

# The new reality of the workplace in 2021 and beyond

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With the current global pandemic restrictions and lockdowns, it is very likely that a large percentage of the local workforce will continue to work from home well into 2021. The lockdowns may have been adjusted, but two central themes have emerged over the past few months.



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Remote working has proven to be an effective and productive model for employees with many organisations re-evaluating their operational models to embed a more sustainable and permanent approach to working from home.

The reality is that the working from home model that has slid out from under the perception that employees take advantage or don't do their jobs properly. Instead, it has translated into considerable savings on real estate rental and maintenance costs as well as having a positive effect on societal issues such as road congestion and pollution. It has also put employee wellbeing at the forefront of the business agenda which, for many, has shown a marked increase in productivity and employee output as they fast adjusted to a newly balanced life.

## Having a choice

According to the NTT Ltd.'s 2020 Intelligent Workplace Report 'Shaping Employee Experiences for a World Transformed' almost 74% of organisations agree that employees would prefer to have the choice and flexibility when it comes to where they work.

Over the past year, around 35% of enterprises have adapted their IT policies to help employees work within more agile operating models, more than half (52%) have deployed new communication and productivity tools, and 46% have increased security to ensure that employees and systems remain secure. There have been steady shifts from traditional working models that have helped both business and employee adapt to the workplace of today, a workplace that may well define the future.

From the moment that the pandemic first forced companies and individuals to work in isolation from variable locations, working models have evolved. Gartner, Adobe, Amazon, Facebook, Twitter, Mastercard, PayPal and Nielson are just some of the global brands that have adopted a long-term remote working strategy to allow for employees to work flexibly, and in ways that match their preferred methods of productivity. The statistics from the NTT survey are not alone in backing up employee remote working preferences either. The Global Workplace Analytics survey found that 73% of employees feel they are more successful when working from home, and 76% want to continue doing just that.

### **A change in workplace strategies**

These changes in approach and attitude mean that organisations have to establish new workplace strategies today in order to prepare for the office of tomorrow. They have to take the employees entire work and life experience into account, creating a holistic working environment that's capable of handling virtual offices, collaboration and engagement. The Intelligent Workplace report found that less than half of companies (48%) are already undergoing reviews of their office design so they can optimise it for changing employee requirements, and that around 60% were set to install video conferencing and video collaboration spaces in a bid to tie remote and office environments together. But this is only one part of the equation.

Organisations must focus on all the threads that weave into the structure of the new workplace. They need to focus on providing the distributed workforce with the right tools to get the job done, but also on employee wellness and engagement. A shift to ensuring activity-based work initiatives are provided can mitigate against potential employee disconnect or feelings of isolations, and are supported by intelligent solutions that empower people.

Businesses need to go beyond the technology, making sure people can really leverage it to the benefit of themselves and the business. The providing of training, and a commitment to culture and employee motivation to embrace new systems will show individuals how to use workplace analytics to understand their pain points and their potential. Through this, businesses are able to implement the necessary tools and systems to allow them to better prioritise and customise their work styles.

There are unavoidable challenges when enabling a remote workforce, some have been ironed out throughout the course of 2020, but others still need to remain a priority as organisations move into 2021. Agility, cost-efficiency and security are critical to ensuring that the distributed workforce enjoys an enterprise-grade experience, consistently. This will introduce advanced collaboration, document sharing, remote conferencing, and steady engagement tools that can really connect people across multiple locations and continents.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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