

When it comes to supporting flexible work arrangements, leaders need to stay in sync with employee requirements to work both on and off traditional office premises by offering intelligent digital workspaces.

Building the Future of Flexible Work Management

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Questions posed by: Adobe

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Q. What are the key market drivers for work transformation and work management?

A. Organizations are struggling to navigate strategic planning in the face of economic uncertainty and new expectations for flexible work models. Top business/market drivers for work transformation include increased employee productivity (43%), cost savings (38%), sustainability (35%), profitability (34%), improved customer experience (33%), and improved employee experience (32%) (source: IDC's 2022 *Future of Work Global Survey*; n = 1,316).

IDC data also shows continued investment in work transformation, specifically in enduring areas such as cloud migration that are the backbone of a hybrid work model. IDC survey results show that 35% of enterprises point to a continuing reliance on cloud-based connectivity, devices, applications, and services.

To attract and keep top talent and deploy a broader variety of workers from around the world and across different staffing models, companies are investing in intelligent digital workspaces. These digital platforms provide integrated access to the applications, data, tools, and collaborators that are critical to driving effective work practices and innovation. IDC's survey research shows 35% of enterprises reporting that intelligent digital workspaces will be an expected way of working across locations, time zones, and devices (source: IDC's *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 11*, December 2022).

Q. How are organizations mitigating against the most challenging risks during disruptive times?

A. In terms of risks in disruptive times, businesses are concerned about potential recession, where supply chain, inflation, and labor shortages are the key concerns globally. Enterprises entered 2023 with steady spending plans but are poised to cut budgets if needed; around 64% of CIOs who have created specific macroeconomic environment scenarios will potentially resort to the adjustment of budgets in 2023. Organizations have invested in technologies that are helping them shift gears and reprioritize work. More digitally mature organizations are better prepared to respond to the shifting markets with the highest spending levels, experiencing better business outcomes as a result.

The most pressing concerns for organizations implementing flexible work models are around security and teaming — two areas that speak to both the technology and the sociology of a secure work environment. Organizations are struggling to ensure security with organizational IP as well as provide visibility into endpoint management, network, cloud, and development of zero trust environments. Exposure also comes from not providing tools and technologies that are well integrated or easy to use, prompting employees to investigate less secure ways of communicating.

Around 39% of organizations worldwide indicated that secure remote access to data, applications, and content is a major concern, and 31% said that security of home networks as well as personal devices is the biggest IT challenge in supporting flexible work models (source: IDC's 2022 *Future of Work Global Survey*; n = 1,316). The same IDC survey found that 59% of organizations are investing in security tools for networks (access control, antivirus software, network analytics, VPNs, etc.). Connectivity issues and integrity of connections have been key elements for delivering and producing visually rich content with colleagues and for clients.

Q. How do organizations build a culture of employee engagement?

A. The temptation is to retrench and order employees to "return to the office" if they are working remotely full or part time, especially at times when organizations are keenly focused on the bottom line. Repeated attempts to invoke a forced march back to the office in a traditional style have been less than successful. That said, there are many very good reasons to encourage collaboration across on-premises and remote workers to ensure the highest degrees of innovation and employee retention.

IDC research points to the value of offering hybrid alternatives as a key means of keeping and attracting top talent. It also points to increased investments in both digital and physical workspaces to ensure improved engagement of employees. When IDC asked survey participants which work practices and technology investments are most likely to endure in the face of current market disruptions (economic turmoil, skills shortage, inflation etc.), 37% responded that remote and hybrid work models will remain an embedded part of accepted work practices for many industries and another 37% indicated that physical workplaces will become increasingly instrumented, interconnected, and intelligent to build employee experience (source: IDC's *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 11*, December 2022; n = 840).

Leaders must also focus on building a culture of trust and collaboration to ensure that employees feel invested in their work, encouraging employees to stay productive. They are investing especially in intelligent digital workspaces, work management platforms, team collaboration solutions, remote desktop management, and secure remote access to enterprise files and resources. IDC data points to the growth of future of work technologies to almost \$1 billion in 2023 — an 18.8% increase over 2022.

Leaders need to focus on staying in sync with employee requirements to work both on and off traditional office premises by offering intelligent digital workspaces and work management platforms that provide seamless access to key creative tools, resources, and collaborators. According to IDC's December 2022 *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 11*, 35% of respondents said that intelligent digital workspaces will be an expected way of working across locations, time zones, and devices and 34% indicated that employee experience/engagement as a driver of business growth and innovation will remain a top priority. Employees need to be empowered to manage their own work and focus on outcomes rather than being purely process driven in their approaches to work.

Q. What does it mean to offer employees a frictionless work management experience?

A. Employees of all types are facing the twin challenges of having more and more tools to work with to get their jobs done and having those tools become increasingly complex. This has led to a real impediment to efficient work as employees continuously go from one application to the next or search for several minutes to find a new functionality that promises greater efficiency. At a time when companies are increasingly budget conscious, it's key that the applications that employees use are as integrated as possible so that employees can spend more time engaged in being creative and productive and less time struggling to navigate the means to do so.

Rather than jumping from one tool to another, employees need to have integrated workflows and integrated access to both data and knowledge across functions. A top priority investment by companies for enabling technology parity for all hybrid workers is frictionless access to applications and data across business systems as well as collaborators across time zones. Top initiatives to improve the employee experience include technology upgrades focused on teaming (43%), responsive IT support to ensure productive work practices (37%), and analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) focused on improving the employee experience (32%) (source: IDC's *Future of Work Global Survey*, April 2022; n = 1,316).

Q. How can leaders best adapt to more flexible work models and work management?

A. Leaders need to consider organizational and technology goals in conjunction with one another. If they assume technology will solve organizational concerns or vice versa, they will be faced with challenges of employee frustration with work management or frustration with organizational leadership. Whether teams are broadly distributed or working side by side, full time or part time, in-house or contractors, they all benefit from having integrated tools with which to communicate and collaborate.

Flexible work models depend upon C-suite taking a holistic approach to building out the employee experience as CIOs collaborate with CMOs, COOs, CHROs, and lines of business. They need to be aligned not only at a leadership level but also with employee expectations to be effective. As leaders around the globe have announced new work model policies around hybrid work, 21% of leaders reported being completely aligned with employee expectations and 26% reported being fairly aligned. In addition, more than 80% of leaders and employees in North America agreed that hybrid work is just as productive as or more productive than working in an office only (source: IDC's *Future of Work Employee and Leadership Survey*, August 2022; n = 1,316).

As automation becomes increasingly pervasive and employees have to rely on continuously evolving approaches to work, leaders need to be more mindful of using agile approaches that enable cross-functional collaboration. Leaders must support a strong partnership between IT and business to drive effective work automation and management. In IDC's *Future of Work Global Survey*, some of the key requirements for employees to automate their own work are collaboration with IT (60%) as well as approval from leadership (46%). With the necessary organizational and technological support, employees are more able to be productive, creative, and effective at engaging with their work, colleagues, and clients.

About the Analyst



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Amy Loomis is Research Vice President 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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