



Executive briefing

Where is your utility losing money?

The operational costs that rarely make it onto the board agenda

Introduction

Every utility is trying to do more with less. Demand continues to grow, infrastructure is becoming more complex, experienced engineers are retiring, and customers and regulators expect faster, more reliable service than ever before. None of this is new. What is changing is the scale of these pressures and the speed at which they are converging.

For many organisations, the immediate response has been to recruit more people, increase overtime or rely more heavily on contractors. Those measures can help in the short term, but they also raise an important question. Are utilities genuinely running out of capacity, or are they losing capacity within their existing operations?

The answer is often less obvious than it first appears. A technician who spends an extra hour travelling between jobs, a repeat visit because the wrong parts or skills were assigned, or a planner manually reorganising schedules after an emergency call-out may seem like isolated operational issues. In reality, these small inefficiencies accumulate across hundreds of engineers and thousands of jobs, quietly increasing costs while reducing the amount of productive work that can be completed.

Research highlighted in the IFS guide to field workforce management suggests that much of the challenge facing utilities is not simply about workforce numbers. It is also about how effectively that workforce is planned, deployed and supported. Operational friction, including unnecessary travel, manual coordination, repeat visits and administrative effort, consumes valuable time that could otherwise be spent maintaining assets and serving customers.

Understanding where that capacity is being lost is becoming an important leadership issue. It affects operating costs, customer service, maintenance backlogs and an organisation's ability to respond to future demand without continually increasing expenditure.

Are workforce shortages the real problem?

Looking beyond headcount

The utilities sector is facing a genuine recruitment challenge. Many organisations expect a significant proportion of their experienced workforce to retire over the next five years, while attracting and retaining skilled engineers continues to become more difficult.

However, increasing headcount is only one way of increasing capacity, and often the most expensive one. Before deciding that more people are needed, it is worth understanding how effectively existing resources are being used.

Every unnecessary journey, repeat visit or manual intervention reduces the amount of productive work a technician can complete during the day. Those lost hours rarely appear as a single line in a financial report, yet they have a direct impact on labour costs, overtime, contractor dependency and customer service.

A different question to ask

Rather than asking, "How many more people do we need?", leading organisations are asking a different question.

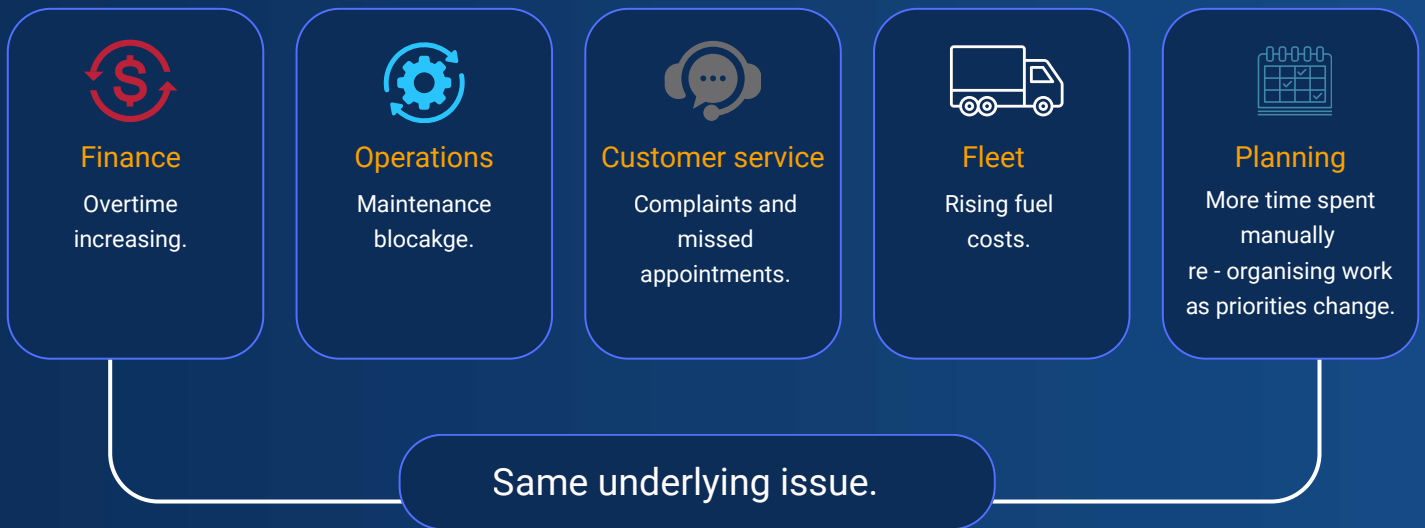
"How much more could our existing workforce achieve if we removed the barriers that stop them working efficiently?"

Improving the way work is planned and coordinated can often release capacity that already exists within the organisation, allowing more work to be completed without a corresponding increase in workforce size.

Every inefficiency has a cost

The costs are spread across the business

One of the challenges with improving field operations is that the costs are rarely visible in one place.



Small inefficiencies become expensive

When work is not planned effectively, small inefficiencies begin to compound. A technician who spends longer travelling between jobs completes less work that day. A repeat visit because the wrong skills or parts were assigned creates another journey, more labour and another appointment for the customer. Delayed maintenance increases the likelihood of unplanned failures, creating additional pressure on already stretched resources.

Over time, these costs become accepted as part of normal operations. The organisations making the greatest improvements are taking a different approach. Rather than treating each issue in isolation, they are looking at how work moves through the organisation, from planning and scheduling through to execution and completion. That gives them a much clearer understanding of where time, money and workforce capacity are being lost.

Leadership question

If you reduced travel, repeat visits and manual coordination by just 10%, what would that mean for your operating costs and workforce capacity?



Better operations are built on better decisions

Complexity is increasing

Utilities operate in an environment where priorities change constantly.

Emergency outages interrupt planned maintenance. Customer appointments compete with asset inspections. Experienced engineers are unavailable, while less experienced colleagues require additional support. Weather conditions can change the day's priorities within hours.

Planning for this level of complexity using static schedules or manual processes is becoming increasingly difficult.

Better decisions create better outcomes

The highest-performing organisations recognise that improving operational performance is not simply about working harder. It is about making better decisions throughout the working day.



Prioritise

Which jobs need
attention first.



Assign

Match work to
skills + location



Optimise

Reduce avoidable
travel



Respond

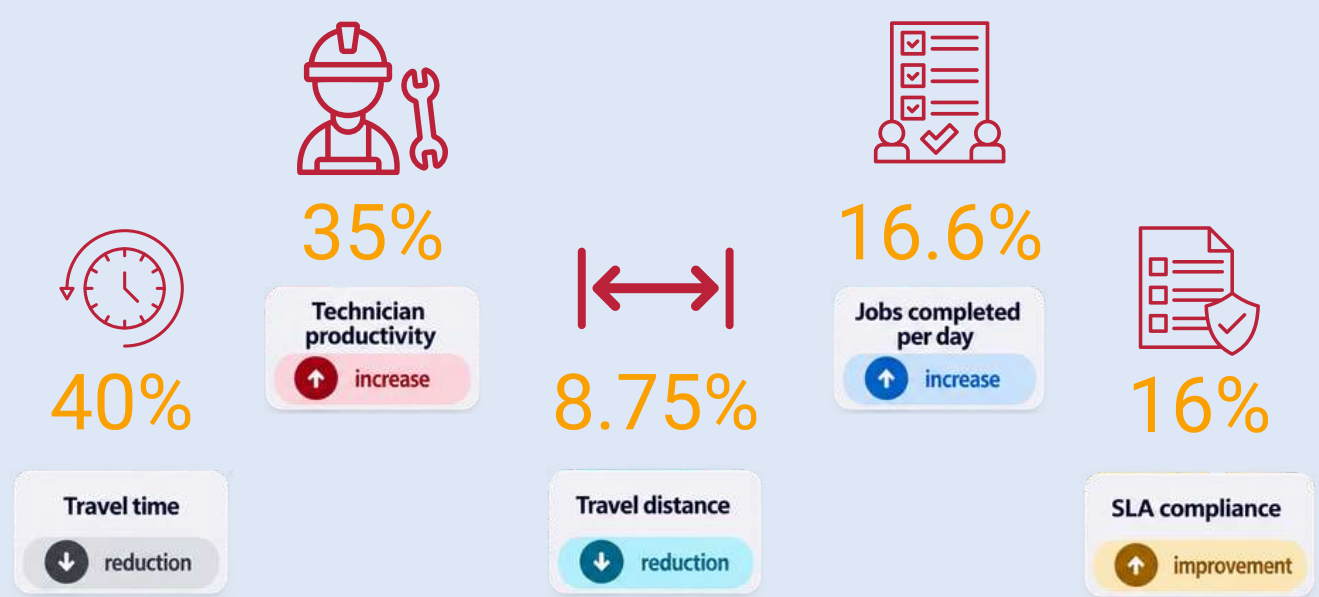
Adapt quickly as
conditions change

More productive time = less avoidable disruption

For many utilities, achieving this requires more than improving individual processes. It requires planning, scheduling, dispatch, mobile working and asset information to work together, so decisions are based on what is happening now, rather than what was planned several hours earlier.

This is where IFS Field Service Management helps organisations move beyond manual coordination. Combined with Planning and Scheduling Optimisation, it continuously balances technician skills, availability, location and job priorities, automatically adjusting schedules as conditions change. Rather than reacting to disruption, planners can make informed decisions based on live operational information.

Utilities using IFS Planning and Scheduling Optimisation have reported average improvements of:



These improvements are achieved by making better use of existing resources, rather than simply increasing workforce numbers.

What leading utilities do differently

They understand where time is being lost

Benchmarking shows that leading organisations complete more work, resolve issues faster and achieve higher first-time fix rates than lower-performing organisations. They also require fewer repeat visits and make better use of their workforce.

Although every organisation is different, successful utilities tend to have several characteristics in common.

They understand where technician time is being spent and actively work to reduce unnecessary travel and administration. They plan work around technician skills rather than simply availability. They continually adjust schedules as conditions change, rather than relying on fixed plans created at the start of the day.

They connect the whole operation

Planning, dispatch, field execution and job completion all need to work together.

Leading utilities are moving away from disconnected systems that require planners and supervisors to manually coordinate work across multiple applications. Instead, they are connecting workforce management, enterprise asset management, mobile working and Industrial AI on a single platform. This gives planners, dispatchers and field teams access to the same operational information, improving decision-making while reducing administration and unnecessary handovers.

IFS Field Service Management brings these capabilities together, helping utilities reduce travel, improve first-time fix rates and make better use of available workforce capacity.

Across a workforce of hundreds or thousands of people, relatively small improvements in productivity can release significant additional capacity, improve customer service and reduce operating costs without increasing headcount.

Questions worth asking

Looking beyond the headline metrics

Executive teams naturally focus on operating costs, reliability, customer satisfaction and regulatory performance.

Those are the right measures.

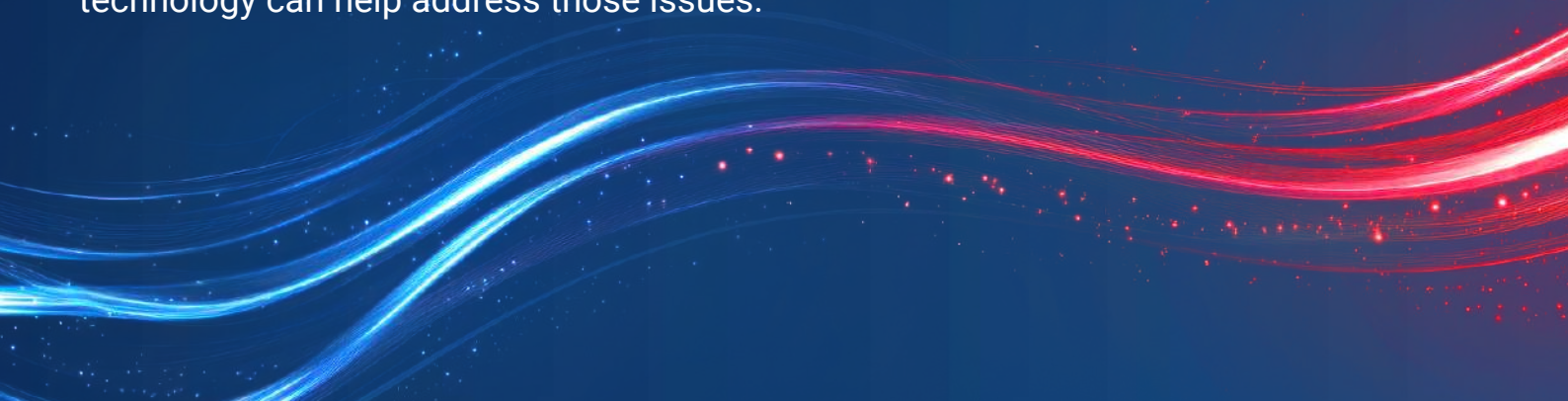
However, understanding what is driving those outcomes requires looking further upstream.

Questions for leadership teams

- Where does technician time actually go during a typical working day?
- Which activities create the greatest delays or require repeat visits?
- How much planned work is displaced by reactive work?
- If work volumes increased by 20%, could today's operating model cope without significantly increasing costs?
- Are planners spending their time making informed decisions, or manually correcting avoidable problems?
- Do current systems provide enough visibility to understand where operational capacity is being lost?

These are not technology questions.

They are business questions that help identify where improvements will have the greatest impact. The IFS workforce management guide encourages utility leaders to begin by understanding where technician time is being lost before considering how technology can help address those issues.



Building a stronger business case

Looking beyond cost reduction

Investment in operational improvement is often justified through labour savings or technology replacement.

Those are important considerations, but they rarely capture the full picture. A stronger business case considers the wider operational impact.

Understanding the wider value

Reducing unnecessary travel means lower fuel costs, lower vehicle wear and more productive hours available for planned work. Improving first-time fix rates reduces repeat visits, helping customers while lowering labour costs. Better planning allows maintenance to be completed before failures occur, reducing the disruption and expense associated with emergency work.

These benefits reinforce one another.

This is why many utilities now view workforce optimisation as an investment rather than an operational expense.

IFS reports that organisations using Planning and Scheduling Optimisation achieve measurable improvements in technician productivity, SLA compliance, travel time and daily job completion. Those improvements support a stronger business case because they generate operational and financial benefits using the workforce already in place.

The objective is not simply to reduce costs. It is to create an operating model that can continue delivering reliable service despite increasing demand, workforce pressures and changing network requirements.

From operational insight to measurable improvement

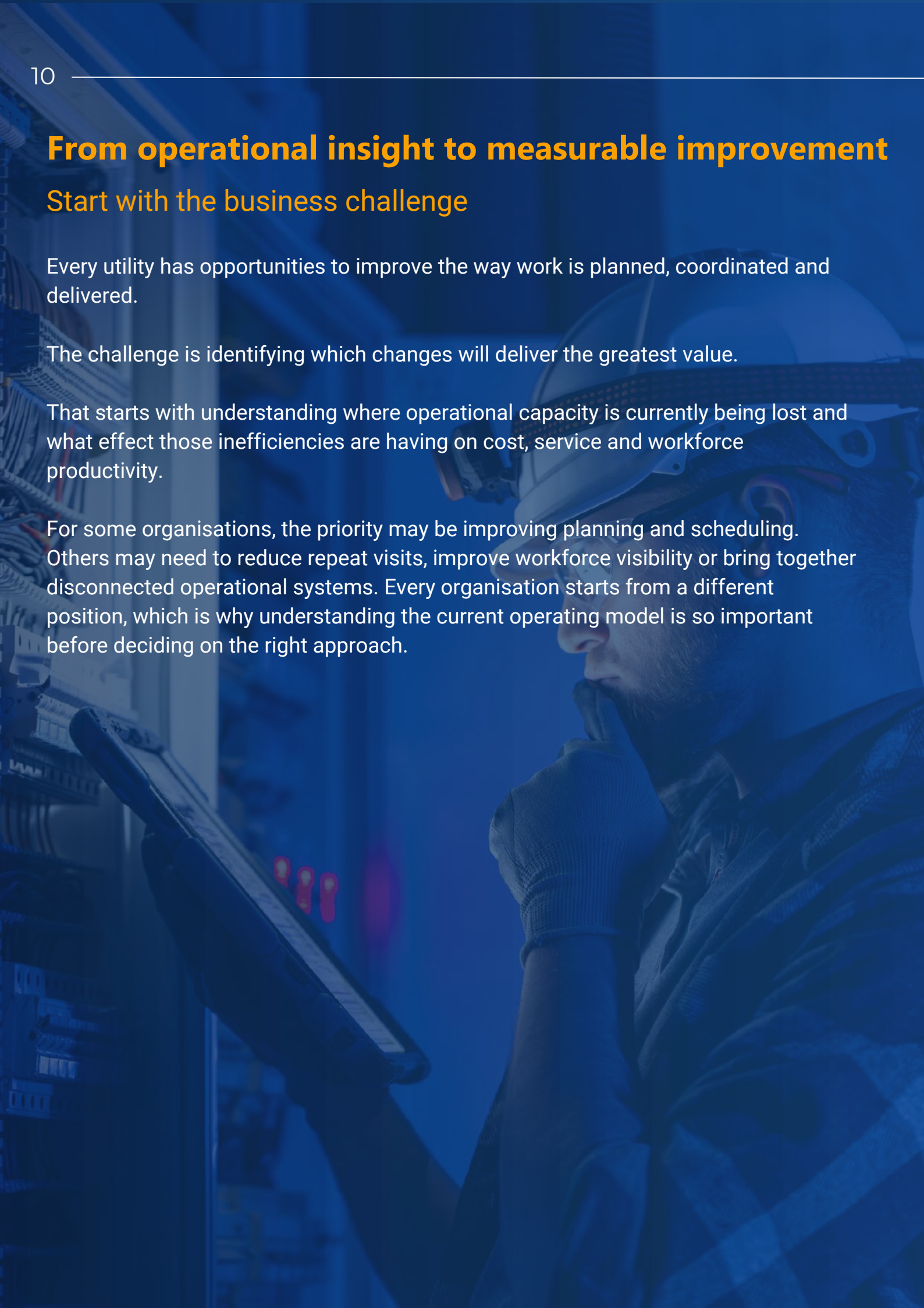
Start with the business challenge

Every utility has opportunities to improve the way work is planned, coordinated and delivered.

The challenge is identifying which changes will deliver the greatest value.

That starts with understanding where operational capacity is currently being lost and what effect those inefficiencies are having on cost, service and workforce productivity.

For some organisations, the priority may be improving planning and scheduling. Others may need to reduce repeat visits, improve workforce visibility or bring together disconnected operational systems. Every organisation starts from a different position, which is why understanding the current operating model is so important before deciding on the right approach.



How IFS helps

IFS Field Service Management, together with Planning and Scheduling Optimisation and Industrial AI, helps utilities connect planning, scheduling, dispatch, mobile working and enterprise asset management into a single operational platform.

Instead of relying on static schedules and manual coordination, organisations can continuously optimise field operations as priorities change. The result is better workforce utilisation, improved customer service, reduced travel, higher first-time fix rates and greater operational visibility across the business.



Why Platned?

Technology alone does not improve field operations.

Success comes from understanding how work is planned, coordinated and delivered across the organisation, then applying technology in a way that supports those processes.

As an IFS Specialised Partner, Platned works with Energy, Utilities and Resources organisations to:

- **Assess where operational capacity is being lost.**
- **Build evidence-based business cases for workforce optimisation.**
- **Design and implement IFS Field Service Management and Planning and Scheduling Optimisation.**
- **Optimise existing IFS environments to improve productivity and service performance.**
- **Support continuous improvement as operational requirements evolve. Our approach starts with understanding your business, your assets and your operational challenges. Only then do we recommend the technology and services that will deliver measurable improvements.**

Final thought

Every utility is under pressure to deliver more while controlling costs, maintaining reliability and preparing for the future.

Those pressures are unlikely to ease.

The organisations that respond most successfully will not necessarily be those with the largest workforce or the biggest budgets. They will be those that understand where productive capacity is being lost, make better operational decisions and give their people the tools and information they need to work as effectively as possible.

IFS Field Service Management provides the technology to make that possible.

Platned provides the experience to help you realise its full value.

Because the biggest opportunity is not simply investing in new technology. It is making better use of the people, assets and resources you already have.

