How can technology activate your hybrid work ecosystem?

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Organizations must accelerate their digitalization efforts in four key areas to ensure a thriving hybrid work environment.

A well-oiled workplace puts workers at the center. Irrespective of how the business landscape shifts, that is one core value that helps an organization excel in the long run. But in today's highly transformed and distributed hybrid workplace, ensuring employee happiness and cohesion can seem tough.

The recent EY Work Reimagined survey reveals that 9 out of 10 employees in the Nordics expect flexibility at work – and they are ready to quit if they don't get it. From the vantage point we stand at today, we see a workplace forever changed. How do you ensure a great employee experience, asset security, collaboration and productivity as employees take more active control of their work-life?

The answer: the digital workplace, or "Bytes" as we call it at the EY organization.

Bytes represents the user-centric digital workplace that helps enable knowledge sharing and collaboration regardless of time, place and setting. Bytes is part of the three "Bs" – the other two being Bricks and Behaviors, which refer to the physical workplace and organizational culture respectively. The three Bs collectively represent the core components required to reimagine work for the hybrid workplace.

Great organizations are able to connect their people with what they need to perform their best at work – by understanding and supporting inclusive behaviors, providing physical spaces that revolutionize innovation and finally, by providing the technology needed to enable the best of all the hybrid work facets.

In this article, we'll take a close look at four key areas in a hybrid workplace where technology will play a major role.

Why is it important to reimagine technology in the hybrid scenario?

By reconfiguring or enhancing the digital workplace to support hybrid work behaviors, leaders can set up a system that derives insights from individuals working from anywhere and understand how they can best contribute to the organization. A robust digital workplace also provides the tools necessary to improve collaboration across physical and digital spaces, support professional growth and enhance people's sense of belonging.

In the Nordics, employees are keen on better digital assets that can make their work more seamless, our Work Reimagined survey finds. More than half (51%) of the employees in the Nordics want better technology in the office, while 45% are more eager about home office "hardware" investments. These figures show how the role of a digital workplace is already understood and accepted by employees.

In essence, an inclusive and comprehensive digital workplace strengthens every aspect of the hybrid work continuum. What would be the main areas where technology would play a greater role in the hybrid workplace? Let's find out.

1. Employee experience

Even before hybrid work came into play, we have seen how technology can augment virtual experiences. This trend persists today and aligns very well to the workplace. The technology experiences that employers provide can define the employee experience in a hybrid setting.

How employees connect, communicate and collaborate defines the employee experience. As a result, facilitating these qualities through the digital workplace becomes of paramount importance to employers.

Using advanced technologies to enhance team building, ideation, co-creation and upskilling will have a huge positive impact on how people view your organization. Besides improving employee satisfaction, this would also serve as a great currency to attract new talent.

1. Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity measures have always been very integral to an organization's everyday operations and have been baked into its anatomy. Hybrid working, if anything, has only made the need to focus on cybersecurity even more important.

Remote and hybrid work models hold huge implications for network design. A distributed workforce means that we're no longer in a perimeter-based world. As a result, networking and security need to be secure by design.

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While organizations can mould company premises to ensure they're safe, it might not be realistic to expect the same level of safety at remote workspaces (co-working spaces, home, cafes). If not addressed, this can put employees and the organization at risk.

EY Global Information Security Survey 2021

%

of CISOs say that they have never been as concerned as they are now about their ability to manage the cyber threat.

Organizations must ensure that their people have the equipment they need to run the technology they use. Both at the office and away from it. Establishing these ground rules from the get-go can help secure the work environment irrespective of where and when your employees are working.

3. Communication and collaboration

Communication and collaboration were fairly simple before the pandemic disrupted the workplace as we knew it. It was a healthy combination of in-person and virtual interactions, with the former happening more frequently. But the era of hybrid work has significantly altered how employees connect with each other, making collaborations more complex.

The crux of workplace conversations now hinges mostly on virtual tools. While there is nothing fundamentally wrong with this, one can argue that virtual meetings simply do not replace physical ones. But if there's one way a virtual meeting can actually be as engaging as an in-person meeting, it is through advanced technology.

Be it hiring, peer-to-peer communication, training or customer demonstrations, technology can enable immersive hybrid experiences, ensuring effective collaboration through and through. However, the key to making the adoption of such technologies more sustainable is to make these tools comfortable for employees to use for a long time.

4. Productivity and workplace analytics

It is easy to lose sight of the ultimate goal of a project or even your organization when you're not within a physical space where everyone is working in tandem towards the same vision. This might result in lethargy kicking in, negatively affecting employee morale and productivity.

Using advanced analytics technology can give organizations better insight into the behavior of people and how they interact. Intuitive tools that enable open-ended surveys and support other mechanisms which help an employee feel heard, could improve factors like efficiency and wellbeing.

Employees who prefer a hybrid work model want company investments in at-home and on-site technology to remain productive.

Understanding employee motivation and productivity helps leaders understand issues like burnout, stress and management dynamics even without the obvious hints offered by face-to-face interactions.

Implementing great technological solutions is a great first step, but organizations shouldn't stop here. Disruption is perpetual and innovations will always emerge. Quick-thinking organizations can thrive in the new normal only by embracing a mindset of continuous improvement.

How EY teams can help

The demand from many of EY clients to partake in ideation sessions with their industry peers to discuss experiences around existing workplace challenges has been quite inspiring. As a result, EY teams have formulated the work reimagined action labs, where we invite clients for interactive sessions.

As part of these labs, selected people from many leading organizations in the Nordics meet up with EY professionals to get inspired, discuss and co-create. The sessions utilize virtual collaboration tools, are highly engaging and focus on the biggest challenges that each participating organization face – be it with respect to people, the office space or technology.
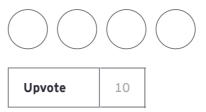
Summary

The digital workplace is a fundamental component of the hybrid work environment. Those that have digitized successfully, or are in the process of digitizing key areas, are seeing better results – in teamwork, data security, productivity, customer experiences and the overall bottom line.

About this article

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