Team Topic and Number: Distributed Work- Team #9

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Accelerating the future of distributed work

At the foundation of a thriving and sustainable organization is its people and their sense of community. People are the single most important asset and their patterns of interaction and communication has shifted dramatically in the last couple of months and will be for the foreseeable future. The forced "work from home experiment" has contradicted antiquated beliefs and proven that the workforce can be more agile, resilient, and productive. Scaled physical distancing worldwide and low touch environments are now the basis for a safe workplace that promotes well-being and minimizes risk. This has forced leaders to rethink processes and re-evaluate their dependency of a physical space altogether. Every day, we are unlocking new ideas and defining the future of work at an accelerated adoption rate higher than ever seen before.

Although the timeline of returning to the physical workplace is uncertain, the experience has shown us that the following four drivers will redefine the future of work:

Community- Building a collaborative and trusting culture on choice for remote workers

Cost- Replacing traditional workplace footprints with only mission critical space

Productivity- Automating processes to enable anyplace work strategies

Risk- Safety, compliance, and monitoring risk within the remote workplace

Technology continues to transform how, when, and where we work, leading us to clearly understand what we need to be productive and engaged. With thoughtful engagement we can unlock the full potential of our people and their environments, resulting in a resilient workplace strategy that maximizes output, mitigates risk, and potential shifts in fixed overhead costs.

A sense of community is important
It is key for us to reference a few facts about human performance and needs. According to research there are 6 key factors to create conditions for workers to flourish and knowledge to flow:
1. Social cohesion
2. Perceived supervisory support,
3. Information sharing
4. Vision and goal clarity
5. External communication
6. Trust.

The Allen Curve shows that when you distance workers less than 24 feet (8 meters), communication frequency goes way up. When you add the new physical distancing recommendations, the new range that balances safety and optimal communication is 6-24 feet. In addition, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, show that organizations can directly impact physiological and safety needs, providing a sense of belonging. When we are comfortable with one another our conversations become more nuanced and personal.

"When we trust, we share more."
Studies show that when this happens productivity increases and turnover decreases. Even for teams where people work from anywhere, they still find ways to come together in person. This helps to build those social bonds that generate trust, therefore increasing the willingness and desire to share.

Physical space requirements drive cost impact

Industry studies show people will want to maintain autonomy over their day and are willing to give up personalized items such as their assigned desk in order to keep that autonomy. We have also found that knowledge workers have a clear distinction of what activities are best suited for the workplace and working from anywhere. It will be key for business leaders to collaborate with their industry partners to think strategically and creatively about how to marry human-centric workplace with cost efficiency.

As offices lay empty, the need and cost of physical space is on the forefront of the C-level suite. More flexibility in lease terms, furnishing designs, and evaluating amenities will be the focal point to meet the financial pressures. In the interim, we see heightened cleaning protocols, reuse of communal spaces, implementing physical distancing and low touch requirements raising operating costs.

Now more than ever, it seems clear that organizations will need to take a wholistic vison with a long-term approach. Companies will need to think beyond the short term and look to a new future of the organization's mission, vision, and values.

How technology can help

Digital and mobile technologies, global connectivity, cloud, and IoT have redefined how employees get their job done. As we were initiating a transition towards more hybrid workplaces, the pandemic experience is live-testing organizations' culture, technology, and operational resiliency and efficiency in the face of physical distancing measures.

Our work has been entirely digitized and technology providers have offered the tools for communication, collaboration, and virtualization. Video has become a leading modality to promote human interaction at work. Technology solutions will continue to improve with new tools and features, supporting organizations' needs for better visual thinking and connections, and ultimately enhancing our user experience. Organizations will need to develop programs and provide training to ensure employees' adoption of tools and stay connected with teams. Leveraging new standards around technology will bring greater efficiency, productivity, and connectedness in this new *"work from anywhere"* (WFA) workplace.

While technology has been a facilitator for work from anywhere, it is the employees themselves who demonstrated their ability to self-manage and deliver on company goals and objectives. The preconceived correlation of productivity and employees physically being 'at work' has been challenged. Industry surveys show that employees feel just as productive, even in this 'forced'

WFA experience. In these early stages the technology and process may not have been always optimal, yet people are demonstrating high performance.

The key will be a well-planned *work from anywhere* program. With no significant impacts to productivity, companies have the unique opportunity and time to strategize and develop plans that will effectively redefine their new 'workplace', leveraging the human-centric component and providing workers with choice.

Why choice is important

The demand for flexibility and fluidity in where and how people work existed before the pandemic, yet under half of organizations had a flex policy in place. Since organizations did not have a choice and moved all employees to a work from home arrangement, employee expectations have evolved even further. The need for companies to move quickly has proven to be the difference in meeting this demand. These changes will have a cultural, operational impact on companies. According to a study completed by Global Workplace Analytics, 80% of employees want to *WFA* at least some of the time. As they develop new routines, employees will have the opportunity to integrate their work *with* their life rather than attempting to balance life with work. Communication, morale, and collaboration have a significant impact on an employee's workplace satisfaction. With a varied 'workplace', these aspects will shape employee satisfaction and how the work gets executed.

Companies will need to develop clear guidelines, by working with their employees, to establish what will be best for the centralization of the roles, functions, and activities that need to remain in the office and those that can be done remotely.

Security and safety first

As we look past the interim risk of bringing workers back into the physical workplace to the future of more work from anywhere, there are some risks that need to be considered. Given the unpredictability of COVID-19, leaders have been showing caution in plans to bring employees back to the office. Security and Safety are two key risks organizations need to consider.

The risks associated with security are primarily driven by the increased use of communication and collaboration technologies outside the controlled environment. Compliance around confidential discussions and storage of sensitive and personal data may be exposed and pose a reputational and financial risk. Organizations will need to continuously invest in and reinforce their network security, as the percentage of workers working from anywhere increases beyond the interim of phasing back into the office.

Transparency and consistent communication are essential to employees feeling safe because they understand what the organization is doing and what their individual responsibilities will be. A sense of safety, as people, is one of our fundamental needs. According to the American Psychological Association, 74% of employees report that work is a significant contributor to their stress, which is estimated by the American Institute of Stress to cost organizations about $300 billion a year.

Deciding specifically what to do is made more complex by the fact that the timeline for phasing back in initiatives is uncertain. Consider initiatives and investments that have long term benefits and extend beyond the physical workplace to WFA programs.

Projection

The future of work will become more human centric because it is required to enhance collaboration, productivity, and connection in both the physical workplace and while *working anywhere*. That transformation will be supported by technology innovation and adaptation to become part of a more distributed work scheme that enables employees to connect and build their organization's values and culture. Listening and giving employees a voice will help manage change more effectively, but centralization and densification strategies that drive efficiencies and cost will be the key focus for decision makers. Leadership needs to evaluate the immediate risks and safety of their employees before establishing a timeline for returning to the physical workplace and determine if they will extend the experiment for a longer steady state analysis. As these decisions impact the need for physical space, a demand shift will affect rates and leverage in urban and suburban real estate markets.