



Whitepaper

Future Workplace

Thought Paper
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What's new in the future workplace?

Buckle up – your future workplace is in sight!

Do you think you're working in a digital workplace just because you can work from home? We believe there is more to that story.

„The farmer's job has been farming in the past and will continue to be farming in the future. While the essential objective remains the same over time, the manual scythe has been replaced by satellite controlled and fully digital combine harvesters to support the farmer's job.“

Omnipresent trends such as globalization, digitalization, sustainability and new societal expectations are shaping an exponentially fast changing and increasingly competitive global business environment.¹ Just like the preparation for a possible future pandemic crisis, these trends require radical measures that address the need for quick adaption as well as optimization of organizational effectiveness and efficiency. To ensure this, a shift to a digital workplace environment is advisable.

The current COVID-19 situation revealed huge potential in the digitalization of workplaces: From one day to the next, organizations had to establish a techsupported environment in which flexible and remote work was possible to ensure the companies' ability to continue their

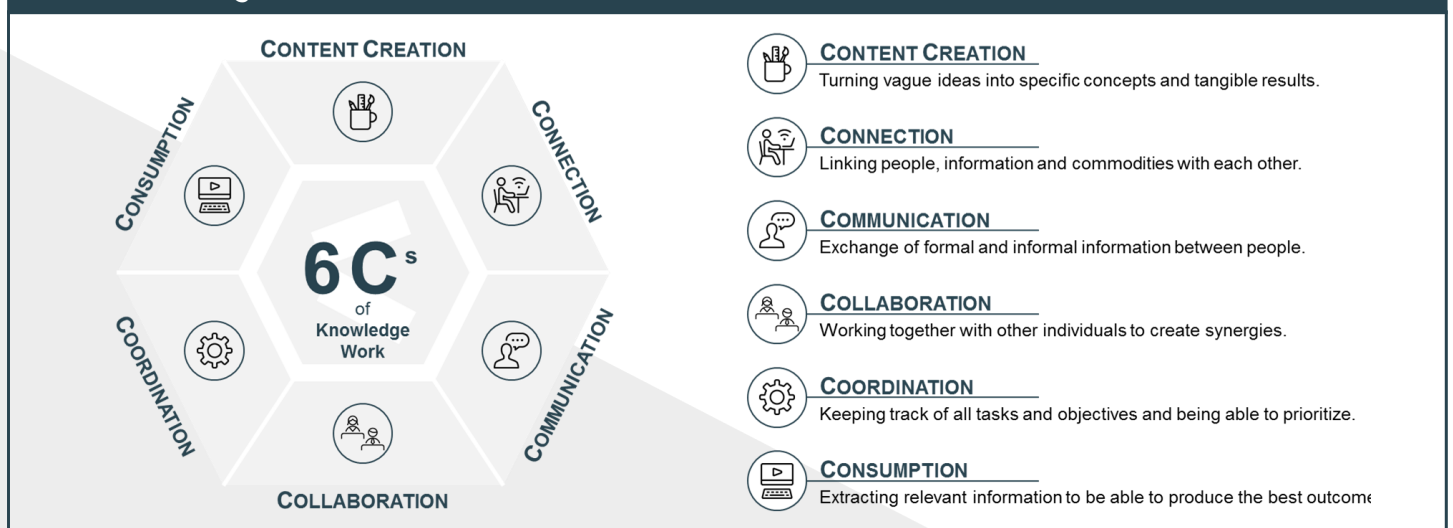
operations. Now, entering a new normal, organizations are taking their lessons learned to adapt prior working models and develop digital workplaces.

Taking this transformational mentality as a chance, a more holistic perspective is needed regarding the question what the workplace of the future will look like for office workers and how this workplace can be established in organizations.

Similar to the initially mentioned farmer's job, the main tasks and objectives of office workers will predominantly remain the same in the future: this includes, among others, bringing value to the business and having an impact by contributing expertise, driving innovation, solving problems, saving cost. Yet, how might these objectives be pursued in a future workplace?

First of all, the future workplace can be described as a combination of a virtual and physical workplace that is technologically connected to other workplaces and supported by digital tools to ensure the most efficient and effective way of work in terms of content creation, connection, communication, coordination, collaboration and consumption.

6 Cs of Knowledge Work



¹World Economic Forum (2019). HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (p.9)



Six Cs on what the future workplace will look like

These six elements of knowledge work already exist, just like the farmer's job. Nowadays, office workers are already creating content, connecting with each other to communicate and collaborate, coordinating their work and consuming knowledge to ensure the best results. But how is this different from the future workplace?

Content Creation: *Turning vague ideas into specific concepts and tangible results.*

Development of content will be increasingly assisted by systems while workers will focus on innovative and complex data-based problem solving. The latter will be supported by learning processing programs that are controlled by optic and linguistic instead of haptic stimuli.

Connection: *Linking people and information via commodities with each other.*

Office workers will be connected to people and information via digital corporate as well as open social networks, which will contain data about individual know-how and professional experience. Furthermore, they will be connected via organizational or open, on-demand knowledge platforms to connect people with the right information.

Communication: *Formal and informal exchange of information between people.*

To overcome barriers such as internationality, different time zones and increased flexibility, real-time communication will be replaced by on-demand virtual and non-virtual communication forms and continuous and instant social exchange opportunities (e.g. time delayed video and voice messages).

Collaboration: *Working together with other individuals to create synergies.*

Communicating and working together seamlessly as one taskforce among the whole organization, as well as beyond, will be ensured by cloud-based collaboration solutions that allow all members to virtually and proactively contribute to tasks.

Coordination: *Keeping track of all tasks and objectives and being able to prioritize.*

Handling multiple work packages and employees simultaneously will be required by organizations, managers and individuals. Transparency concerning team setups, tasks, responsibilities and capabilities will be essential and supported by digital platforms, allowing task tracking and overall coordination.

Consumption: *Extract relevant information to be able to produce the best outcome.*

Gathering ample and relevant information, extracting and structuring required information to get a task done and consolidating it to make it easily comprehensible for employees and co-workers and usable as input for the development of content.





How to cultivate a digital workplace: Four guiding principles

Although the core activities will remain more or less the same in future office jobs, they are likely to be executed in a different environment and in a different way. This requires new design principles. To cultivate a digital workplace successfully, the following four key design principles should be considered:

Design principle 1 – flexibility: *Providing flexibility in all aspects of work for employees, as well as quick adaptability of work practices.*

Flexibility emphasizes the empowerment of employees to decide for themselves to work from any location, at any time and in any order they deem most appropriate. Flexibility also fosters the employees' work-life balance, productivity and retention.² 54% of employees asked in a Gallup workplace survey said they would leave their current workplace for one that offers flexible hours.³ The workplace infrastructure setup and the culture

should foster this ideal. Potentially even adaptations of the overall organizational structure are required. While leaders in the past may have focused much on managing employee tasks, leaders of the future will have to guide, empower and set impulses for employees at a distance and therefore adapt their leadership style.

According to the findings of a study conducted by Kienbaum and Stepstone⁴, leaders predominantly need to provide flexibility, room for collaboration and empowerment for creation. They also have to ensure transparency in terms of information and knowledge transfer. Especially the two latter dimensions displayed a need for action. Thus, it becomes important to effectively utilize workforce capabilities and networks, coordinate them via guidance and structure, and establish easily accessible knowledge management tools to secure knowledge sharing and transfer. All of this ensures work being carried out properly.

Four guiding principles to cultivate a digital workplace

Providing independency in terms of location, time and approach of work for employees and ensuring quick adaptability of work practices to facilitate problem-solving content creation.

Understanding the employee as a key client and focusing on creating a demand-based environment e.g. for learning (consumption), working (content creation & collaboration) and communication.



Increasing project setups and reducing departmental boundaries concerning collaboration and communication to ensure knowledge exchange and address the complexity of future problems.

Identifying, selecting and using IT tools to directly support the digital work in terms of content creation, connection, communication, collaboration, coordination and consumption and focus on the employee's demands.

² LinkedIn Talent Solutions (2019). Global Talent Trends: The 3 trends transforming your workplace (p.25)

³ Gallup (2020). Is Working Remotely Effective? Gallup Research Says Yes

⁴ Kienbaum & StepStone (2020). Agile Unternehmen: Zukunftstrend oder Mythos der digitalen Arbeitswelt? (p.36)



Design principle 2 – structured fluidity: *Increasing fluidity of work assignments across the company in a structured framework, reducing departmental boundaries in fulfilling tasks.*

To address the difficulty of future problems and facilitate complex and innovative solutions, reorganizing the way companies distribute work assignments and allowing more organizational fluidity of tasks and capabilities will be essential. Ensuring work is accomplished in the most efficient and effective way it will be important to coordinate the workforce across the whole organization, based on a competency match and increasing project-based structures. In order to generate optimal content in a fluid organization, it is vital to have transparency concerning capabilities, experiences and knowledge as well as tasks and responsibilities within the whole organization.⁵ This will ensure that the right groups of people connect with each another and create the required content.

Beyond connecting the right people with the required academic, professional and cultural background, it is crucial that these people are able to easily collaborate and communicate about their tasks in order to create the best customer-solutions.⁶ Adopting tools and structures that recreate immediacy and informality while allowing employees to work digitally will likely foster collaboration and communication.⁷ Paired with cross-functionality, this approach also promotes the consideration of problems from different angles.

As work will predominantly be done in team settings where an array of knowledge and experience will lead to success, ensuring a continuous, structured and adequate level of communication and structural fluidity to work on different tasks will be key.

Design principle 3 – tech-supported: *The right match of technology fulfilling the needs and demands in a digital work environment.*

There is an abundance of available tools to choose from and SaaS has certainly made it easier and initially cheap-

er to implement them. The use of IT-supported tools to complete work will continue to increase, yet the tools need to directly support the digital work and should not be the reason the work exists. Hence, going forward, tools may even be “designed first” for digital work.⁸ These tools need to provide direct support for facilitating content-creation, communication and collaboration. Moreover, they need to remove complexity from tasks and to be able to provide information that would otherwise be time-consuming to attain. In a world where there is a surplus of tools, which can easily be replaced, it is essential to identify those that support employees, function intuitively and are mobile responsive at the same time.⁹ Otherwise, there is a high risk that employees will be overwhelmed and may even refrain from using the latest technology.



⁵ Briken, Chillas & Krzywdzinski (2017). The New Digital Workplace: How New Technologies Revolutionise Work (p.169)

⁶ Forbes (2020). 5 Things Businesses Need From The Future Digital Workplace, Including More Intimate Communications

⁷ LinkedIn Talent Solutions (2019). Global Talent Trends: The 3 trends transforming your workplace (p.27)

⁸ Forbes & Girling (2020). 3 Ways Crisis Will Shape The Future of Knowledge Work

⁹ Kienbaum & SAP (2020). Daten und Talente: Studie zur HR-Strategie und -Organisation 2020 (p.26)



Beyond ensuring that employees are satisfied and ready to embrace new tools, new technology also needs to be compliant, secure and integrated into the overall IT landscape. Single-Sign-On (SSO) and easy sign-up processes will increase user compliance in a secure network. In addition, the saying "the more the merrier" does not apply to the number of tools a company uses. Thus, the identification of a few digital tools required to perform 80-90% of the work is recommended, as working with multiple tools and continuously switching between them creates fatigue and reduces productivity.¹⁰ Finally, a holistic view of job clusters is required as a basis to identify and implement the most relevant tools for each cluster.

Design principle 4 – human-centered: *Understanding and focusing on the digital human experience to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the digital work environment.*

Even in the digital workplace, employees will need the appropriate infrastructure, hardware and software to carry out their work. Having human-centered measures in place safeguards continuous employee engagement, retention and performance.¹¹ To ensure that the digital work environment is experienced intuitively, efficiently and effectively, employers need to assess and adapt the current work environment and select technologies that individual employees deem as accurate to fulfill their work within their new work reality.

Hence, the workplace needs to set an overall framework of an array of options that employees can choose from based on how they accomplish their work best.¹² This certainly also requires an adaption of the office infrastructure to meet those needs, as the transition from analog to virtual workspaces should work seamlessly.

Employees will require different environments when engaging in content creation, depending on the question if the work is done individually or in a group setting. Providing a diverse set of "break-outs", quiet as well as creative work possibilities are therefore advisable. To support employees to connect, communicate and collaborate, digital and analog workspaces are essential, and they support building a common culture, allowing individuals to meet people and share ideas. Possibilities for social interactions are a vital element in creating a human-centered work environment and should allow both digital and analog opportunities. To ensure employees aren't overwhelmed by the level of information to be consumed it is recommended to keep lean internal communication structures. If possible, also provide a digital, on-demand database where information is easily accessible, aggregated and comprehensive. Overall, to ensure a positive digital human experience, an employer's first contribution should be setting up an attractive virtual as well as on-site work environment focusing on simplicity, flexibility and usability.



¹⁰ World Economic Forum (2019). HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (p.5,11,17)

¹¹ Kienbaum & SAP (2020). Daten und Talente: Studie zur HR-Strategie und -Organisation 2020 (p.25)

¹² Forbes Insights (2017). Blueprint for a Borderless Workplace: Empowering Users in the Anytime, Anywhere Workforce (p.12)



Next Steps

To support employees in mastering the 6 Cs, companies are advised to keep the four design principles in mind when cultivating a digital workplace. They are essential when considering the journey towards a workplace that combines virtual and physical environments, which are technologically connected to other workplaces and supported by digital tools. Your organization should seize the opportunity and use the current momentum of the existing crisis to shift to a true digital work environment. Four initial steps are proposed that guide your business on its journey to a future workplace, while simultaneously ensuring value for your employees in terms of a positive digital human experience:

Give your employees a voice

Knowing about your employees' future needs concerning the 6 Cs of knowledge work is the first central component for cultivating a human-centered and demand-based digital work environment that will foster efficiency and effectiveness. Hence, it is recommended to conduct an employee survey aiming to understand your employees' needs concerning all aspects of a future workplace. Additionally, it is advisable to check your employees' current knowledge level and state of mind to identify which hotspots you should tackle early in the process.

Put your leadership team into the driver's seat

As your leadership team should act as a role model within the digital working environment, appropriate skills and competencies, especially regarding distance leadership and team management, digital tools and collaboration, have to be developed. Future-oriented leadership training and coaching as well as corporate digital leadership guidelines provide leaders with orientation in this context.

Set up an appropriate architecture

Establishing a digital workplace also requires you to provide the necessary technology and office space infrastructure. This will be different for each organization, based on the maturity level, geographic and structural complexity as well as content related diversity. Developing a holistic target picture for a digital workplace requires to bring decision makers with different perspectives (e.g. IT, HR, infrastructure) together. Here, an overall roadmap, including a timeline and the added value for the organization will have to be developed.

Define KPIs to measure the success

Before you start your transformation towards a digital workplace, make sure you know what you want to achieve by it. Define and implement a set of KPIs (recommendation: maximum 5 KPIs) that you want to improve over the course of the transformation and regularly check if you are on track. KPIs will vary depending on your overall transformation objectives. Make sure that any measure you are planning to develop has an impact on the defined KPIs.



Do you see your organization already set up for the digital future in line with your organizational goals and what your employees are expecting from you? Ensuring that you are taking the right step in the right pace requires you to develop a solid, sustainable, yet realistic digital workplace strategy. Finally, you should ensure the support of key stakeholders, as the transition will take time and require commitment and a clear focus. After all, setting up a digital workplace is more than just rolling out a number of technological gadgets and removing a few walls.

While it may disappoint you that flying a rocket ship will not be part of your job description as an office worker, your future workplace will entail new ways of working with fancy tools that make work more effective, efficient and ultimately also more fun.

For further information or support please contact our experts.

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