

# What will define the digital workplace in 2020?

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The past year has seen companies implement several incremental changes to create a more immersive experience for employees around the digital workplace. Much of this has revolved around driving collaboration and using automation so workers can deliver increased strategic value.



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While this automation has always been a focus area when it comes to computing-centric solutions, robotic process automation (RPA) has been a significant driver for growth in 2019. However, one of the most disappointing technology trends that has not materialised is that of practical blockchain technology. It can potentially benefit all industries and transform the digital workplace, but many decision-makers are still stuck in the cryptocurrency mindset. There are positive signs with the digitising of health records and insurance processing using elements of the blockchain, but it will be some time before the technology becomes mainstream.

## **Collaborate, protect, find**

Instead, the focus has been on making enhancements to collaboration platforms. This has been the fundamental challenge plaguing companies – how do you break beyond the traditional limitations of people sitting in a central location and instead engage with one another digitally from anywhere in the world? To this end, Microsoft has invested significantly in enhancing its Teams unified communication and collaboration platform.

Another part of this shift towards the digital workplace is to ensure that cyber security keeps up with the pace of change. People remain the most significant infection vector into the organisation. They either open phishing emails containing ransomware or do things on their laptops that introduce the ability for malicious users to penetrate the organisational defences. This is especially important given that the office environment is no longer limited to a building that can provide localised defences. Instead, collaboration tools like Microsoft Office 365 will continually introduce cyber protection mechanisms to reflect the geographically dispersed digital workplace.

Another important element is the need to become better at finding information. This means companies must have the ability to search for something more intelligently in a way that interprets context and not be reliant on simply tagging everything like in the past. This is where artificial intelligence (AI) can be used to interpret the content and delivering insights to the end user.

## Making the move

Thanks to the arrival of the Microsoft Azure data centres earlier this year, more local companies are embracing the transition to the digital workplace. Of course, the level of sophistication will still be determined by the type of industry.

For example, it is not practical for labour-based organisations (think manufacturing and mining) to embrace telecommuting. However, they can still empower their deskless workers to interact with their mobile devices or kiosks in new ways to benefit from AI and other insights while on site.

Information workers (for example, professional services, insurance, and financial) are starting to benefit from working remotely. While many traditionalists view it as essential to have people in the office, this is starting to change with a willingness to give employees the opportunity to work wherever it suits them while still coming into an office when required.

## Safe space

Companies can create a space for their employees to collaborate better. From a process side, RPA is becoming increasingly important in this regard. This is where the business is starting to look for opportunities to allow a robotic agent to do more of the menial work and let people refocus on where they can deliver better value.

Even though the physical workplace will never completely disappear, it is becoming less of a constraint in terms of geographic or physical location. Altron Karabina has done much work around remote teaming and interactions using Microsoft Teams for virtual collaborations, meetings, and presentations. The digital workplace means you do not have to have everyone physically present in a room.

One of the most exciting things heading into 2020 and beyond will be to remove the grunt work out of employee interactions. This level of automation gives people the ability to rise to a new level of responsibility and capability. Now employees can add an even richer value layer to the organisation.

And thanks to the ability to interact across time zones and physical locations, teams can now work on the same outcomes with equal effect if they were physically in the same place. But a cautious approach is necessary. Employees must become disciplined in how they control work and its impact on their personal time. 2020 must bring with it a maturity in how this is managed. So, fundamentally, education will be a vital aspect of the digital workplace as much as embracing technology is.

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