

Transforming for Hybrid

How companies can make the most of the opportunities offered by the new work paradigm



INTRODUCTION

The world of work has changed forever. As lockdowns begin to be relaxed around the world and offices reopen, most organisations are now adopting a hybrid model, in which employees divide their work time between a central office, their home and a workspace close to home.

For leaders, this new work paradigm throws up some fundamental questions:

- What technology and real estate footprint are required?
- What implications does this distributed way of working have for the organisation's culture and wellbeing?
- And how can productivity and creativity be optimised?

The Covid-19 pandemic is often credited as the catalyst for the growth of hybrid working, but as Mark Dixon, CEO and Founder of IWG, points out, it is a trend that had already begun pre-pandemic thanks largely to technological innovation.

"The shared workplace only ever existed because it contained the materials and equipment workers needed but didn't have at home: typewriters, computers, photocopiers and filing cabinets to store countless kilometres of paper," he says. "But today, digital technology puts into every white-collar worker's hands all the tools they need to do their job. The office is no longer a defined physical space, but rather it has become digital."

This throws up the first challenge for business leaders as they transition to the hybrid model. During the pandemic, IT teams were forced to rapidly accommodate the switch to home working. But now, as we enter a world of workforces distributed across different kinds of workspace, what technology will be most suitable to help them work most productively?

These are the issues addressed in our white paper by [Chintan Patel, Chief Technologist at Cisco UK](#). As he puts it, "The big hybrid work experiment starts now." That means enabling workers to be productive wherever they happen to be, and in a safe and secure way. "And it's going to have to be a bit more thought out than just a webcam on a laptop," he stresses.

Another opportunity for organisations comes as they contemplate their workspace options. [Doug Demers, Managing Principal at B+H Architects and the Centre for Advance Strategy](#), says most companies are currently reassessing their real estate strategies as they contemplate the switch to hybrid working. "There's a chance for companies to fine-tune their real estate footprint to be more appropriate to the way the next generation of employees are looking to work," he says.

According to recent research by Accenture, the vast majority of workers want the future of work to be hybrid. That means companies who allow their employees to be successful and productive anywhere are likely to attract and retain the best talent, says [Christie Smith, the company's Global Lead of Talent & Organisation/Human Potential](#). She believes there are a number of policies that organisations can introduce in order to foster productivity in a hybrid world.

A major factor in productivity is creativity, and this was something that suffered during lockdown periods: Bank of England Chief Economist Andy Haldane, for example, has said that home working probably reduced his capacity for creative thought. The challenge now is to power up creativity levels wherever employees choose to work.

[Creativity consultant Chris Barez-Brown](#) already has considerable experience of working with companies that are using the hybrid model, and he has some valuable tips on getting the creative juices flowing. "It's about getting people into the right state mentally and emotionally wherever they happen to be," he says. "And that takes management and leadership."

Hybrid working is also an opportunity for organisations to re-evaluate their corporate culture, says [Jane Sparrow, co-founder of consultancy The Culture Builders](#). Having worked with major companies all over the world who are transforming to hybrid, she understands the potential pitfalls, but also sees this as a great chance to think about corporate values going forward – with wellbeing likely to be at the top of the agenda. "The first thing we tell companies is that they have to be intentional about all this," she says. "They need to put time and strategic thought into how they're going to evolve their culture."



GIVE EMPLOYEES THE RIGHT TOOLS TO SUCCEED

By Chintan Patel, Chief Technologist at Cisco UK & Ireland



In terms of tech, the big hybrid work experiment officially begins now. For quite a few organisations, the switch to hybrid working will be tough, because it's very different from what they've been used to.

A level playing field

Digital infrastructure will continue to be the foundation for hybrid working going forward. According to our research, about 98 percent of meetings will have at least one remote participant in the hybrid world, which means technology will play a crucial role in making sure that there's a level playing field in terms of people feeling engaged and being part of the discussion, even if there are many more people present in person. So there's an onus on organisations to put in the digital infrastructure to help employees securely communicate and collaborate from home – and that's going to have to be a little more thought out than just a webcam on a laptop.

At Cisco we're very focused on giving dedicated video endpoints that provide a much more immersive experience for employees, irrespective of where they are, because you want to have a uniform experience. If we have nice video devices that give us an amazing experience when we're in the office, we should have that at home as well.

In the office

The physical layout of offices will have to change in terms of how many physical desks we need compared with more open, collaborative spaces or meeting rooms. And that means ensuring the kind of digital fabric in offices that allows people to be more mobile. Wireless technology can help facilities teams to understand where people are in an age of trying to manage density in space – you can get real-time insights into numbers and movement patterns.

We're also moving into an era when quite a lot of things are touchless. Our homes have already become voice activated through devices such as Alexa and Google Home, but now we can make our offices voice activated in many ways too. In our videoconferencing solution, WebEx, we've got an assistant that actually allows us to do that. So I can walk into one of our meeting rooms and tell WebEx to start my meeting. It will already know who I am, through our proximity technology, and will get all the other colleagues online. And then when the meeting is finished, the camera has already checked how many people were in the room and whether it needs to be cleaned or sanitised, so it can then automatically get the real estate team to come in and do a clean sweep. Putting in more automation like this simplifies the work experience for the teams that have to operate in these environments.

In the future, work is going to be distributed between the office, home and elsewhere, so we have to make sure that security is absolutely embedded in everything that we do, whether that's at the endpoints, in the physical infrastructure, in the cloud, in your private data centre or anywhere in between.

The cyber threat

Trust is vital and employees need to be reassured that the technology they're being given is security driven. In amongst all of the goodwill shown during the pandemic, the bad actors continued to flourish. In the future, work is going to be distributed between the office, home and elsewhere, so we have to make sure that security is absolutely embedded in everything that we do, whether that's at the endpoints, in the physical infrastructure, in the cloud, in your private data centre or anywhere in between. We weave security into everything that we do now, as a company, and we have done for many years, based around our zero trust architecture.

We also have to constantly make sure we're educating employees on what I call digital hygiene. That includes regularly testing the organisation. Our own internal cybersecurity team sends fake emails to staff, which genuinely look like they're from our CEO. It's not necessarily to catch people out, but to get everybody trained in terms of trying to look out for things.

Ultimately the right technology in a hybrid world means delivering employees with as rich a set of collaboration tools as possible, ones that don't exclude people on the basis of their physical location, and ones that can be trusted one hundred percent.



OPTIMISE YOUR REAL ESTATE FOOTPRINT FOR THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

By Doug Demers, Managing Principal at B+H Architects and the Centre for Advance Strategy

Real estate footprints are continually evolving, and depend entirely on what activities an organisation carries out. What's important for us as a company right now is really understanding those activities, and then helping organisations map out programmes for spaces that match them, with flexibility being the key attribute. That means finding the right mix of spaces based on whether people are coming together or working apart. We're seeing a new set of hybrid, flexible programme requirements that are affecting organisations' portfolio optimisation strategies.

Creating magic

The New York Times ran an article a few months ago saying that employers had better figure out how to make some magic happen in the office space if they wanted people to come back and feel empowered and creative. It's true. In order to attract and retain the talent pool you need, you're going to have to be thinking about how to make your employees feel happy about coming back to work and contributing at their highest potential. People will be thinking, "Am I going to be able to be creative in this space?" So one of the things we've been looking at is how we apply technologies around changing the lighting, the colour, the feeling of the space. In other words, if you were a winemaker and you wanted to have a meeting to come up with a new brand, imagine you could change the projection settings so that you felt like you were in a wine cellar by just colour and lighting and stuff.

Our Experience Design group is currently growing like crazy, we can't keep up with the demand. Most companies are looking at their current portfolio of real estate and saying, okay, I can't throw this all out, but I need to reposition it. That's likely to include a variety of meeting spaces that enhance the experience, and graphics and experiential planning are the easiest way to do that.

It's about creating magic. Amazon calls them Easter eggs: unexpected things that happen as you move through space, which inspire you or maybe disturb you, but essentially make things more interesting. If you're moving into an existing building space, a lot of that is around colour, materials, graphics, lighting. If it's new architecture, then of course there are opportunities to have the building actually be more active in scripting some of those experiences. That's where I see a lot of focus right now, trying to identify ways to create that magic, and creating the kinds of flexible meeting spaces that people are looking for.



Hubs, spokes and sustainability

The flexible hub-and-spoke model is a definite trend and this will be part of organisations' portfolio optimisation. We've been working on a project for a financial services company where they were going to build a new headquarters, but they've pushed pause on it. The discussion now is about readdressing what kinds of office needs they actually will have, which will probably be based on a distributed model.

The sustainability piece is a big part of this. Carbon footprint modelling is becoming part of what we're doing in a lot of things now. And it's not just about an individual office space. It's also thinking about if I have this hub-and-spoke model, how does my carbon footprint change? Do people travel less? Or do they travel smaller amounts to that local satellite location by bike or walking, or by car for five minutes versus a 45-minute drive to a headquarters somewhere?

This is something that's top of mind right now, and there's an opportunity for companies to fine-tune their real estate footprint to be more appropriate to the way the next generation of employees are looking to work. It's a win-win if you can attract and retain the best talent, while doing it with a smaller footprint. Years ago, Microsoft used to build an office for every single employee. It was part of their attraction as an employer: "Come work for us, you get an office." It served them well for a period of time, and then you saw the shift. I think this is another one of those shifts, where there's going to be economic benefit to being more efficient in your portfolio model and how you use office space. The smarter people are adapting them and using them to their advantage.

Back to nature

There's a lot of documentation now on how the introduction of wood and other organic materials lowers your blood pressure and does all kinds of other good things for your body chemistry. And that ties into the current focus on wellness. We're working on some really interesting projects that are driven by biophilic design. This is the next generation of office buildings, and I think the existing generation of office buildings is in trouble. Other uses need to be found for them or they're going to end up being mostly empty at some point. The pendulum is going to swing towards buildings that are more human scale, that are more biophilic in design, with mass timber and operable windows. And those are going to start to syphon away the lease spaces for those companies looking to reinvent what kind of programme mix they need and that support wellness and wellbeing. There's not a lot you can do with a tall concrete and steel tower that doesn't have anything operable. It's just more difficult to address the new workplace model.

Listen to the stakeholders

You have to look at a multi-dimensional solution. If you look at it from just one point of view, you'll end up with a problem. That's what I'm seeing a lot right now. You have to do it holistically.

If I was talking to a CEO, I would say you need to put together a multi-discipline team internally that represents the key stakeholders: that means HR, your culture and brand leadership, and of course the operations people who know what activities really need to happen. Then go through a process of evaluating how you're going to work and translate that into an optimised real estate footprint. You might have less leased space, depending on the kind of business you're in, or you might have different kinds of leased space at different price points. For example, it's likely to be less expensive to have satellite offices in local neighbourhoods compared to having a giant, gold-plated headquarters building.





TRANSFORMING PRODUCTIVITY

ALLOW YOUR PEOPLE TO BE SUCCESSFUL AND PRODUCTIVE WHEREVER THEY CHOOSE

By Christie Smith, Global Lead of Talent & Organisation/Human Potential at Accenture, and co-author of The Accenture Future of Work Study 2021

First and foremost, companies and leaders need to get their heads around the fact that most employees want the future of work to be hybrid. We surveyed more than 9,000 workers around the world, and 83 percent said they considered the hybrid model to be optimal. They want to be able to decide when they go to their main office and when they work from home or in a workspace close to home. That means a shift in how we structure work, and how we manage that work. It also means a fundamental shift in the employee experience and how we engage with one another.

Given that most want a hybrid model, when a company offers that choice, most employees are more likely to stay with that company, which is hugely important given the current narrative that everybody's quitting their jobs. Hanging on to talent has become really important, but in order for employers to ensure that individuals stay with them, they have to allow them to be successful and productive anywhere.

Nobody knows exactly what the future of work is going to look like, but based on what we've found out about organisations' most productive employees, we believe leaders can make a start by redefining their work policies and strengthening the relationship with their workers.



We surveyed more than 9,000 workers around the world, and 83 percent said they considered the hybrid model to be optimal

First, that means HR has to show up in a more modern way. We've devised a model called Net Better Off, which addresses the six fundamental human needs that need to be met through work: Emotional and Mental, Relational, Physical, Financial, Purposeful and Employable. These can be the foundation for a new social contract between employers and employees. We also talk about a frictionless future of work in which people have flexibility, and a human-led culture that's omniconnected: digitally connected, in-person connected, and connected to opportunities and roles.

Second, work needs to be designed around people. Historically we've lived in a very hierarchical kind of arrangement within our organisations. Even when organisations say that they're flat, they really aren't. We need to structure work differently around collaboration, connection and value-based outcomes. There's no one-size-fits-all model: organisations have to respond to the needs of all types of workers.

Third, we have to build digital fluency. I'm not talking about digital literacy. There's a big difference between the two. Being digitally literate is understanding what AI is. Being digitally fluent is understanding what AI is, but also knowing how to derive intelligence from that and apply it to the work that you're doing. Digitally fluent organisations have higher growth and are better places to work.

Finally, it's essential that we lead with humanity. Coming out of the pandemic, we know that there's a new type of leadership. CEOs and C-suite leaders have learned they need to focus on trust, transparency and empathy.

Our survey found that the people who are most able to be productive anywhere tend to have significantly greater personal and organisational resources:



Autonomy

They're held to realistic performance expectations, given the freedom to manage their own time and provided with continuous feedback to improve their work.



Positive mental health

Their work, colleagues and organisations help them to feel more positive.



High degree of digital skills

They have good skill levels across emerging technologies such as cloud computing, cyber security, robotics, virtual reality and digital collaboration tools.



Health policies

Their organisation has adopted policies such as the routine cleaning and disinfecting of workspaces, and ensuring flexible sick leave.



Digital maturity

Their organisation has a strong digital vision that is clearly communicated and endorsed through employee training and upskilling opportunities, and the use of digital tools to drive employee innovation, collaboration and mobility.



Supportive leadership

Their leaders actively listen and demonstrate care and consideration for the wellbeing, productivity and personal development of all employees.





TRANSFORMING CREATIVITY

SIX GREAT IDEAS FOR HAVING GREAT IDEAS

By Chris Barez-Brown, founder of worldwide consultancy Upping Your Elvis and tech startup Talk It Out

1

GET A FACILITATOR

If you're being creative in a group, you need facilitators. It was quite easy when we were all in one room with a flip chart, but now there's often a very different dynamic, with some people in the room and some remote. That requires a much higher level of facilitating skill. But if you don't have a facilitator, you are going to have a car crash.

2

DON'T LET THE ROOM WIN

When some people are in the room and some people are on screens, the room always wins. What you need to do is to start off the brief with everyone together, then facilitate the group in the room separately, and let the remote people go off and do their own stuff. Then bring them all back again at the end to harvest ideas.

3

EXPLAIN WHAT AN IDEA LOOKS LIKE

If you are getting loads of people to go off and have ideas on their own remotely, they need to know what an idea looks like. It sounds really basic, but most people can't capture an idea. An idea is something that you can tangibly do. So if I were to capture it on a piece of paper, I'd be able to give it to you, and you'd be able to read it and think, I can do that. But most people capture thoughts, which are just the starting point of building an idea. If you teach your people to know what an idea looks like, it means that when they're on their own, they will come up with something of value.

4

DO IT IN BURSTS

I'm a big fan of short periods of creativity. I don't think we should do day-long sessions like we used to. The latest research suggests that we can only focus between 90 and 120 minutes a day, and for most people the best time is early in the day. So book your creativity in then, because you will get way better ideas out of it. And don't do it for too long, just do it in bursts.

5

INVEST IN TECH

With hybrid working, tech makes all the difference. We've all been on those calls where people are dropping out, they can't share their screen or whatever. Anything that breaks down the human connection is going to break down your creativity. So invest more in good tech.

6

TRY CHANGING THE DYNAMIC

One thing I've been doing quite a lot is to pair people up on headsets and get them to go off and talk to each other away from their screens. It's a really neat way of getting a kick back into creativity. They always come back with ideas. So if you find the energy's dropping and ideas aren't there, break people off into different dynamics, then bring them back in again and see what you've got.





TRANSFORMING CULTURE

MAKE THE MOST OF NEW WAYS OF WORKING

By Jane Sparrow, co-founder of business consultancy
The Culture Builders

The shift to hybrid working is a chance for organisations to pause and say, actually, what do we want our ways of working – and therefore our culture – to look like in the future? What are the opportunities it brings if we don't expect everybody to be in the office all the time every day? Can we think, for example, about how we do more project-based working across geographies and so on? It's a chance to look at what you need in the future and to be intentional about it.

Some leaders worry that they might end up with two cultures: a remote culture and a workplace culture. But it doesn't need to be like that. We've worked with global businesses for years that have teams spread around the world, and they've shown that the gap can be bridged. You've got to work at it – it's a bit more complex than it was just flicking a switch and telling everyone to go remote. It's all about managing that change.

The first thing we tell organisations is that your culture is going to change whatever happens, but you have to be on the front foot and make sure that it changes in a way that is true to what you want to continue to be. That means putting time and strategic thought into how you're going to intentionally evolve the culture at both organisational level and team level. What do you value and what do you believe in? And how do you make sure that it continues in a hybrid world? This is the conversation you need to be having.

A lot of organisations tend to just focus on policy, and how many days a week people will be in the office. That's great, but it's not about what people believe and how they're going to behave.

What we're also seeing, particularly in the more progressive organisations, is that wellbeing has moved from being something on the sidelines to being absolutely front and centre of people's minds. It's definitely much more on the agenda than it ever was, yet it's harder than it ever was if you've got a workforce that is dispersed. I work with some of the world's most intelligent people and yet they struggle with saying, "Right I'm going to stop looking at my emails at 7pm for a couple of hours." They know they need to do it, but knowing it and doing it are two different things. Burnout is a threat to our wellbeing and changing our habits is very difficult.

So it comes down to culture. Some companies we've worked with have done things such as banning meetings between 12 and 1, which gives people permission to have the space to go and get a break. There are others that have said on a Friday there are no meetings after 3 o'clock. Again it's a way of saying we're giving permission for you to stop. Senior people need to be very overt role models, but individuals and teams also need to own their own wellbeing. We all need to look out for each other.

One of the main priorities in terms of maintaining and evolving culture is a focus on human connection. This is what makes us thrive, and if we're not together, or only some of us are physically together at certain times, then the risk is that we start to feel disconnected and that silos start to appear, which we've spent decades trying to get rid of. We all have to take more responsibility for making sure that we connect more often, both formally and informally.

When people are together, they need to make sure they have those moments of connection, and make the time to perhaps go for a walk together, or have lunch together, or stand by the coffee machine together. What you don't want them doing is coming in to the office to do Zoom meetings or being on email the whole time.

In terms of the people who are working remotely, there's going to be a bigger onus on those individuals to own being included. If they're maybe the one in the team that's working remotely and others aren't, they need to step in more than they would have done when everybody was remote. That means speaking up, saying they're feeling a little isolated, asking to be included in meetings.

For their part, team leaders need to make sure they're 'over-connecting' with people who are still remote. So if they're having half-hour one-to-ones with everyone, they put in 45 minutes for the remote people, so they can still do a bit of social chitchat as well: What have you been up to today? What have you most enjoyed about this week? What have you learned this week?

Some people talk about going back to how things were before the pandemic, but there's no going back. Work will never be the same as it was, it will be different, and the key is to make sure that difference is a positive rather than a negative.

Keeping hybrid meetings inclusive

We suggested to one of our clients in Hong Kong that when they were having a meeting, if there were, say, five people in the room and four people remote, they should put an extra four chairs in the room as a reminder that there were four people that they needed to not only include during the Zoom chat, but also to remember to inform about anything they talked about after the meeting finished. One group went as far as putting photographs on the seats of the people that were remote.



Allowing remote workers to shine

Something we started with a business in Asia was the idea of 'trophy moments'. They would start the weekly team meeting with just a couple of people voicing something that they'd learnt or they'd contributed over the last week. That five minutes at the beginning of the meeting gives people the permission and the comfort to speak about themselves and their role and the value they add.



Making time for the human stuff

One of the leaders I work with schedules 50-minute meetings, and she intentionally dedicates the first ten minutes to asking, "How are you doing? How are you feeling? What was good about last week?" The next half an hour is the business of the day. And then she's got a little bit of overspill at the end. She actually uses a timer and she says it really works because it reminds her to do the human stuff. It's easy to forget if you're seeing people most of the time, but you still need to do it.





CONCLUSION

It's clear that there are many hurdles to be overcome on the road to hybrid working, but above all there are many advantages to be gained.

"I know from speaking to many of our clients that transforming for hybrid is a significant challenge, but it's of paramount importance," says Mark Dixon. "The opportunities it offers to both employers and employees can't be underestimated.

"People now want to work wherever is most convenient and productive, and employers who fail to embrace the hybrid model risk losing their best talent. The so-called Great Resignation has been given a lot of publicity – and it's very real. The workforce is increasingly choosy, and as Accenture's study has shown, the vast majority of people now want their future to be a hybrid one. If employers can't offer that choice, they not only risk an exodus of their best people – who will now be harder to replace – they will also pay the cost in terms of turnover and lost productivity.

"On the other hand, the benefits of getting hybrid right are considerable, delivering increased productivity and a happier, healthier, more diverse workforce.

"There are also big pluses in real estate terms. The switch to hybrid means reduced property costs for companies, while employees can benefit from working closer to home. In a recent survey, we found that more than three quarters of workers said a workplace nearer their home would be a must-have for their next job move.

"And with reduced commuting come the considerable environmental benefits of a reduced carbon footprint – together with the attendant health benefits associated with walking or cycling to work.

"Companies and organisations that embrace the hybrid model have the world to win. And now is the time to make that change."

To help your business navigate the new world of work, speak to IWG today
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