THE NEW WORK ORDER: HUMANIZING EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE (EX)
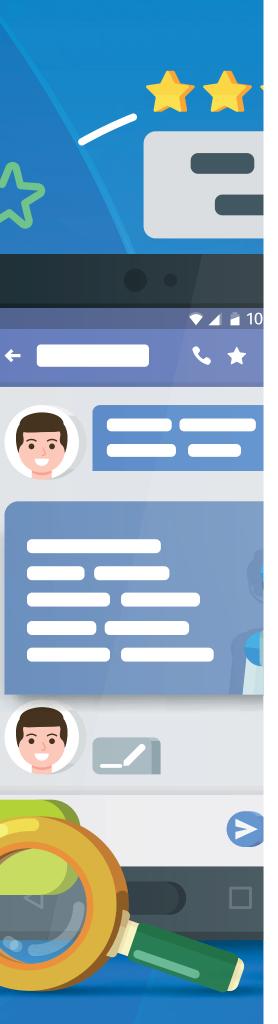
Abstract

Imagine this. A CAD draftsman sets up his drawing board and plotter at home. A shop floor worker programs a CNC machine without being at the factory. A bit outside the realm of possibility, perhaps?

Even with the pandemic disrupting the way people work, the world cannot go completely remote.

That being said, there will still be some job roles or functions that will require employees to be physically present in the office or on the shop floor, even as a large part of the workforce acclimatizes to remote workstyles.

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Research today estimates that even in a typical office setup, say that of an insurance firm, majority of employees can accomplish 80% of their work while working remotely[1]. There is a flurry of advertisements endorsing the possibilities of what can be achieved in a remote setup - banks helping customers open new savings accounts from the comfort of their homes, insurance agents explaining and selling their products over a Zoom call. The DNA of work, as we knew it, has transmuted. The digitization of the workplace which was already in motion, has been accelerated by the pandemic and is more of a reality now than just a cautiously experimented concept.

These progressive changes, however, have come at some cost. Employees tend to spend a large part of their daily lives at work. In the process, workplaces have a direct correlation with their identity as social beings – a place where they get the opportunity to network, mingle, learn, and co-create with peers. The pandemic has markedly altered this reality. As the world has embraced the new 'distance' economy as a way of life - to survive the ravages of the pandemic, work-from-home, hybrid workplaces and remote work have become a necessity. While this has been a boon for ensuring business continuity, the human side of the workplace has suffered the aftermath, as social circles have dwindled. Though the teams and colleagues who worked together before the pandemic, are able to keep up the camaraderie sans the physical proximity, the new recruits who are just stepping into the corporate world or even lateral transfers - are left in something of a lurch. So are the organizations recruiting them.

To bridge this gap between the remote-work and human connect, substantial investments need to be made in tools and software that will offer some semblance of solidarity and cohesion for all employees. In the work from anywhere-anytime-any device scenario, it is imperative that organizations provide their employees with the best-in-class experience to help them manage deadlines, maintain quality of work and be resilient. Hiring, onboarding, and training processes can be carried out seamlessly even in a remote setup. With the right infrastructure, everyone can join in from the comfort of their homes and contribute productively.

On the bright side, we are already on the right track with technologies like AI and Cloud being leveraged extensively to support these changing times. These technologies are empowering employees to work securely from any location and on any device with access to all apps, settings and data and helping them pick up right from where they left off.

~ 75%[2] of remote workers say their expectation from hybrid work has increased, meaning there is no going back to a completely on-premises work-culture. This calls for increased investments in supporting technologies as well as a fluid talent pool. Location should no longer impede the onboarding of a skilled resource from anywhere in the world for a project that requires specific skill sets, thereby allowing business to effectively address skill gaps. Families should be able to reconfigure themselves and share responsibilities - especially when it comes to working parents, or differently abled members - contributing to their homes, society, and their organizations efficiently and productively. This will be critical in promoting a culture of diversity and inclusivity.

As an increasing number of frontline workers embrace the new ways of work, it is foreseeable that they might want to continue this way as a factor of choice rather than situational compulsion. Organizations will have to double up their efforts to enable security, social engagement, team bonding, collaboration.
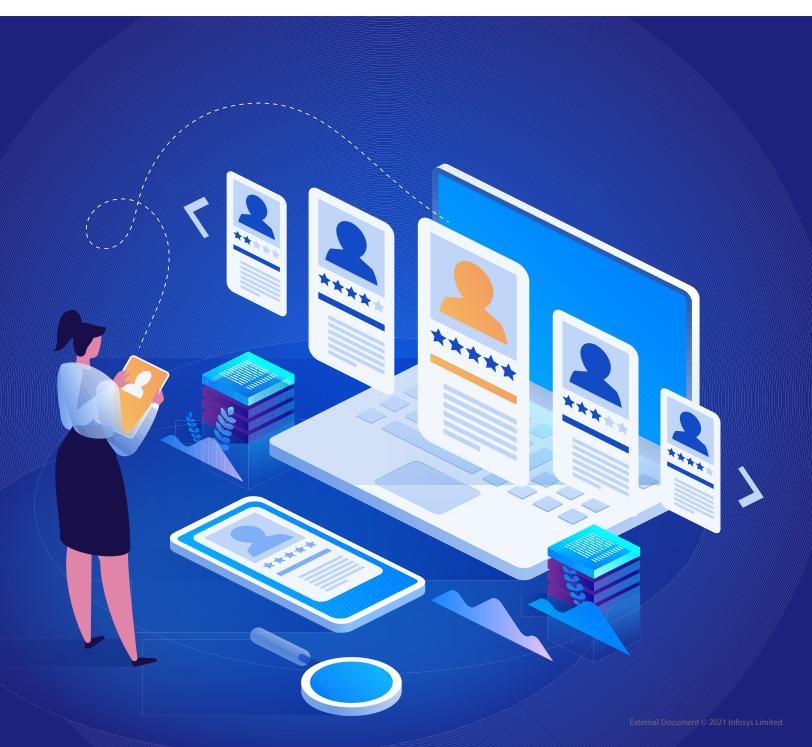
We are already seeing these changes in motion. The adoption of Microsoft Teams has significantly gone up. The concept of using physical phone for discussions or using a physical meeting room are distant memories. The tools available for intuitive and seamless collaboration are going to change the way employees build apps and work. Microsoft's new offerings are employee experience (EX) driven - offering employees a platform to engage, form connections, access curated content. Organizations get a chance to get better insights into workplace behavior and functions. These EX driven improvements will lead to employees that are more productive, committed, engaged, and empowered, translating into a profitable and resilient enterprises.

It is hard to say how long this transient situation will last and where it is headed. Yet, with the right tools, advanced technologies, and a forward outlook and growth mindset, we could be looking at a future wildly different from the times now. A future that is in constant state of flux, sans boundaries, and still far more efficient and productive than ever before.

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Madhusudhan R is Senior Delivery Manager and leads Global Delivery for Infosys Digital Workplace Services unit. He has 25 years of experience in the IT services, practice building, pre-sales, and delivery for global Fortune 500 clients across multiple verticals including Retail, Distribution, Logistics, Financial services, Pharma and other industries. He has an extensive experience in delivering large technology transformation programs for global clients as part of their digital transformation initiatives.

Madhu has been an active speaker in industry forums (CII / PMP conference) and colleges providing his views and thought leadership on Program Management and Cloud Technologies.

References:

[1]   Infosys Report, "A Workplace That Works: Impacts of shifts in the digital, physical and cultural landscape", 2021

[2]   https://www.gartner.com/en/insights/future-of-work

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