The Digital Workplace Revolution

How to create the fluid work environment that employees—of all ages—are looking for

By Kai Andrews

The Challenge

Since 2015, when millennials became the largest generation in the U.S. workforce, much has been written about the expectations they bring to the workplace. As digital natives who grew up in a fully mobile and connected world, they seek environments where they can interact easily, discover new opportunities quickly, and add value even in areas outside their job description. They also expect the impact of their work to be more important than when or where they do it.

But the bigger issue is not generational; it's digital.

Employees of all ages are feeling the gap between the flexibility of their personal digital lives and the rigidity of their work environments. As people experience ever greater mobility and connectedness in their own lives, they want those experiences to translate to their workplaces. It's not only millennials who are frustrated by corporate hierarchies, siloed org charts and other barriers to the way they are thinking and connecting in their personal lives; employees of all ages are looking for more flexible, fluid work environments.

Given the tough competition to attract and keep the best talent, how do you make sure that your company provides the employee experience people are looking for in this mobile, connected world? How does your work culture align with their expectations?

Point B’s Approach

Point B works with organizations to adapt processes and cultures that attract talented employees and unlock their potential. Many companies are looking to break down traditional silos and make it easier for employees to communicate and collaborate with each other—including remotely and in real time. Often, this means that companies need to change business processes and better adapt to mobile work environments. They need to provide user-friendly tools that make it easy to get daily work done. And they need to make a cultural shift that says these changes are truly OK.

As your organization digitizes business processes and supporting technology, you can create a more desirable and fluid experience for all employees. Here's how.

Change your business processes

Research shows that millennials feel constrained by rigid roles and processes. They are eager to work in an open and collaborative environment, with the ability to share ideas on how their work could change or improve. They want to be able to jump in and work to make things better, even when their efforts fall outside their formal job description. We see these desires extending...
well beyond millennials to include employees of all ages, including self-starters and creative spirits. It's worth noting that a number of leading companies, including Google, give their employees time to do things outside their standard work assignments.

That said, if a free-thinking employee comes along with a great idea, how fast can you run with it? Are your processes, tools and content structured to adapt and change with these new ideas? Or would you be bogged down in reasons why "we've always done things this way?" Take a look at whether your organization's processes might prevent it from leveraging the very talent you've worked so hard to attract.

Change the enabling technology

As you change business processes, you'll need the technology and tools to support them. It's not unusual for companies to have outdated tools that prevent employees from using technology at work the way they use it in the rest of their lives. Employees feel the disconnect in two types of work experiences that they value: collaboration and the ability to work remotely.

Does your technology enable people to work anytime, from anywhere? If your company doesn't provide tools that make it easy to create and share content, employees may resort to downloading tools or using their own. That increases your company's content security risks and fractures your infrastructure.

Change the user experience

Many organizations are still bound by outdated technologies that are dictatorial and cumbersome to use. At the same time, employees are using the latest mobile technology in their personal lives—with intuitive, user-friendly features and functions that get better every year. Thus our mantra: Invest in functionality over form.

Do your tools dynamically connect people to each other and to related content? Is remote presence accepted as part of everyday work—made easy through video chats and instant messaging? Do you have discovery engines that serve up relevant, sharable content to employees without the need for them to take any action on their end? Opt for technology upgrades that make it easier for employees to do their daily work.

Change the work culture

One of the most critical changes in the work experience isn't about technology or process; it's about the underlying culture. Are you creating an experience that attracts and keeps the best people? Just because your company has made a process or practice more agile doesn't mean that your culture has made it more acceptable. For example, is it really "OK" not to show up in person at that weekly team meeting?

Here are a few things to think about as you consider how digitally friendly your culture is:

- Are your employees still trapped in siloed teams? Or are they able to seek out interests across the company and contribute outside their set responsibilities?
- Are employees able to pursue their passions? If talented people can't do so at your company, they'll find a company where they can.
- Is it acceptable not to be onsite for every meeting?
- Are there opportunities to network that extend beyond departments and daily work teams?

Young businesses that have grown up over the last 10 to 15 years have the advantages of being digital natives themselves. Their employees' work lives are more apt to flow similarly to their personal lives in the ways they connect and collaborate. Older companies and more rigid organizational structures will need to make a concerted effort to adjust their work cultures.

The Bottom Line

When your company thinks forward with employees to create the work experiences and opportunities they value, everyone wins. You want to be the company that the best people flock to for meaningful work—not the company they leave behind.