



Telstra  
Purple

# UniSuper

Adopting new ways of working to support members in the midst of a crisis





Many companies that had undertaken digital transformations in recent years thanked their stars they had made the move ahead of the pandemic. For one industry super fund the investment in a cloud strategy significantly paid off when its offices across Australia were forced to close and people need to work remotely.

UniSuper serves over 450,000 members in the higher education sector across Australia. With more than \$80 billion in net funds under management, it's also one of the largest. While it describes its members as the thinkers, creators and investigators who shape tomorrow, its IT leaders admit its own workplace was until recently a very traditional business environment.

“We had the fundamental capabilities to work remotely. However; there were opportunities to improve the employee experience and provide a scalable solution that would allow employees to work remotely.” says Sam Cooper, Head of Platforms and Engineering at UniSuper.

“Prior to COVID if someone was working from home, participating in meetings remotely was a challenge. We needed technology that would enable people to collaborate from anywhere.”

“When I joined in 2017, UniSuper did not have a reliance on collaboration tools as much as other organisations.” says Anna Leibel, Chief Delivery and Information Officer at UniSuper. “With 89% of staff work out of the one building we have the privilege of working in the same physical space. After working in multinationals, it is one of the things I love most about UniSuper. We did not have a business need for a full suite of collaboration tools.”

UniSuper embarked on its cloud migration in 2018. The team chose Microsoft Azure for its new cloud operating environment and Telstra Calling for Microsoft Office 365 for its new communications environment. Fortunately, the IT team had just completed its roll out when the coronavirus hit, and everyone had to switch to working from home.

The investment and decision to adopt cloud technologies proved its value to the organisation in a way that might have been harder to demonstrate under ordinary circumstances.

“This kind of transformation work is like doing a house renovation,” says Leibel. “It’s the plumbing and wiring. The stuff people can’t see but is a requisite for delivering a service to meet a critical business and customer need.”

When the questions started flying in IT’s direction about readiness for remote work, the answer came through action – and it came fast.

“When is the tech going to be ready? When can we start working from home? were the two big questions asked by the Business Continuity team and the executives” recalls Leibel.

“Sam and his team built out a readiness plan and had everything ready to go within a few days. It felt great to provide a scalable solution so quickly to keep the business running – we really demonstrated what value IT could bring to the table.

# Rapid Implementation

Telstra Purple, Telstra's professional and managed services business, helped UniSuper with its roll-out, from both a technical and a change-management perspective. And it ensured the transformation delivered the agility promised, with preparation, piloting and a full implementation. With the technology in place, the coronavirus accelerated adoption of the platform.

“ The transition to Office 365 has been a lot faster as a result of the pandemic,” says Cooper “This has been a catalyst for completely changing the way we work.”

The migration to Microsoft cloud technologies and Telstra Calling for Office 365 immediately delivered efficiency dividends.

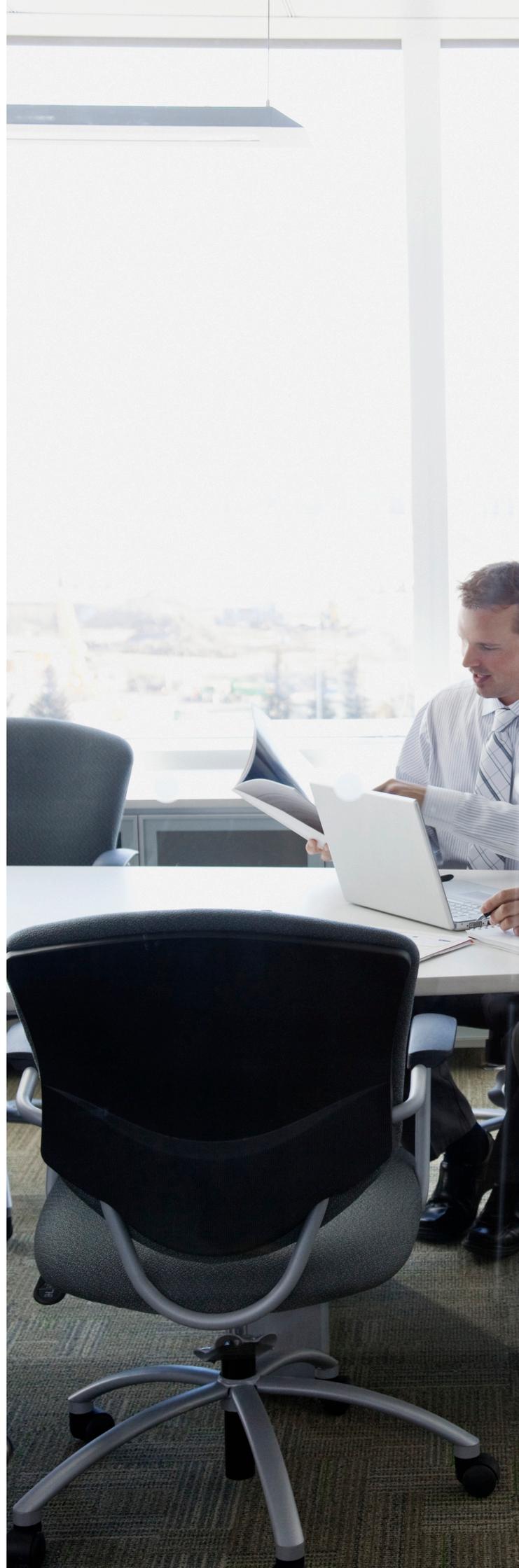
“ We're not buying physical hardware and having to manage all the maintenance activities that comes along with that,” says Cooper.

Leibel says a big advantage of the partnership is that the internal IT team at UniSuper can focus more on giving the fund's members the best possible experience. Telstra Purple has helped reduce day-to-day operational concerns, like traditional phone systems and server storage.

“ The tech is just the tech,” says Leibel. “It's how people use it. It's how the capability and functionality they've got access to can influence the service we provide members and employers; and how productive our employees can be by having access to it.”

It has given UniSuper a readiness to scale and delivers the tools that enable greater collaboration for its employees.

“ We now have a cloud-based telephony system which we can scale quickly. This is combined with our corporate chat and video conferencing tools to provide a platform where a people can truly collaborate” says Cooper. “We can use it from wherever we need to. It's given us far more resilience in our corporate telephony and reduced our costs.”





Cooper found working with Telstra Purple delivered a true partnership during roll-out and developed a solid level of trust.

“ They were so invested in achieving the outcome we needed that it was like they were part of the UniSuper team,” says Cooper, adding that because the Telstra Purple project team regularly worked within the UniSuper offices “It built so much trust in the partnership.”

## Peace of mind

There were added pressures. While grappling with the challenges of introducing the new cloud-based toolset to its workforce, made necessary by the pandemic, UniSuper also had to deal with changes to government rules on members’ gaining early access to funds from superannuation accounts. That meant the company had to be ready to rapidly deliver on such requests from its members.

“ We were mindful of how quickly we could service requests for the early release of funds,” says Leibel. “Working from the perspective of supporting our members during the pandemic really motivated us.”

The UniSuper team worked around the clock to make fast withdrawals possible for their members.

With such critical financial data to protect and manage the decision to adopt a full Microsoft cloud suite was led by the desire for a single vendor system to reduce risk associated with handling data.

“ One end-to-end provider and a single security-management system offers peace of mind,” Cooper says. “Seamless usability was absolutely front of mind for us without any friction for users. We’re here to enable the business, so we always make decisions with that in mind.”

The pressing need for a seamless transformation was also a strong reason to partner with Telstra Purple.

“ We just don’t need to have that IP in-house,” says Leibel. “It makes sense to partner with someone who has extensive experience in this area and we can focus on doing the things that matter to our members.”



## Cultural adaptation

Robust change management was essential for UniSuper to help the organisation cope with such a fast and dramatic shift in working arrangements. Telstra Purple brought its experience in helping other organisations transform their workplaces with advice on best practice, and by offering demos and case studies to guide UniSuper toward its own success.

Workplace champions, who took part in the pilot program, were valuable to fast and successful adoption.

“They [the champions] took it upon themselves to be the person people could come to in their team to ask questions,” says Cooper. “Having champions worked really well in driving adoption and maximising usage of the features available in Office 365. I’d recommend this approach to anyone.”

Making cultural shifts was integral to ensuring a positive employee experience for both the enforced remote-work scenario alongside the new digital working environment.

“The longer you work remotely the more you have to be creative in the ways you engage people and maintain connection,” says Leibel. “Things like going to Teams meetings -- and not really to talk about work. Just talking generally about how people are going.”

UniSuper has also run trivia events to bring more fun into the way people are interacting, and she says the feedback on these informal meetings and conversations have been very good.

UniSuper has seen an immediate uptake of the platform with it overtaking Outlook as the preferred collaboration tool within 6 months of it being rolled out.

Within weeks, the UniSuper team was seeing benefits from using Teams; reporting a reduction in email traffic and improvements to mobility and flexibility, due to the new features of the platform.

After the unexpected disruption in the midst of a digital transformation, Leibel sees the greatest measure of success being that UniSuper never missed a beat through it all while looking after its members and employers – and its own people.

“Not only have we been able to keep the business operating seamlessly during a crisis, but we’ve met all our commitments for the FY20.” says Leibel. “Not just from an IT perspective, but from the whole organisation. That’s something we’ve been really proud of.”

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