



ARE YOU RECESSION READY?

How to do more with less





Introduction

It says something about the last few years that a recession, in some ways, feels like a welcome change in the news headlines. But, of course, a recession is no laughing matter for any business, large or small. On top of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine has slowed economic recovery, disrupted global supply chains, and drastically increased the cost of living.

The World Bank is warning that a recession is on the horizon, and that means organisations need to start considering how they will prepare for that eventuality – now.

The last major recession of 2008 holds lessons for today’s leaders, but the world we live in is vastly different compared to 2008. Some of those differences are external to organisations, such as interest rates (which are vastly higher and rising) than in 2008.

But more importantly, the way financial organisations run their operations is in some places unrecognisable:

- Many processes have been automated that were once run by humans – a transition massively sped up by the pandemic.
- Employees have vastly different expectations from their work, including hybrid, remote, and other flexible working arrangements.
- Customers expect faster, more personalised services than in 2008, and are quite prepared to take their business elsewhere if they don’t get that service.

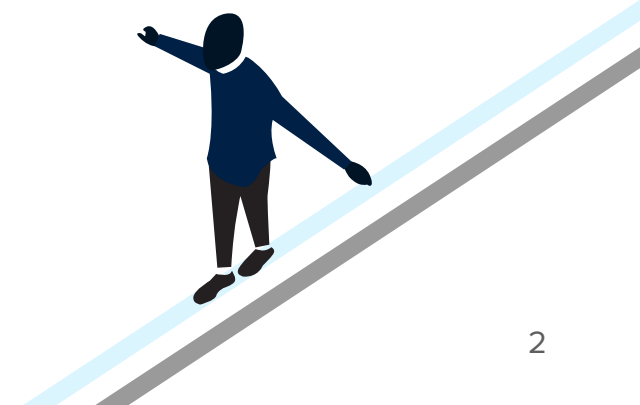
These factors mean that dusting off your 2008 response plan for a rinse-and-repeat – including outsourcing, redundancies, and headcount freezes – will very likely fail.

What’s needed to ensure success is a deep understanding of your operation. Do you have any areas that could be leaner, or any that are already under too much pressure? How do different areas vary? This insight helps you consider the consequences of various actions and create a plan that gets you through the coming storm.

We’ve put together this report to help you on your journey to recession-readiness. The first half of the paper features original research that explores how prepared organisations are for a recession, allowing you to benchmark your own operations with those of your peers both at home and abroad.

In the second half, you’ll find commentary from a host of industry experts from Australia, the UK and North America who all offer their take on what you need to do to get recession-ready. This section includes practical tips about how you can get started on that journey.

We hope you find the information useful in your quest for riding the recession.





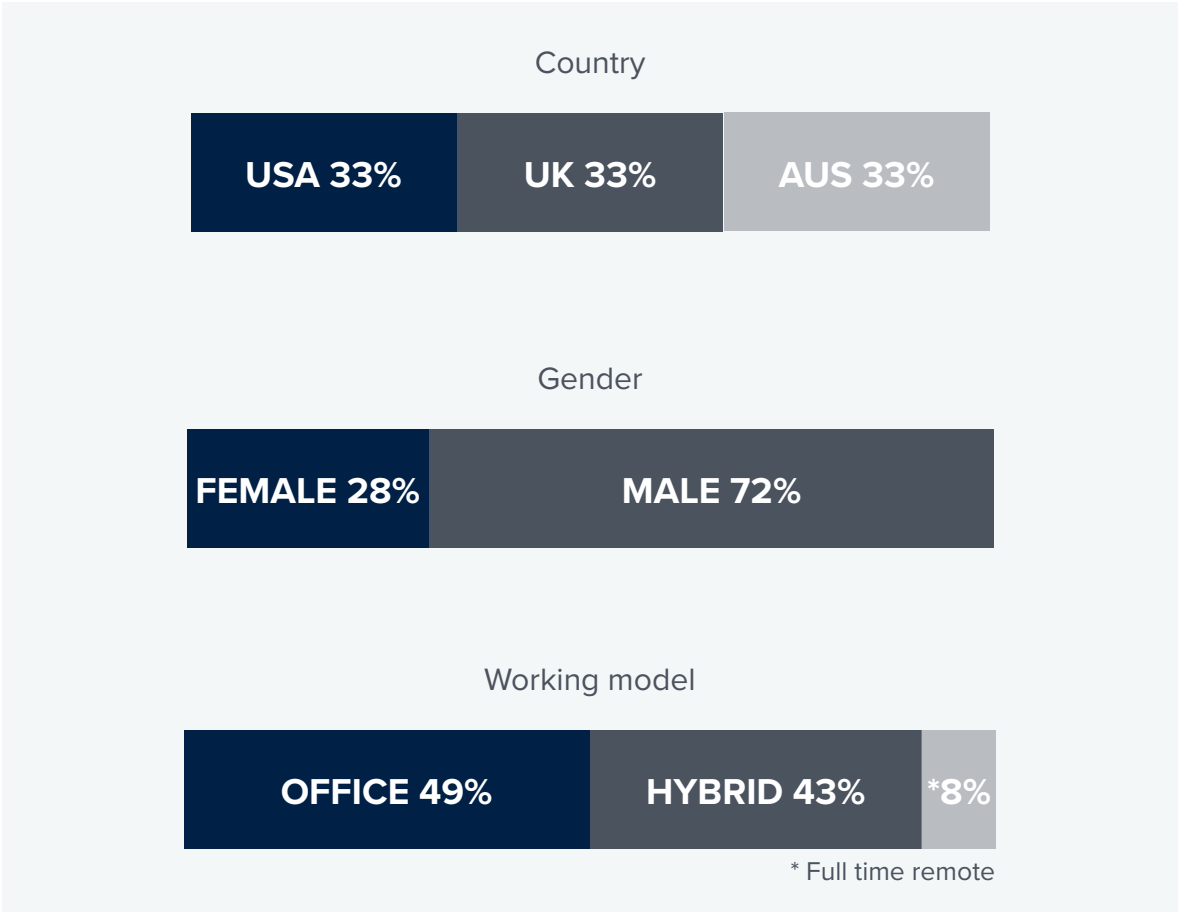
Our research methodology

Our research is based on data gathered by our research partner Censuswide, investigating attitudes towards a recession and its impact on back-office operations among employees in banks and the financial sector.

We spoke to 1000 individuals, across a range of demographics, geographies, and seniorities, and with a variety of different working models, asking them questions on topics including:

- Whether a recession is likely to happen
- Their organisation’s preparations for a recession
- The likely impacts of a recession on their operations, people, and customer experience

We also asked individuals to indicate their agreement with various statements, to identify some key themes across respondents and companies about the impacts of recession on their operations.





Section 1: The Research

Recession looms, options are being explored, but preparations are slow to begin

Our survey data revealed a range of interesting insights about how people feel their organisations are preparing for a recession and what the likely impacts of those preparations are.

There were three main conclusions from the data, which we'll dive into in a little more detail in each subsection:

1. Recession is likely – but many organisations are behind in their preparations
2. Organisations are considering all the usual responses – even when those will bring challenges
3. Organisations will need to do more with what they have – but lack the insights to do so effectively

Throughout this report, unless otherwise stated, the survey data that appears is specific to Australia.

Recession is likely, but 95% of organisations are yet to begin preparations.

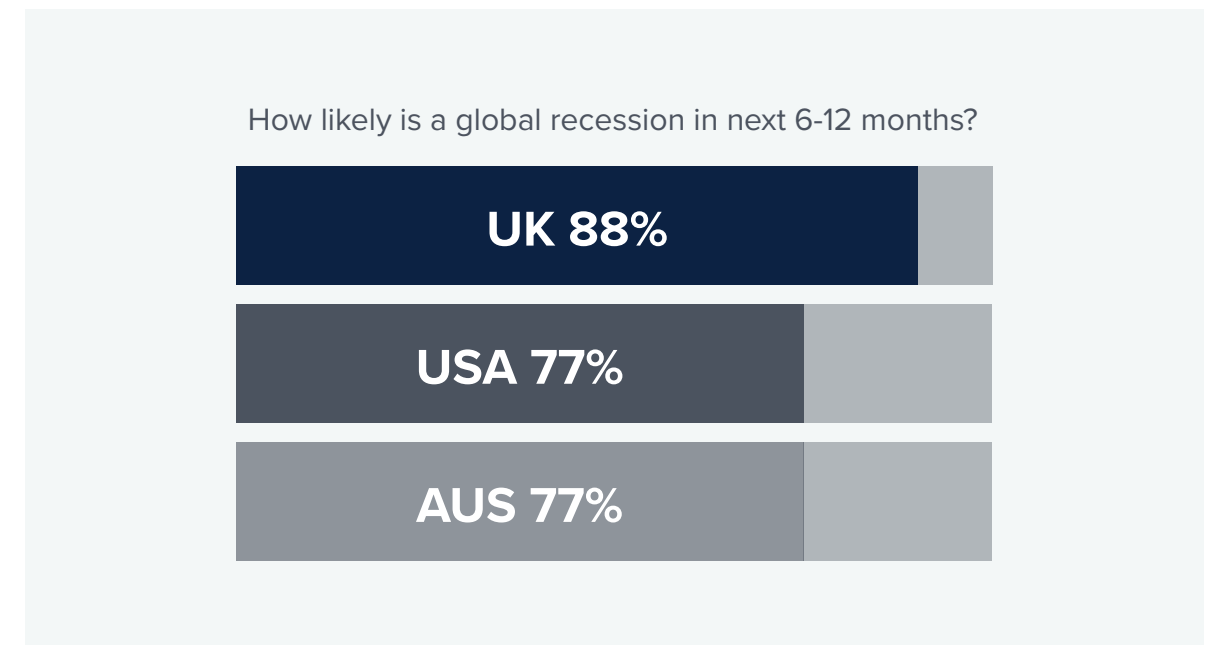
77% of Australian respondents believe that a recession is likely in the next 12 months, the same as the USA, but less than the the UK (88%).

This was largely the same across all organisation sizes and seniorities, although it is interesting to note that respondents who worked in a fully remote workplace were

significantly less likely to believe a recession is likely than those in a fully office-based workplace, or a hybrid workplace.

This makes it rather surprising that, according to our data, only 5% of respondents' organisations have already started preparing for a recession – making Australian organisations the least prepared compared to their US and UK counterparts.

38% of respondents said they anticipated preparations would begin in the next 2-6 months – and although that might feel soon, the volatility of the global economy means that every day's delay in beginning those preparations comes at a cost.



Organisations are considering all the usual responses, even when those will bring challenges

In this area it's especially interesting to differentiate between the responses of junior and senior respondents, as each brings a different perspective to the table that is of value.

Encouragingly, the most common response our senior respondents identified was increasing their use of automation and digital transformation. Juniors, by contrast, felt that redundancies were equally as likely as increasing automation and digital transformation. This might indicate the worries of junior staff, which seniors could ease with some communications outlining their response plan to a recession.

It is also very interesting to consider the differences between those who have been through a recession versus those who haven't. Recession veterans were more likely to consider increased use of automation and digital transformation, while first-timers seemed to favour outsourcing and absorbing increasing workload with fixed staffing levels. That difference is no doubt based on experience; and perhaps a belief from those recession veterans that the cost savings associated with outsourcing and increasing everyone's workloads aren't worth the risks those two responses pose to productivity, employee engagement, and the customer experience.

However, nearly half of respondents agreed that tech spending was where the biggest cuts would be made in the event of a recession. Obviously, cost cutting is almost a certainty during a recession, meaning that leaders who plan on digital transformation projects may struggle unless they can find a way to save budget for that activity.

There was a marked difference of opinion between junior and senior respondents on this question. Senior respondents ranked cutting existing people above tech spending as the place where the biggest cuts would be made, while junior respondents ranked that behind tech investment and hiring freezes. This disconnect will need to be addressed by senior leaders well before any significant changes are made, in order to limit the damage to employee morale and productivity, caused by unexpected redundancies.

Another key finding was that respondents felt that their organisations weren't prioritising retraining or cross-training of operational staff to increase skill sets and versatility, with this

priority ranking last. Yet 59% of our respondents agreed that cross-skilling and upskilling of team members will be required to balance the workload during a recession. It seems that there's a disconnect between what people think their organisations will do compared with what their organisation needs.

Most of our respondents believe that the biggest negative consequence of recession is an increase in outsourcing. The next most anticipated negative impacts were mandatory redundancy and lower employee morale. Clearly, people are expecting rough seas ahead, with layoffs and their consequences.

Crucially, organisations that have already started preparing for a recession ranked mandatory redundancies last in terms of negative impact. This heavily implies that early preparations give organisations opportunities to avoid redundancies; allowing them to protect their operational capacity and maintain employee morale, whilst keeping operations running smoothly even as recession starts to bite.

59% of respondents agree that retraining or cross-training staff will be required to balance workloads.

Organisations will need to do more with what they have, but lack the tools to do so effectively

59% of respondents agreed that there will be significant pressure on operations teams to do more with what they have, rising to 65% for hybrid workers. Given that we also know layoffs are widely expected, we can assume that in reality they will need to do more with *less*.

This makes it especially concerning that 22% of organisations said that they did not feel equipped to deliver against their organisational objectives in the event of a global recession. Worryingly, senior respondents were more likely to feel unprepared, and fully remote workers felt the least prepared of the different working models. If your organisation is fully remote, it's worth considering how equipped you feel to deliver against organisational objectives in a recession, and the reasons behind your answer.

When asked whether they had the information needed to improve productivity and efficiency, 37% of our respondents either didn't, or weren't sure if they did. That number rose to 57% for respondents who haven't been through a recession before. We also found that the further away an organisation's preparations for a recession, the more confident they were that they had the information needed to make decisions to improve productivity and efficiency – possibly indicating that organisations who haven't yet begun preparations are too optimistic about the information they have at their disposal.

We asked where those gaps were, and our respondents most often said they lacked visibility into when people work (32%). Behind that, respondents equally ranked a lack of visibility into how individuals spend their time during working hours, an understanding of work completed and spotting opportunities to better balance workload - in short, all the things that are crucial to implement process improvements.

Looking at the data split across different working models, fully office-based workers felt that a lack of opportunities to balance workload between people and teams was their biggest gap, while hybrid workers ranked visibility into how people spend their working time the highest. Remote workers felt strongly that their biggest gap was in individual and team performance metrics such as productivity and utilisation. We recommend considering these insights in relation to your own organisation and its working model.

21%

of respondents don't have the information they need to improve productivity and efficiency

32%

of respondents can't see when people are working

28%

of respondents don't have visibility of all completed work across applications

We also asked our respondents to rate their agreement with various statements related to the effects of the recession on their organisation. Some highlights include:

- **62%** of respondents believe they have spare capacity in their organisation, but don't know where, or how to access it. *This goes up to 66% for fully office-based workers.*
- **59%** of respondents agreed that their organisation lacks the agility to cope with unusual workload variations. *This went down to 46% for remote workers.*
- **64%** of respondents agreed they needed better forecasting and planning during a recession. *Junior respondents were more likely to agree with this than senior respondents.*
- **60%** of respondents agreed that automation can offset the loss of team members if needed. *Remote workers were markedly less likely to agree with this (46%).*
- **59%** of respondents agreed that they would need to look at alternative scheduling such as four-day weeks to meet employee expectations and operational demands. *Hybrid workers were most likely to agree with this (60%), while remote workers least likely (46%) – though this may be due to the inherent flexibility of remote working.*

For all these questions, it's worth highlighting that between 20% and 25% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement – implying that they didn't know the impact something would have on their operations.

The fact that organisations lack visibility and information about their operations makes these neutral responses as much a cause for concern, if not more of a concern, than those who knew where they stood. After all, if you know you lack visibility into operations, you can take steps to fix that. If you don't know, you risk paralysis that could ultimately be devastating for your operations.

So, if you don't know your own position on these questions, we recommend you urgently find out what the state of play is in your organisation so you can plan an appropriate response.

Clearly our research shows that the need to take action, start planning and mitigating for recession is urgent.

Many organisations lack critical visibility across the workforce. They struggle to manage and utilise capacity effectively, which consequently hinders their ability to effectively do more with less, yet still make gains.





Section 2: The Experts

Practical tips to respond to the challenges of a recession

Now that we understand the challenges organisations are finding themselves in, it's time to focus on how to move forward; to go from unprepared to prepared, from limited visibility to total visibility into your operations.

To help us in that endeavour, we've gathered insights and tips from experts across the banking and finance industry from around the globe.

We interviewed each of the experts – the vast majority of whom have weathered at least one recession before – and from our discussions with them, we've identified five key areas to work on in your operations.

For each of the following key areas we'll share some practical tips from our experts that you can implement quickly.

1.



**Resilience
And Agility**

2.



**Customer
Experience**

3.



**Employee
Experience**

4.



**High
Performers**

5.



**Tech
Investment**

Meet our Experts

All our experts have shared their personal experiences and opinions. They are not speaking on behalf of their organisations.



Kevin Butt
United Kingdom

Kevin has held senior leadership roles in global operations for RBS, NatWest and Brewin Dolphin.



John Henderson
United Kingdom

John has more than 25 years in the banking sector, working for RBS, Bank of Scotland, Halifax, and Sainsbury's Bank.



Campbell J Morrison
Australia

Campbell has a wealth of executive and operational experience gain in APAC for NAB and ANZ.



Jane Pretty
Australia

Jane has over 17 years' operations experience at National Australia Bank. Jane now works for ActiveOps.



Tony O'Donnell
United Kingdom

Tony has 27 years of experience in Europe and Asia holding leadership roles at UBS, Lehman Brothers, Cognizant, Ford and Xerox.



Rosalie Spies
Australia

Rosalie has held several senior operations roles in South Africa for ABSA before joining ActiveOps in Melbourne.



Martin Hogg
Australia

Martin has been specialising in resource utilisation for over 10 years for companies such as NAB and ANZ.



Prof. Danny Samson
Australia

Professor Samson has been at the forefront of Melbourne Business School and has consulted for NAB at Group CEO level for a decade on business strategy.



Jude Pinto
United States

Jude has over 30 years' executive leadership roles at CIBC and the Canadian and Caribbean Financial Services.



Vincent Brennan
UK & Ireland

Vincent has 41 years' banking experience working through senior leadership and transformation teams at the Bank of Ireland.



John Ainsworth
United Kingdom

John has led large operations teams in organisations including Atos, Lloyds Banking Group, RBS, and Citigroup.



Jonathan Astley
United Kingdom

Jonathan has a career spanning more than 30 years in operations for organisations such as RSA, RBS, and PwC.



Kelly Brown
United States

Kelly has over 15 years' experience in health insurance at Elevance Health (formerly known as Anthem).



Key Area One

Review your resilience and agility NOW

Our data has shown that most organisations are lacking visibility into their operations, and that their preparations for a recession haven't begun. Both of those need to change – yesterday if possible.

As organisations are required to do more with less, and as work becomes more unusual in terms of volumes and working patterns, our experts recommend reviewing just how resilient and agile your operations are.

Of course, everyone has taken steps to build those qualities into their operation – but has that operation been tested before?

Can you:

1. Make intra-day decisions and changes to your operation?
2. Account for, and use every possible hour of capacity without burning out your teams?
3. Articulate the behaviours of different departments, and resource them accordingly?

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Our Experts Say



Vincent Brennan

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Don't wait for your boss to approach you, don't wait for the memo from head office; get your activity and planning underway today. But remember that very few recessions come and go in a couple of months, and very few major self-induced transformations go quickly. So while you need to act decisively on some immediate things, you also need to think multi-year when you're planning.



John Ainsworth

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The companies that win through recession are those that continue to invest in their business, specifically in improvement activity. That activity reduces your cost base as well giving performance benefits.



Campbell J Morrison

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Some parts of your business will see drops in demand, others will see spikes. First, you need to understand how each part will behave. Then, you need to investigate how easy it is to transfer resource from areas where demand is dropping to those where demand is spiking. That's how you create agility.



Our Experts Say



Jude Pinto



Do you know that you can meet your SLAs? Do you need to staff up in an area to manage that, can you staff down in other areas to make that happen?



Kevin Butt



Some parts of your operation may see a spike in demand; others may see a drop. You need flexibility in your operations to respond to those variances – but you also need the visibility into your operations to understand where extra resource is needed and where you can get it from.



Vincent Brennan



It's all about trimming the fat but not the muscle. Rework processes that generate excessive customer queries... these are all fat that can be trimmed.



Jude Pinto



Being able to handle exceptions and problems is a vastly important skill. Customers will be worried and upset, with no tolerance for poor service. Handling exceptions well is vital.



Prof. Danny Samson



It's important to balance offensive strategies in the market with defensive. For instance, consider moving from just-in-time supply to just-in-case; consider multiple sourcing of key supply elements; consider onshoring.



John Henderson



Are all projects truly required? Are all meetings necessary and do so many people need to attend them? The more time people spend on core tasks, the more work will be cleared, and the more work can get done.



Tips to build resilience and agility into your operations



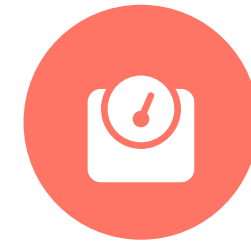
Facilitate a culture of cross-team collaboration

Do managers share their capacity with their colleagues? Do they come together to discuss their plans at all? Instigating this kind of activity in your organisation will make it possible to support overworked teams, clear backlogs, and keep the wheels turning when the unexpected crops up.



Get to a true picture of real-time capacity in your organisation

Accurately analyse the work that teams are doing and look at how they spend their days. Which teams are consistently showing higher non-work time than others? Which teams are hitting their targets and might be able to take on more? Once you know where capacity is, you can start to think about using it. And don't forget – your Robotic Process Automation (RPA) tools may also have spare capacity.



Ruthlessly analyse your workload

A deep understanding of how teams and individuals are spending their time will help you identify projects that can be paused, or stopped altogether. You can also understand how much time managers are spending leading teams vs working on data; anything you can do to reduce the data burden for managers will free them up to lead their teams more effectively.



Key Area Two

Put the customer at the heart of your decision-making

Organisations are expecting their operations to do more with less in a recession.

In this environment, the risk of customers receiving poor service grows massively – which, of course, can lead to loss of business and revenue at the worst time for your organisation.

The challenge goes deeper than customer-facing interactions. Leaders will be reviewing processes and projects to cut costs and weather the storm. Without proper consideration, those decisions could negatively impact the customer experience too.

Whether you're at the coal face dealing with customer-facing work, or making decisions that affect processes, it's absolutely vital that the customer is central to your thought processes.

53%

of respondents agree that if headcount is reduced then quality and/or customer service will be sacrificed.

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Our Experts Say



Vincent Brennan

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The customers you look after through a crisis will stay with you for a lifetime.

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Our Experts Say



Jude Pinto

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Focusing purely on operational concerns, worrying about job losses, and so forth, increases the risk that you become irrelevant to your customers.



Jonathan Astley

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It's vital that you know what's happening with your customers so you can treat them with respect. And when you review your processes, you need to be thinking 'will this enable us to treat our customers in the way they want to be treated?'



Vincent Brennan

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Whatever you can do to improve the speed of turnaround for customers or eliminate errors in your work will help. Even in a recession, it's possible to optimise things for the customer.



John Ainsworth

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It's vital to understand your customers' stresses during a recession. They are likely worrying about their finances, their job security, and all the knock-on worries those bring around health, happiness and family. As a business, a focus on excellent customer service and empathy will pay dividends.



Martin Hogg

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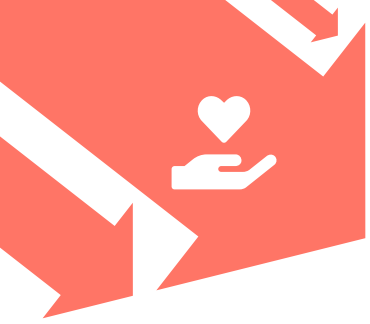
For the benefit of the customer, managers need to prioritise and deprioritise processes in a way that will get the work done in the way the customer needs it to get done.



Jude Pinto

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What is happening in your customer base? That information gathering piece is as important for the executive team and strategy guys as it is for the ops team. If decisions are driven by an understanding and empathy with the customer, then you can equip leaders with the reason why one thing is less important, another is more important, and so on.

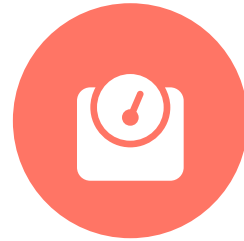


Tips to put the customer at the heart of your operations



Nominate a customer champion at C-level

There will be multiple discussions about how to respond to a recession, involving every arm of the business. An individual at a senior level (ideally with a working group underneath them) to champion the customer in those discussions will help ensure balance.



Address the workload challenge

Finding a way to do more with less that doesn't burn out employees is vital to maintaining customer service. Look for additional capacity and prioritise cross-training and reskilling of employees to remove skills-based bottlenecks and make it easier for teams to borrow and lend resource.



Review customer communications

Are your phone scripts, automated emails, and letters sensitive to what people are going through? A bland script that doesn't acknowledge your customers' fears and stresses will only make things worse for your people. Also consider how you can enable customers to talk to a human more easily, given that they may be more likely to call through with complex questions your automated systems can't handle.



Key Area Three

Engage employees to maintain productivity and focus

We all know what a challenge employee engagement is during a recession – not just if you’re considering redundancies, but as work gets harder, customers get more volatile, and home pressures get more intense for employees.

It’s vital that leaders understand that engagement needs to happen at every level. It’s not just about keeping team members engaged in their work; team leaders and middle managers also need to feel engaged in their task of leading teams.

Can you:

1. Explain to your direct reports why you’re making certain changes?
2. Identify employees who might be struggling with burnout?
3. Create an objective picture of performance to celebrate high performance and support low performers to improve?

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Our Experts Say



Tony O'Donnell

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Stay true to yourself. As a leader, sometimes focusing on your people is a way of focusing on the positive aspects of a turbulent time rather than just the negative aspects.



Our Experts Say



Rosalie Spies



Leading a team is really difficult when people are vulnerable and anxious. Forcing overtime in order to manage high volumes really distresses staff members and employees through the process and increases absenteeism.



Kevin Butt



When you're dealing with your teams on the floor, make sure that you're visible, calm, and listening.



Kelly Brown



Create training programmes that develop the skills needed to optimise operations, such as Lean Six Sigma, and data analysis and visualisation. Those skills will benefit the company, and keep employees engaged.



Kelly Brown



Offer flexible hours and work-from-home options wherever you can – but set clear goals when you do, so that people can work with a sense of purpose.



Vincent Brennan



I've looked at teams and said to them, 'I have no plan that's not the culmination of the aggregation of each of your individual team plans.' Teams always wonder: is there a bigger plan we don't know about? So if you can not just share plans with them, but point them back to the things in the plan that were their ideas in the first place, that can be really reassuring at a time of recession and time of crisis.



Prof. Danny Samson



The challenging environment around you is going to change the goals you have for your department. A consultative approach with your workforce as you communicate those changes will help you keep everyone on board and working towards those goals.

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Our Experts Say



Campbell J Morrison

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If you can cross-skill in a practical way that's prioritised in line with what the business needs, you help the business pivot faster to respond to the unexpected, and keep employees engaged with your organisation and invested in their career by giving them growth opportunities.



Jude Pinto

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The challenging environment around you is going to change the goals you have for your department. A consultative approach with your workforce as you communicate those changes will help you keep everyone on board and working towards those goals.



Jonathan Astley

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You need to be respectful of the fact that, just like your customers, your employees are worried about their futures. Free tea and coffee and a metaphorical hug won't do. You need to be honest, open, and real with them – even if the news is bad for them.



Top tips to prepare for a new kind of employee engagement



Get visibility of your workforce data and put it in the hands of your managers

With the right insights, managers can lead teams in a way that keeps people engaged and happy in their work by ensuring they prioritise the right tasks. Leaders can also get a true picture of performance and workload which helps shape their plans.



Take time to understand the narrative in your data

Your workforce data is a rich source of insights that can help guide your decision-making. That data can also help you explain and validate your decisions when explaining them to your reports and their teams, so they don't feel blindsided or lost amidst all the changes that are going on.



Prioritise health and wellbeing

Look after your employees and they'll look after the customers has never been truer than now. Revisit your employee assistance programmes and in particular the mental health support available to your people. Also consider how you can use workforce data to identify the signs that an employee may be struggling.



Key Area Four

Hang on to your high performers

All your employees are important to your organisation.

But your high performers need to be handled in a different way to your main cohort of employees, for a number of reasons:

1. If treated right, they can achieve more than other employees can, driving your business forwards
2. Their working habits may well be different from other employees, requiring different management tactics
3. They are a bigger flight risk if they become disengaged due to their employability – and the impact of their departure on your organisation will be greater

To effectively look after your high performers, can you:

- Identify top performers in your operation?
- Move work around in your organisation to stretch high performers without burning them out?
- Identify signs that someone is overworking and is at risk of burnout?

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Our Experts Say



Jude Pinto

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Invest in your own leadership capabilities. Downturns are an opportunity to build long-term agility and resilience in a whole new generation of leaders. Handled right, it can be a great experience for them.



Our Experts Say



Vincent Brennan



My first step was always to bring in the leaders, share the challenge with them, explain the 'why' of what we need to do, and encourage them to figure out what we need to do or at least make them a large part of doing it.



John Ainsworth



There's always a skill shortage, an employee shortage, and many people looking to hire your key talent. So how do you make sure that you keep them not necessarily through money, but through opportunities and development and keeping them within your organisation?



John Henderson



The merry-go-round of team leader churn has already started across financial services and it is driving salaries up. Team leaders need empowerment, accountability, and responsibility to drive performance. They don't want to be collating data and reporting tomorrow what they did yesterday. They need to be dynamic and stimulated to be able to get the best out of their teams.



Jane Pretty



If work dries up, performance engagement suffers. To address that, we gave our people opportunities to go and explore items that they had in their individual development plans in other areas of the business.



Jane Pretty



Leading can feel like on the outside, you're in control, but under the water, you're paddling at 1000 miles an hour. You can't sustain that. Create opportunities with your peers, away from your teams, where you can share how you're feeling, and share your experiences – someone might be doing something that will help you, and vice versa.



Top tips for looking after high performers



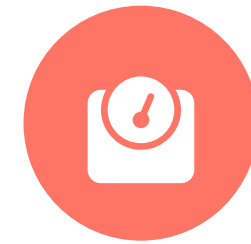
Drill down to individual performance

If you don't know who your high performers are, you can't look after them. Your managers need to be able to see performance at an individual level, to get a clear picture of who they need to focus their attention on, if they have to choose.



Take data aggregation away from managers

Those same tools that show you your high performers should also help managers and team leaders spend less time sifting through data, giving them a chance to shine and showing you who has potential to go further in the business.



Take a data-driven approach to workload

If managers have the right tools in their hands, they can ensure that everyone is kept engaged and spot the signs of burnout. This will protect high performers who might be likely to work more hours and overstretch themselves, but will benefit the entire workforce, too.



Key Area Five

Tech investment is crucial if you want to come out ahead

Your organisation will no doubt look to cut costs during a recession, so it may feel like getting any investment approved will be impossible.

However, investing in technology that makes your operations more efficient and effective will unlock savings that mean your investment pays for itself many times over.

Given the challenges our paper has highlighted around visibility into people's work, capacity, and the ability to forecast; technology that can deliver on these elements would go a long way to helping an organisation become recession-ready.

This sort of technology frees up operations leaders from having to manually aggregate and analyse data; giving them more time to lead, whilst providing team members with insights into their team's performance, that help drive better results and gain context for organisation-level decisions.

When considering if you need additional technology support in your operation, ask yourself whether you can:

1. Take productivity data from multiple sources and view it in one place?
2. Compare data from different sources using common measures?
3. See productivity data in real-time, and compare it with historical data?

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Our Experts Say



John Ainsworth

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Invest in technology that identifies opportunities for improvement, and that makes things more transparent so you can manage the performance and product cycles through technology.

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Our Experts Say



Jude Pinto

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To meet shifting, client-driven demands, you've got to have great tools that help you decide where to staff up or staff down in order to meet this type of SLA, this type of client turnaround time, and so on.



Martin Hogg

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It's critical to invest in forecasting technology. The more certainty you can deliver the business the better. If you can be making decisions a week, month, or quarter before time, you'll be much better able to deliver.



Campbell J Morrison

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Digitising work that's either customer-facing or involves time-consuming manual steps can help build resilience to volume changes.



Vincent Brennan

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Some of the early wins in your operations will create investment capacity, so you can say listen, if we can retain X amount of it for technology, we can sustain and in fact drive efficiencies further out over the period. That's kind of like a Chief Financial Officer's dream.



Tips to get started investing in technology during a recession



Urgently review your business' approach to tech investment

44% of respondents expect the biggest cuts in their organisation to come in tech spending. Leaders need to do all they can to clear this path so that if the right investments can be found that deliver savings, they can be pursued.



Carefully consider what kind of technology to invest in

RPA is one of the most commonly-sought tech investments financial firms make – but it may not be appropriate in every situation. The key here is understanding where your biggest inefficiencies and blockers are in your organisation. Is it about automating work, or empowering people to make better decisions?



Sweat your technology assets

Make more of the technology you already have or plan to onboard. Utilise your tech stack fully to improve visibility and performance, consolidate duplicate tech and train employees to maximise the value they can extract from the technology and data.



Conclusion

If you were to only take away one thing from this paper, it's that your organisation's recession planning needs to begin today. Our survey data, combined with the opinions and experiences of experts, shows that organisations are heading towards a potential disaster.

If recession bites, your organisation will likely find itself unable to respond without severely damaging the customer experience, the employee experience, and its operational capabilities. As a result, your customers will vote with their feet and leave, and employees who you don't lose to redundancy may leave rather than struggle with low morale and overwork. Ultimately, these factors will cost you revenue and profit. The sooner you start planning, the better chance you have of avoiding this fate.

For many, this will no doubt feel like a tall order. That's why investing in the right technology, our final piece of advice from our experts, is so essential. There are solutions out there that can do much of the heavy lifting for you:

- If you know how your people spend their time, you can get control over capacity.
- If you know how long work takes to get done, you can start to find efficiencies and understand the impact of prioritising various types of work over others.
- This information, aggregated and made available to planning teams, helps you forecast work more accurately, and helps managers support employees who are struggling emotionally or mentally during this challenging time.

All these things combined give your operation agility, helping you respond to emergencies and rapidly changing work volumes, and resilience to keep things moving as a recession really starts to bite.

Combined with a constant consideration of the customer when making decisions you can roll out strategies that keep customers happy, keep employees engaged, and keep the wheels of your business turning.

Our research also makes it clear that those preparations should focus on boosting visibility within your operation. You need to know as much as possible about how work gets done, how long it takes, and how your employees spend their time. That information builds the foundation for everything else that follows:

- Gathering productivity data from disparate systems and surfacing it to managers.
- Analysing that data to help with automated forecasting and weekly planning.
- Making those analyses and trend data available to senior leaders to aid their decision-making.

Crucial to all of this is the ability to perform these tasks in real-time. In this recession, circumstances will change rapidly – both in terms of the work required and the resource available to do it. Responding to emergencies, even using yesterday's productivity data, could leave you making the wrong choices.

If you can find a partner to help you understand your workforce and give your team the tools to manage in an agile and data-led manner, then you'll already be a long way up the ladder of preparing.

Armed with those insights, you can act with confidence whatever comes your way; ensuring that your organisation can continue to deliver great service for customers, retain top talent and look after employees - ultimately coming out the other side of recession in a position to thrive.

■ About Us

We help operations teams do more with what they have. Operations teams in banks, insurance and healthcare businesses are constantly under pressure to reduce costs, drive up efficiency, all while trying to maintain a great customer experience.

This is easier said than done. Many have invested in all sorts of technology and process principles to help drive efficiency, but still find themselves struggling to meet SLAs and operational targets.

That's where we come in – through our software and approach we help operations teams find capacity and enable them to use it much better. The result - our clients typically see customer turnaround times increase significantly, including double-digit improvements in productivity with work in progress materially down. They can also leverage the capacity created to invest in non-core activity, as well as reduce levels of new recruitment.

Ultimately, our clients talk about how they are now in control of workload, rather than feeling reactive to it. That's our aim and purpose.



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