that will serve business organizations in good stead at a time of ongoing disruption and change. The feedback from EBMOs also confirms that adapting to evolving internal skills needs will become even more of a priority and is an area where external support will be increasingly welcomed.

- ▶ **Advocacy in the digital era** – EBMOs are mindful that political parties and government departments are also looking at how best to harness digital tools and at how to regularly evolve their own consultation and communication strategies. Will the advocacy work of EBMOs be transformed on the back of this? Some of the areas that EBMOs are looking to evolve include a greater focus on social media as a means of reaching the wider population as well as political decision-makers, using social media as a listening tool (rather than a broadcast tool) to inform policy messages, and increasingly using online platforms to build innovative and multi-stakeholder 'campaign coalitions'. The focus on innovation will also be reflected in the way that EBMOs harness different digital channels to drive proactive campaigns to showcase the positive role of private sector employers in society and enhance the overall reputation of business.

- ▶ **Facing up to competition** – Representative business organizations continue to face various sources of competition – not only from other membership bodies but also from providers of business services. Examples of these diverse sources of competition include consulting firms offering legal support, accountancy firms creating business networks focusing on particular tax issues and public relations (PR) firms offering advocacy and lobbying services. Yes, there is competition and yes this could intensify going forward. But one inherent and unique feature of representative business organizations is the ability to convene the collective voice of the business community and to make a genuine impact on government policy. As highlighted in Part I of this guide, one of the opportunities for business organizations going forward is to use digital channels to further enhance this convening role and to amplify the collective voice of the business community.

BOX 21: Practical tips for EBMOs – how to develop a 'digital mindset'

Based on the insight from EBMOs and sectoral organizations, here are six ways that representative employer organizations are looking to embed a 'digital mindset' within their organization:

- ▶ **Continuous improvement** – Building a culture of continuous improvement – reflecting member feedback and a changing external environment – is already a priority for EBMOs. This includes a focus on personal development as well as a culture of regularly reviewing activities and performance. This is a crucial building block for continuing to harness new digital opportunities.
- ▶ **New approaches to recruitment and development** – Hiring for digital mindset and on a willingness to learn and adapt are important ways forward. Providing learning and development opportunities for staff on digital adoption and on making the most of new delivery channels are tools for embedding new approaches and mindset.
- ▶ **Leadership and governance** – Any sustainable mindset change must be modelled from the very top of the organization. Embracing digital evolution and being sufficiently informed to ask the right questions are hallmarks of future leaders. On governance, some representative organizations are evolving the composition of their advisory board to include external experts – including from the digital arena.
- ▶ **Looking outwards to drive innovation** – As well as looking inwards at how digitalization is benefiting members, EBMOs are looking outwards at how other types of organization are using digital adoption to boost the client and customer experience. Learnings and innovation will come from regular exchanges within the EBMO ecosystem as well as by looking beyond it.
- ▶ **Recognizing the importance of data** – Digitalization is a means of generating new data to enhance the performance of EBMOs and their understanding of evolving member needs. A recognition that more consistent and focused data management practices can boost services and increase EBMO membership, resources and influence will fuel the digital mindset.

RECAP – Change will be the only constant

The feedback and insight from EBMOs confirms a growing recognition that change and evolution will be the only constants. A number of EBMO leaders specifically referred to a 'mindset' change, based on the need for speed, agility and innovation.

Embedding and enhancing online learning platforms remains a priority in many countries – especially as this provides a crucial additional revenue stream. As the needs and priorities of member businesses evolve, there will be opportunities for new services. Practical guidance for businesses on managing their own digital journey as well as access to technology experts and peer-to-peer learning is just one example.

It is difficult for businesses to keep up with the unrelenting pace of technological evolution. This creates a challenge for EBMOs representing a diverse membership. Digital penetration and take-up are very unequal meaning that, in concrete terms, EBMOs will need to put in place blended strategies to ensure that services can continue to be accessed by the whole membership base.

▶ 2. What's next? – How can EBMOs take a lead on the (digital) future of work?

The practical implications of a fast-changing world of work for employers, workers and policy makers has been a hot topic for several years. But, the global pandemic has radically accelerated the pace of change and greatly intensified the focus on workplace trends and the role of digital innovation.

This presents a unique and multifaceted opportunity for EBMOs:

- ▶ ensuring that the voice of business remains at the forefront of the future of work debate, in a way that impacts positively on public policy and on the reputation of business;
 - ▶ developing and/or curating the latest research on how digital developments will impact on services and the workplace and using this intelligence as a practical service to members;
 - ▶ using this same intelligence to inform EBMOs' own digital strategies, with a focus on constantly evolving and enhancing digital delivery and internal skills.
-

Driving the future of work agenda

EBMOs around the world have driven thought-leadership programmes on the future of work for a number of years. As social partner institutions, their expertise in labour markets and social policy fields is widely recognized as a key differentiator to other business representative groups. Pre-empting evolving business models, the impact of automation, new skills needs and evolving expectations and needs of workers will be more important than ever for businesses and economies to recover from the COVID19 crisis. EBMOs will need to take a view on these big debating points and work with their members to strike the right balance between optimizing technology-driven cost savings and reskilling workers.

A good example of employer organizations taking a lead is GICAM's establishment of a Digital Economy Commission, with a core mission of developing concrete proposals for accelerating the digital transformation of the Cameroonian economy. A further example is the REC's creation of a Future of Jobs Observatory in the UK to take a lead on pre-empting evolving skills needs and building better bridges between education and a fast-changing world of work. Sectoral bodies and employer organizations all over the world are working with national governments to create vibrant digital economies. This requires targeted support for the business community; and this should be seen as an investment rather than a cost. Going forward there is a strong case to be made for this support infrastructure to include specific provisions for EBMOs who can create an ongoing trickle-down and multiplier effect amongst the businesses they represent.

The digital step-change has a further specific implication for EBMOs: the need for a telecommunications infrastructure to support it. This is already a campaigning 'ask' in many countries, and EBMOs will be at the forefront of ensuring that countries have the necessary bandwidth and investment in physical infrastructure, such as antennas and even stable electricity supply, for the business community and wider society to thrive in the 21st century. Focusing on affordability – particularly for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) – is also a campaigning priority. A good example of this is the work of FEC in the Congo, making the case for high-speed bandwidth connectivity in the Congo and for reducing the cost of a broadband connection. On the issue of cost, the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development set a target for 2025 that entry-level broadband services should be affordable in developing countries, corresponding to less than 2 per cent of monthly GNI. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) [publication on measuring digital development](#)³⁷ indicated that the average cost remains significantly above this target. Moreover, when available, access to internet and mobile services are

³⁷ The full ITU report can be accessed here: <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/ff2020interactive.aspx>

characterized by deeply entrenched inequalities (in term of rural vs urban areas, gender or income levels) which cannot be overlooked by EBMOs, especially in their quest for greater digital inclusion (see Part 2.3).

Helping employers and workers navigate the future of work

EBMOs are uniquely placed to offer specific support and thought leadership on new working patterns. A survey from the Boston Consulting Group³⁸ shows that a substantial portion of both managers and employees think that the pace at which their companies are transitioning to digital could be faster, and employees in particular feel that they could be more involved than they are, according to the survey. A significant proportion of managers and employees – just under 50 per cent – are unsure of how the digital transformation will affect them personally when it comes to their jobs, career prospects, and pay.

50 per cent of workers are unsure of how digital transformation will affect them personally.³⁹

How have the expectations and needs of employees, consumers and clients changed on the back of the pandemic? What job roles and skills will be most in demand going forward? How will employment relations and regulatory landscapes need to evolve in the post-lockdown era? These are just some of the forward-looking questions that the business community can help find answers to. Pre-COVID, EBMOs around the world were taking a lead on the future of work agenda. This forward-looking role will become even more important as a means of healing national economies and jobs markets as they recover from the crisis.

One of the challenges ahead will be to inform and reassure people about how fundamental changes to the world of work will have an impact. Automation and the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) were hot topics pre-pandemic; the speed of change could accelerate in the new normal and the technological divide could widen. The Edelman Trust Barometer⁴⁰ shows an ongoing lack of trust in institutions and a general loss of hope; on the whole, people do not believe they will be better off in five years' time. The same survey shows that 83 per cent of workers across the world are worried about job loss due to automation, new competition and other external factors; nearly two in three feel the pace of technological change is too fast. EBMOs can play a pivotal role by working with national governments to ensure that these concerns are heard, understood and addressed. Painting a vision for a future of work that inspires hope and aspiration rather than concern and fear must be a shared goal. This is a further example of the stabilizing role EBMOs can play in disrupted societies.

The least affected enterprises (and least affected economies) that are able to recover more quickly from the crisis will be in a better position to adopt new technologies and benefit from labour-augmenting technological change to increase productivity, gain market share, and build economic resilience. This scenario could exacerbate job polarization and income inequality. The adoption of technology – whether new or conventional – must not be taken for granted. MSMEs in particular face multiple barriers, from financial constraints to lack of skilled technical staff. Access to experts and peer-to-peer exchanges on technology-driven change will remain crucial. This is a further example of how the convening and curating roles of EBMOs can become increasingly relevant and business-critical.

³⁸ Full survey available here: <https://www.bcg.com/en-gb/press/3july2020-digital-transformation-survey>

³⁹ Boston Consulting Group global survey: <https://www.bcg.com/en-gb/press/3july2020-digital-transformation-survey>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Digitalization – A source of new members?

The digital shift has also led to other changes that EBMOs have harnessed in the crisis and can build on in the short and longer term. In particular, it has underlined the importance of the digital and technology sector within national economies. This was a significant growth sector pre-crisis, and the crisis provided another opportunity for EBMOs to reach out to companies (including new start-ups) and associations from the IT and technology sector as part of membership acquisition strategies. This has been apparent in many countries for some time. A good example of this trend can be found in Bulgaria, where the national federation, BIA, reported not only the acquisition of individual IT companies as members but also brought a specialist association within membership – the Professional Association of Robotics and Automation.

BOX 22: Taking a lead on the future of work

- ▶ **GICAM (Cameroon)** have established a [Digital Economy Commission](#), bringing together leading members as well as GICAM staff. The core aim is to develop concrete proposals for accelerating the digital transformation of the Cameroonian economy, including evaluating specific training and support needs in areas like website management, social media and data protection, promoting new business models and encouraging online exchanges between companies. The aim of the Digital Economy Commission is also to assist in the implementation of 'incubator' support for businesses and new start-ups.
- ▶ **Confindustria (Italy)** has positioned the voice of business at the forefront of the future-focused agenda through a high-profile thought-leadership publication entitled *The Courage of the Future: Italy 2030–2050*. The core message is that the economic and social fortunes of the Italy of the future will be defined by today's choices and behaviours. The publication includes concrete proposals with regards to the impact of technologies on work, as well as on other areas such as climate change, globalization and demographic trends.
- ▶ **FEC (DRC)** have consistently made the case for high-speed bandwidth connectivity and for reducing the cost of a broadband connection, which is seen as prohibitively high with telecommunication companies. Part of this campaigning work on the digital environment has seen FEC underline the barriers being created for specific groups with the business community such as women entrepreneurs.

RECAP – We all have an interest in the future, we'll meet there pretty soon...

The faster the pace of technological change, the more employers, policy makers and individuals will need help in making sense of the brave new world of work. This is a space that EBMOs can occupy through pragmatic insight and entrepreneurial energy.

A number of EBMOs are already ensuring that the voice of business is at the forefront of the future of work debate. Providing a fact-based, balanced and reassuring tone to the debate also supports the ongoing aim of enhancing the reputation of business.

Taking a lead on technological trends and an increasingly digitalized world of work also means providing members with thought leadership and enhanced digital services. Successful EBMOs take a lead on the more ethical debates and will also be practising what they preach when it comes to evolving challenges such as workplace skills assessment and managing remote working.

Being at the heart of the future of work and future of technology debates is an opportunity to reach out to new segments, attract potential new members and develop new partnerships. This will also ensure a steady stream of intelligence that will inform the EBMOs' own digital strategies!

▶ 3. What's next? – Recommendations for action

Based on the feedback and emerging challenges flagged by representative organizations around the world, what are some of the actions that national governments, international institutions and EBMOs themselves can take to ensure that digitalization facilitates inclusive and sustainable growth? The collaborative activities taken forward over the course of the global pandemic must be built on during the recovery phase to ensure that the digital era is one in which individual workers as well as employers (and the EBMOs who represent them) can thrive.

Based on the aggregated insight from EBMOs around the world, here are some common 'calls to action' that can boost digital adoption as part of the broader recovery agenda:

For EBMOs' work with national governments

1. **Business support will unleash the digital dividend** – EBMOs across the globe are working with national governments to create vibrant post-pandemic digital economies. This requires targeted support for the business community; and this should be seen as an investment rather than a cost. Going forward there is a strong case to be made for this support infrastructure to include specific provisions for EBMOs who can create an ongoing trickle-down and multiplier effect amongst the businesses they represent.
2. **Enhance working relationships with business** – The pandemic has acted as a reminder of the key convening role that EBMOs play and the benefits of tripartite and bipartite collaboration. But, the overall picture is mixed with regards to the relationships between government and business. A successful reboot of national economies and labour markets will hinge on positive relationships based on respect, evidence and trust. This in turn will fuel the kind of digital adoption that can boost productivity, competitiveness and job-creation.

For EBMOs' work with global support programmes and institutions

3. **Drive the great digital exchange** – One of the opportunities going forward is to facilitate bilateral or multilateral exchanges between EBMOs at different stages of the digital journey. This will build on and drive forward existing capacity-building activities and peer-to-peer support mechanisms.
4. **Develop new tools to support new approaches** – A number of EBMOs referred to the huge benefits they had gained from turn-key data collection and management tools, learning platforms and regular training programmes. To be successful, support interventions need to be based on needs, allow for iterative process and peer learning, build in quick incremental solutions within a medium-term strategy.

For EBMOs' work with members and the private sector

5. **Pre-empt the evolving business and leadership landscape** – The question that many EBMOs are asking themselves is, 'what will future business leaders expect from a membership organization?' The challenge is to remain relevant in a fast-changing business landscape and to future-proof services and membership benefits. Digitalization forms an important part of this.

6. **Rise to the intensifying communications challenge** – The digital era has implications for the way people want to receive information – shorter bite-size chunks available on a 24/7 basis, with rapid responses to specific queries and more personalized engagement opportunities. As well as implications for the channels and tools that EBMOs use, it is important to not lose sight of the fact that this may impact on the content and substance of what future business leaders require.
7. **Take a breath** – EBMOs have been responding to the needs of members and to the evolving COVID19 landscape with absolute urgency. The pace has been unrelenting. But it will be vital to take a breath, to create some space, to reflect on what services need to be prioritized and what channels should be used to deliver them. In an innovation-rich environment it is important to pause, review what works and what doesn't, and take decisions on that basis.



ANNEXES



Annex 1

▶ ANNEXES – ANNEX 1

The digitalization roadmap – 8 practical steps that EBMOs can go through as they approach future stages of the digital journey:

1. **Ensuring board-level buy-in** – The significant investment inherent in the digitalization process makes it paramount to ensure that strategic plans, targeted outcomes and potential risks are understood by EBMO governing boards and committees.
2. **Clarity of destination and measurement** – The end goal is to provide better services and representation for members. This creates a clear 'anchor' as organizations go through digital upgrades and introduce new ways of working. How will the benefits to members and to the operation of the EBMO be measured? The ability to articulate this from the outset is a must.
3. **Clarity on the current situation** – Being clear on where you want to get to requires clarity on where you are now! For EBMOs this means having a clear understanding of how members feel about current levels of service, what they would like to see the EBMO do more of, do less of, do differently. One common theme is the need to understand how the EBMO can make it easier for members and partners to access services and engage with the EBMO. So, an important and recurrent priority is to engage with members from the outset – via surveys as well as targeted conversations to build qualitative insight.
4. **Ensuring collective buy-in** – As well as obtaining board-level endorsement, EBMOs have ensured buy-in from the wider membership and – crucially – from EBMO staff. Any digital evolution will have implications for internal skills-needs and tasks; for changes to work, it is crucial for staff and members to understand why they are being made and what difference they will make.
5. **Delivering the plan** – The planning phase includes having the necessary internal and external conversations and will typically include clear staging posts along the way, clear key performance indicators (KPIs), realistic timescales and budgets, contingency plans and risk management procedures.
6. **Staying in step with the membership base** – Member associations and companies may not always have the infrastructure to make the most of any new digital offering put forward by the EBMO. How can business organizations ensure that they remain in step with the membership base? The way forward here is to ensure that progress is steady but not frenetic and to regularly check in with members (and to not scare members by moving too fast!).
7. **Measuring progress** – Extensively digitalizing internal operations will support continuous measurement and monitoring of activities. It will also help EBMOs to make data-driven decisions on a more systematic basis. Robust data collection and analysis, learning from the results, and quickly innovating at scale can make a huge difference to the long-term sustainability of the EBMO and accelerate change in terms of overall mindset and organizational culture.
8. **Driving continuous improvement** – Digital technologies offer novel possibilities for generating value in the form of new products, services, solutions, and ways of working. But making the most of these possibilities means regular adjustments to skills, re-allocating resources and making changes to operational delivery. A genuine culture of continuous improvement is more important than ever and is at the heart of EBMOs becoming fully fledged digital organizations.

▶ ANNEXES – ANNEX 2

How can digitalization boost advocacy and voice? Six areas of opportunity for EBMOs

Advocacy and lobbying remain core elements of any EBMO's work and offering. How can the increased use of digital tools and channels enhance the ability of representative business organizations to influence policy and public opinion? Based on the insight and feedback from EBMOs across the globe, here are six areas of opportunity:

1. **Enhancing data collection and evidence base** – Creating a strong evidence base to support policy calls to action and influence regulatory change has been a common theme for many years. The ability to use digital tools to better capture the insights of business leaders and reflect their views is just one manifestation of how digitalization is supporting advocacy activities. The work of EBMOs at the very start of the COVID19 crisis provided a great example of this, with feedback from businesses collated in a matter of days and used to inform business support measures and other government responses. At the same time, avoiding 'survey fatigue' remains a concern. One outlet is to use online events and webinars to generate live feedback whilst members are already engaged.
2. **Spreading the word and telling good stories** – Digital channels are an opportunity to ramp up data collection and generate robust data; they are also a means of disseminating positive stories that showcase the role of business in society. Again, the pandemic has provided a number of practical examples of this, with the EBMOs identifying and highlighting individual businesses within their membership who have gone the extra mile to help the local community and to work with national and regional government to make a positive impact during the crisis. As part of this, organizations are increasingly making effective use of video as a means of making an emotional impact and of reaching out to a larger audience via social media channels.
3. **Direct engagement with policy makers and other influencers** – Digital channels are providing an additional means of engaging directly with political figures, journalists and other influencers. Not all stakeholders and target policy makers will be active on social media, but it is increasingly recognized as an intrinsic part of any communication strategy. Journalists in particular increasingly use Twitter and other tools to monitor responses to government announcements and to identify points of view that are worth covering.
4. **Bringing members closer to the policy arena** – Digitalization is creating new ways of facilitating direct dialogue between members and policy makers. Digital channels were used at the height of the COVID19 crisis to ensure that members could relay their concerns and immediate priorities to government officials; this in turn helped to shape support packages for businesses across different sectors. On a purely practical level, harnessing digital channels facilitates the engagement process, as it is easier to find diary time for online gatherings where travel time and meeting space do not come into play.
5. **Collating insight and intelligence** – In the same way that CRM systems are used to log and collate regularly updated information on members of the EBMO, they can also be used to ensure that contact details, logs of past conversations, and records of all interventions are kept and are regularly updated. There will often be multiple contacts within different government departments as well as within other stakeholders; ensuring that these records are up to date ensures that campaigning activities and contact strategies are joined up. Over time, this could be built on to generate data on common responses from different government departments and outcomes resulting from different types of advocacy approaches. This, in turn, can support ongoing work to measure the impact and effectiveness of advocacy and campaigning activities.

6. **Taking a lead on creating a sustainable digital economy** – The digital revolution provides new tools and a new 'form' for EBMOs to ramp up advocacy and campaigning activities. It also provides substance for future campaigning and positioning initiatives. Nurturing a sustainable digital economy that provides opportunities for all and promotes business growth and job creation is a priority in most countries. EBMOs are seizing the opportunity to play a leadership role here as well as in related areas such as the future of work, pre-empting new skills needs and the ethical adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation.

▶ ANNEXES – ANNEX 3

Practical tips on working with advisory boards to ensure collective buy-in

One of the most important steps for executive leadership teams within EBMOs is to ensure that the board is fully engaged and buys into the need for the ongoing digital evolution of services and procedures (especially as this will often involve significant investment). Based on the feedback from EBMOs across the globe, here are eight practical tips for ensuring alignment and collective buy-in.

1. **Build context** – Clearly explaining the need for digital evolution and investment is one immediate priority. EBMOs have used the feedback from the wider membership to make the case and to clearly illustrate how the investment will result in tangible benefits for members and how this will ensure the organization's sustainability over time. Some EBMOs have also built context by referencing examples of how other organizations are harnessing enhanced digital infrastructure and underlining the need to 'not be left behind'.
2. **Creating an evidence base** – To complement the general context setting, EBMOs have used survey data from members to support the need for change and investment. Using external research on how the wider business community is investing in digital tools and new delivery mechanisms provides a further means for creating a strong evidence base that will usually form part of the strategic discussion papers circulated to board members and subsequently discussed at board meetings before the go-ahead is given.
3. **Using external experts** – Harnessing the expertise and knowledge of digital experts can play a key role in making the case to the EBMO board and in helping to address specific concerns. The key here is to ensure that the digital experts who are invited to engage directly with the board are credible and are properly briefed. In particular, it is essential to demonstrate that the specific needs of a membership organization are understood and that the technical experts are not simply looking to promote an off-the-shelf digital solution that is potentially ill-adapted to the specific needs of an EBMO.
4. **Creating an inner working group** – Some EBMOs have implemented a methodology and process involving the creation of small working groups of selected (or self-selected) board members with a specific interest and knowledge of a priority issue (such as digitalization). This working group can take a lead and help to ensure that the rest of the board is brought up to speed and supports the proposed way forward. Essentially the aim here is to accelerate change through peer-to-peer exchanges rather than the permanent secretariat having to make the case on their own to the non-executive board.
5. **Establishing clear milestones and measurement** – One way to reassure the board is to present a credible strategic plan with clear milestones that the board can use to regularly take stock of progress and ensure that things are going in the right direction. There is always a risk of 'losing control' (in terms of timing and budget) of any large-scale technology project – clear milestones and 'check-in' points are an opportunity to maintain clear oversight and control.
6. **Selling and aspirational vision** – Part of making the case can involve arguing that digital investment and organizational change are essential and non-negotiable. There is also a positive hand to be played, which involves creating a vivid and aspirational vision of where the organization can get to thanks to the investments and forward-looking approach. This includes framing the agenda around positive language such as 'innovation', 'being pioneering', 'leading the way' and 'future-proofing'. Tone of voice and a clear framing of the arguments are key to external messages and advocacy; they are also vital to making internal arguments to the EBMO's board!

7. **Managing expectations** – There are very few examples of technology enhancement projects that have come in on time and on budget. Showing that all the necessary thinking and planning has been done and providing regular reminders of how important and beneficial the end outcome will be are crucial elements. At the same time there is always a need to flag potential challenges and problems and to manage expectations accordingly. The feedback from EBMOs is that most boards will be understanding as long as the right contingency plans are in place (see below) and that the senior executive team within the EBMO has been open and transparent with the board.
8. **Risk management and contingency planning** – A further way of reassuring the board and ensuring collective buy-in is to demonstrate that potential risks have been identified and that credible contingency plans have been put in place to manage these risks if and when they occur. A credible section on risk management will be a vital element of any strategic discussion paper on digital investment. This will also involve updating the EBMO's existing risk register with a specific section covering any new digital project.

▶ REFERENCES

Details of the ILO's programme on Data as a Strategic Asset (DaaSA) can be accessed here:

https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_757375/lang--en/index.htm

The survey of EBMOs conducted by ACT/EMP and IOE in May-June 2020 can be accessed at:

https://www.ilo.org/ACT/EMP/news/WCMS_749490/lang--en/index.htm

The manual for EBMOs on Membership Strategies and Policies was developed by Jeanne Schmitt, Paolo Salvai, Arnout de Koster in 2021. It can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.itcilo.org/resources/membership-strategies-and-policies-manual-ebmos>

Examples of specific themes covered by the GICAM Digital Economy Commission can be accessed at the following link: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202105280166.html>

The 'World Views on the World of Work' podcast series hosted by the World Employment Confederation:

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1417132>

Information on the business support projects taken forward in Uzbekistan can be accessed here:

<https://chamber.uz/ru/news/6164>

Details on the ILO's rapid assessment work on the impact of COVID19 on enterprises in the West Balkans can be accessed here: https://www.ilo.org/budapest/whats-new/WCMS_754190/lang--en/index.htm

Information on the ANDI initiative in Columbia to support local communities during the COVID19 crisis can be accessed here: <http://www.andi.com.co/Home/Evento/47-unidos-somos-mas-pais>

Background on the SIEmpre initiative in Chile can be accessed at the following link:

<https://siempreporchile.cl>

The full McKinsey 2020 survey on technology and digital trends can be accessed here:

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-COVID19-has-pushed-companies-over-the-technology-tipping-point-and-transformed-business-forever>

The ITCILO's analysis of the role of inclusive AI for training is at: <https://www.itcilo.org/stories/power-inclusive-artificial-intelligence-training#toc-tackling-bias-and-promoting-equality-in-ai>

Information on the ITCILO's Malkia initiative on promoting women's empowerment can be accessed here: <https://www.itcilo.org/projects/promoting-womens-empowerment-malkia>

The full McKinsey Seven Key Lessons on Technology Report can be accessed here: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/seven-lessons-on-how-technology-transformations-can-deliver-values>

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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