Managers and leaders need to be aware of the rapidly shifting employee expectations for connectivity and engagement and adjust work practices accordingly.

Preparing for the Certainty of Uncertainty with Hybrid-First Ways of Working

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Questions posed by: Cisco

Answers by: Amy Loomis, Ph.D., Research Director, Future of Work

Q. How are organizations utilizing technology to meet the demands of the new era of hybrid work?

A. One of the key realizations of 2021 was that hybrid work will be enduring — and for good reason. Organizations are discovering both the need for and the benefits of hybrid work models that address myriad disruptions, from pandemic variants to economic volatility and the impact of the Great Resignation. When asked which work practices and technologies emerging from the pandemic are most likely to endure, 45% of business and technology leaders predicted that remote and hybrid work models will be an embedded part of accepted work practices (source: IDC's *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 11,* December 2021).

However, organizations need to provide the right hardware and software tools to enable employees to work from anywhere on any device and across locations. Unlike planning for a single event, these new ways of working anticipate the long-term requirement of being prepared to shift quickly in response to changing business requirements. Intelligent digital workspaces are and will continue to be an expected way of working across time zones and devices. Cloud-based connectivity, devices, applications, and services are a critical part of the shift to mitigate disruption and scale resources up and down in response to or in anticipation of disruptions. Additionally, employee experience must be seen as a critical driver of business growth.

Automation has become a key factor in ensuring stability by taking on the burden of repetitive tasks and supporting connected workflows to make employee and client experiences alike more fluid and faster. Managers and leaders need to be aware of the rapidly shifting employee expectations for connectivity and engagement; otherwise, new and existing workers will likely walk away.

Q. How are organizations leveraging technology to navigate regional needs and expectations in a hybrid-first world?

A. One of the key insights from multiple experiments with hybrid work across industries and geographies is that there is no singular model that works for most organizations. While there are different levels of support for hybrid work across Asia/Pacific, North America, and Europe, what organizations in all three regions have in common is the need to balance work flexibility with some degree of anchor work practices that ground and define the employee experience. The key is to determine which work practices will drive essential business outcomes for any given organization. These insights will offer clues into the tools and hybrid work practices that will nurture employee engagement and productivity. Some 85% of respondents agreed that an improved employee experience and higher employee engagement translate to a better customer experience, higher customer satisfaction, and higher revenue for their organization, according to IDC's *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 6* (July 2021).

Understanding which technologies will support these outcomes and recognizing what peers and competitors are doing are critical components to employee recruitment and retention at a time when finding top talent is a challenge. When asked about the top 3 technology investments to enable workforce communication and collaboration, 38% of IDC survey respondents cited advanced conferencing technologies to support democratized meeting participation.

Q. What strategies can help organizations tap into a broader ecosystem of new talent using remote and hybrid work?

A. Broadening the pool of candidates by offering remote and hybrid work opportunities can make the difference in terms of finding the right person for key positions. IDC predicts that by 2023, digital transformation and business volatility will drive 70% of G2000 organizations to deploy remote or hybrid-first work models, redefining work processes and engaging diverse talent pools. Hybrid work models and the technologies that enable them, from videoconferencing to auto-translation to reliable connectivity, are simply part of the expected parameters for scoping talent recruitment.

Ensuring secure and reliable network connectivity in an era of de facto video collaboration is necessary for ensuring a frictionless experience for employees to engage and innovate effectively at scale. This requires not only technology investments but also investments in understanding global cultural practices around communication and culture. As teams become more multinational by default, collaboration practices need to keep pace with a broad array of time zones, communication practices, and synchronous and asynchronous communication. Where once only senior executives had access to more advanced or costly tools to create close-knit collaboration, employees now expect advanced functionality for easy access to all resources (and sharing of high-bandwidth material).

Q. What are organizations doing to ensure security from the edge to the office?

A. At the outset of 2020, remote workers regularly cobbled together hardware and software resources in an ad hoc fashion, often on insecure home networks. Fast-forward two years, and the deployment of technologies to support remote and hybrid work has grown exponentially in sophistication and complexity. According to IDC's *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 6,* 41% of business and technology leaders pointed to improved network bandwidth and security for remote and in-office workers as the number 2 top investment to enable communication and collaboration.

Organizations are still deeply concerned about the loss and exposure of corporate intellectual property and the lack of visibility into technology deployments — not to mention control over data that is at risk. IT service management (ITSM) organizations are increasingly learning to evolve and work more closely with lines of business to calibrate rigorous security and ease of access for employers and employees alike. This work focuses not only on deploying technologies for remote workers but also on reconfiguring in-office experiences and planning for the delivery of secure and frictionless workflows for workers who go back and forth between home and office environments. When this work is done right, the result will be an organization that offers both security of corporate IP and data privacy.

Q. How are organizations rethinking the role of the office to provide a more inclusive and collaborative experience for employees in the 21st century?

A. As organizations instrument their office environments for a hybrid future, they are realizing that there are critical components to enabling hybrid work technically and programmatically. IDC predicts that by 2025, 90% of new commercial constructions/renovations will deploy smart facility technology that supports flexible workplaces and sustainably improves occupant experiences and operational performance.

Collaboration environments need to be purpose built to accommodate both scheduled and ad hoc meetings with employees who are physically present and those who are not. Individual workspaces need to be designed to be adaptive and multipurpose, enabling workers to easily move to different locations internally, find and navigate new workplaces, and align digital and physical resources to seamlessly shift between in-person, in-motion, and remote or field work. Some workers may need or want to have the routine of regular onsite work, while others will go to the office only on an as-needed basis. This variability makes planning difficult not only for operations, IT, HR, and finance but also for senior executives looking to set long-term organizational and strategic goals. Having workplaces that work harder to accommodate multimodel collaboration is a critical component of the diverse hybrid future of work, which will repeatedly blur boundaries between the physical world and the virtual world for years to come.

About the Analyst

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Amy Loomis is Research Director for IDC's worldwide Future of Work market research service. In this role, Ms. Loomis covers the growing influence of technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, robotics, augmented and virtual reality, and intelligent process automation in changing the nature of work. Her research looks at how these technologies influence workers' skills and behaviors, organizational culture, and worker experience and how the workspace itself is enabling the future enterprise.

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