

Finding Agility: The Next Generation Workplace

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As the concept of “work” continues to evolve, the environment and the technologies used to optimise collaboration, innovation, and productivity become increasingly more valuable.



The way people work is evolving. In fact, even the term “work,” which was once defined as “a *place* of employment,” is now being redefined as an *activity*. And, rightly so, since now more than ever before this activity is taking place outside the traditional office space — and even outside “normal business hours.”

Today’s workers use multiple devices for work, while at the same time spending only two-thirds of their workweek at a desk. Simultaneously, there is a trend toward workshifting, where people shift work to more convenient times and locations.

Mobile computing and BYOD (bring your own device) initiatives are another strong component linked with this trend. Not surprisingly, research shows that organisations that embrace these next-gen workplace trends are seeing significant operational and strategic advantages over those still clinging to traditional business practices.

Making the commitment to embrace a Next Gen Workplace strategy by exploring new policies, procedures and cultural attitudes that reflect today’s workforce is a key requirement to developing a healthier and more profitable business model.

*Companies embracing next-gen workplace concepts and business practices were able to:

- Recruit and retain talent by incorporating BYOD policies for personal devices and flexible work schedules.
- Offer modern, flexible, and economical workspaces that inspire employees while reducing Facilities and real estate costs.
- Increase productivity for people working remotely, providing secure access to business resources from anywhere. (*“Workplace of the Future,” Citrix)

While the industry as a whole is still in the midst of narrowing down “next-gen workplace” to a single definition, our research and observations have led us to the following conclusions. The next-gen workplace is an environment that enables an agile user experience by fostering productivity, efficiency and optimal growth potential — for both employees and the business. To harness the full power of this environment, organisations must create an ecosystem founded on flexible policies that embrace new business models, transparency, collaboration and community building, diversity, and the consumerisation of technology.

This paper addresses the Next Generation Workplace strategy and examines the following components:

1. Enabling a Flexible Corporate Culture
2. Creating a Technology Ecosystem
3. Creating Activity Driven Workspaces and Physical Spaces
4. Developing an Agile Workforce.

I. ENABLING A FLEXIBLE CORPORATE CULTURE

Work flexibility is a clear desire of most workers; creating a truly flexible corporate culture requires lots of preplanning, and it’s definitely not a one-size-fits-all policy.

*A national survey of 1,203 professionals, including 116 HR professionals, 67% of HR professionals reported that their employees have a balanced work-life, yet nearly half (45%) of employees indicated that they do not have enough time each week to do personal activities. Moreover, 20% of employees surveyed reported spending more than 20 hours per week working outside of the office during their personal time — a clear indicator of work-life *unbalance*. (“2015 Workplace Flexibility Study,” CareerArc)

Inflexible work environments contribute to a number of negative outcomes, including spillover, which occurs when work-family conflicts begin negatively affecting employees’ morale and work performance. Another negative consequence of inflexible workplaces is a dip in employees’ loyalty toward their employer, which can lead to high turnover. By contrast, flexible work environments not only help minimise many of the negative outcomes mentioned earlier, they contribute to employees’ overall quality of life.



Collaboration encourages clusters of experts with diverse skills to make decisions quickly. Moreover, the Next Gen Workplace environment allows experts at any level to propose, create and execute without hierarchical or geographical constraints.

Creating a Flexible Work Environment That's a Win-Win

Like many corporate shifts in culture that are broad based, implementing policies that meet employees' *and* employers' needs is much more complicated. Some of the potential barriers employers must address on the business side include concerns about equal treatment among employees, the potential impact on client relationships, the effect on internal staff relationships and even the costs and concerns associated with abuse of flexibility policies.

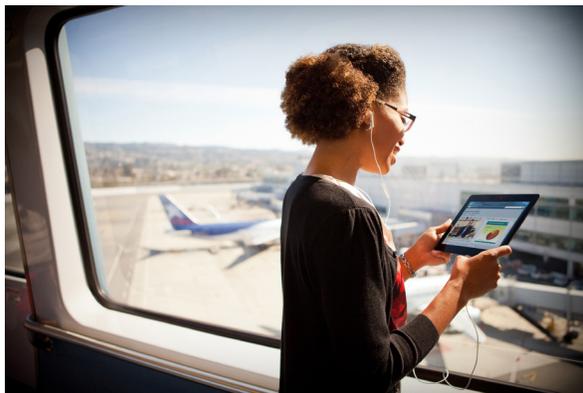
Determining *which* types of flexibility are appropriate for the workplace is a good starting point. Business leaders need to consider their company's unique needs and ask themselves questions such as:

- Is it necessary that every worker be physically present during a certain day each week or a certain period each day?
- Would it be possible to do particular jobs off-site some days using video-enabled collaboration tools (e.g. Skype for Business or other platforms)? If not, can earlier starting hours or later closing hours be considered?
- Can teams adequately cover for one member's temporary absence?
- What types of flexibility would attract and maintain the right talent?

The biggest challenge to implementing flexibility in the workplace often comes down to culture and management. Work environments that place a premium on a "first-in, last-out" culture may make employees reluctant to ask for flexibility. Additionally, managers who perceive flexible work hours as a drawback, who aren't aware of the policies, or who don't feel equipped to manage flexible teams will most likely resist changes. For an effective change to occur, it needs to start at the top with the business owners and be communicated consistently throughout the organisation, including other senior and mid management, human resources, and all levels of staff.

The nice thing about workplace flexibility is that there are many ways to adapt it to meet the needs of the company and the workforce. For larger organisations, instituting flexibility on a trial basis or starting with one department could be helpful for identifying the right balance and determining the best policies.

Balancing flexible work schedules and managing telecommuters can present new challenges, but when you weigh the potential benefits, it can be well worth the effort. In fact, aside from a boost in pay, there's probably no better way to show employees how much you value their service and long-term happiness.



In a collaborative work environment, priorities are set by clusters of experts who make decisions. Decisions are communicated real-time through applications that incorporate social-media-like capabilities and collaborative work tasks are shared on a secure technology platform. In this environment, individuals are able to apply themselves to the work based on their skills and availability, regardless of their geographic location.



II. TECHNOLOGY'S ROLE IN CREATING A VIABLE NEXT GENERATION WORKPLACE

Multiple, real-time technologies must work together seamlessly for the next gen workplace experience to become a reality.

There are two essential technology components businesses must address when creating their next generation workplaces.

1. Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)/The Consumerisation of IT

While BYOD is by no means a new trend, its importance in the workplace has grown exponentially in recent years. Research from Citrix found that corporate attitudes toward the use of personal devices in the workplace have changed dramatically. Currently, 66% of organisations do *not* have an enforced ban on employees' use of their own devices for work, compared to 84% that had such a ban in the past. In fact, 55% of those surveyed by Citrix said they now actively accommodate and encourage the use of personal devices for work purposes.

However, more devices in the workplace bring new challenges, including:

- a. *Platform Incompatibility* (e.g. Android, iOS, Windows) — For example, if a business uses VPN to enable secure, remote connectivity for its workers, it may work for those on a Windows device, but might have problems for Android and iOS users.
- b. *Corporate vs. Personal Data* — One of the biggest challenges companies face when they allow employees' personal devices on their networks is keeping employees' personal data separate from the company's corporate data and intellectual property. Without proper policies that spell out acceptable use of personal devices, in addition to mobile device management (MDM) solutions that can manage and remotely wipe corporate data from personal devices without touching personal data, BYOD can become a litigation pitfall. Also, can companies mandate and implement their standard of security measures on a personal device?

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2. Unified Communication and Collaboration (UC&C)

One of the foundational technologies that enable workers separated by time zones and geographies to collaborate is UC&C, which as its name implies brings together instant messaging/chat, presence, voice (i.e. IP telephony), mobility, desktop sharing, and web/video conferencing into a unified user-interface across multiple devices and media types. Similar to the points made earlier about BYOD, achieving a seamless UC&C experience while allowing for a myriad of endpoints can be challenging for small to midsize businesses, and daunting for enterprises.

Within the UC&C trend are two 'sub-trends' we're seeing that are playing important roles in addressing these challenges:

a. Software-Based Video Conferencing Solutions. Video conferencing has traditionally been a hardware-centric technology solution. Over the past few years, however, there has been a very noteworthy shift in interest and demand for software and services-based solutions. This new model is giving customers more options, more flexibility, and cost savings with regard to how they implement and consume video communications. The downside to this trend is that the multitude of available services creates confusion in the market, making the investigation and procurement process longer and more difficult for decision makers.

One of the technology enablers behind software-based video conferencing is virtualisation technology, which allows software-based components to be deployed more cost effectively. For example, you can put your video management layer, Session Border Controller, and gateway/gatekeeping services on the same physical server rather than using a dedicated device for each component.

Another enabler of the software-based video conferencing trend is the wider adoption of standards-based protocols such as SIP, H.264, and WebRTC. This is what allows end users to mix-and-match across different video conferencing vendors and brands, and across different endpoint types and networks. By deploying software-based solutions, customers can more easily ensure that new mobile solutions can integrate seamlessly with existing room-based and executive video conferencing systems.

b. VaaS (Video-as-a-Service). One of the main benefits of virtualisation has been a migration to hosted and cloud-based video communications. Rather than owning a solution, businesses are becoming more comfortable paying a cloud or video managed services provider a subscription fee and consuming video as a service. VaaS protects organisations against technology obsolescence as well as the ongoing costs of upgrades, maintenance, and repairs. Frost & Sullivan projects the hosted and cloud-based video conferencing model will continue to grow at a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 25% between 2014 and the end of this year.



Collaboration is still a distant utopia for many companies, but it does not have to be that way. While technology is an important component of collaboration, there is much more to the equation. To optimise collaboration and achieve real business value, it must be applied to workflows and business processes. It is also crucial to embed collaboration within the corporate culture to ensure it becomes more than just a passing fad.

III. MAKE TRUE COLLABORATION A REALITY

True Next Gen Workplace collaboration doesn't have to be a distant utopia; it can be a game-changer for your company right now.

To execute the Next Gen Workplace strategy, companies must grasp the essence of collaboration, including defining what it is and how it is an invaluable component to a Next Gen Workplace.

Real Collaboration vs. "Working Remotely"

Collaboration is sometimes confused with concepts such as "consensus," "teamwork," and "working remotely." While it often includes these other concepts, collaboration does not always mean everyone has to agree before a decision is made. Nor does collaboration suggest that there is no room for individual creativity — quite the contrary! Collaboration encourages clusters of experts with diverse skills to make decisions quickly. Moreover, the Next Gen Workplace environment allows experts at any level to propose, create and execute without hierarchical or geographical constraints.

In a collaborative work environment, priorities are set by clusters of experts who make decisions. Decisions are communicated real-time through applications that incorporate social-media-like capabilities and collaborative work tasks are shared on a secure technology platform. In this environment, individuals are able to apply themselves to the work based on their skills and availability, regardless of their geographic location. Additionally, expertise outside the enterprise is available as needed (i.e. on-demand) to bring about necessary knowledge/education. Moreover, factors such as inclement weather play a much smaller role in deterring productivity.

Another advantage of a collaborative work environment compared with just "working remotely" is that individual accountability is embedded into the collaborative work process. As a result, leadership is empowered to influence, envision and execute, rather than focusing on commanding and controlling subordinates, which is so often the case in traditional work environments.

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Make Collaboration Part of Your Corporate Culture

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The characteristics of the collaboration component within the Next Gen Workplace include:

- greater focus on an individual's visibility and reputation
- schedules that occur anywhere and at any time based on working moments
- rewards and compensation based on the value of contribution and expertise
- managers who act as coaches to ensure the right skills and resources are applied to the right priorities
- communications that use richer and more diverse mediums, and
- organisations that are formed based on business priorities and are staffed from a global marketplace of talent.

Evolving from a traditional “plan and push” operation to a Next Gen Workplace is not an instantaneous event; it's a business strategy that requires planning, thoughtful strategy and precise execution. Before leading your organisation on this life-changing journey, ensure that your team members and executives are thoroughly prepared for what lies ahead.



Agile organisations are powerful machines for innovation and learning, with stand-out performance in top-down innovation, capturing external ideas, and knowledge sharing. To optimise this environment, organisations must create an ecosystem founded on flexible policies that embrace new business models, transparency, collaboration and community building, diversity, and the consumerisation of technology.



IV. NEEDED: GREATER WORKFORCE AGILITY

An organisation's ability to move quickly when challenged — without compromising stability — is a key indicator of the organisation's overall health.

There is a lot of talk these days about the increasing pace of work in our global economy. The traditional work week has evolved from 9 to 5, Monday through Friday, and the pressure to innovate and be more productive is a daily reality. A common misconception about this trend is that it comprises two forces working in opposition — speed and stability. In other words, if you work too quickly, business stability will be compromised. And, an emphasis on business stability necessitates that work speed will suffer.

As more Millennials enter the workplace and companies are evolving to accommodate the needs of the next-gen workers, companies are disproving previously held “truths.” For example, McKinsey & Company conducted an extensive study, based on feedback of more than two million respondents at more than 1,000 companies, on the impact of a wide range of management practices. The goal of the study was to identify specific organisational and leadership characteristics and their impact on a company's health.

Within the survey were questions designed to gauge companies' speed and flexibility, and to see how often leaders and managers moved quickly when challenged and how rapidly organisations adjusted to changes and to new ways of doing things. What the study uncovered was that the vast majority (70%) of companies that displayed high levels of speed and stability (i.e. agility) also were ranked in the top quartile for organisational health.

The study also revealed agile organisations to be powerful machines for innovation and learning, with stand-out performance in top-down innovation, capturing external ideas, and knowledge sharing.

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Following are three components of an agile, NGW:

1. A profile of an NGW worker.
2. How to attract and retain agile workforce talent.
3. The kind of training necessary to grow and sustain an NGW work style.

Who Is The NGW Worker?

To understand the dynamics of today's workforce, it's essential to include the growing role of "Millennials," which have now surpassed Gen Xers as the largest generation in the workforce. A study conducted by PwC (*PwC's NextGen: A Global Generational Study*), gives insight on a couple of key motivators for these workers:

- 1. Millennials value job flexibility.** 64% of Millennials would like to occasionally work from home and 66% of Millennials would like to shift their work hours. The first key component of an NGW environment is enabling a flexible corporate culture.
- 2. Millennials place a high priority on workplace culture and environments that emphasise teamwork and community.** Next Gen Workplaces enable true collaboration, which aligns with Millennials' work needs and promotes higher levels of productivity.

Attracting and Promoting Agile Workforce Talent

One of the primary drivers behind the aforementioned study was that a decade after the first Millennials started working at PwC, the company saw employee attrition levels climbing at an alarming rate. Additionally, a significant majority of Millennial employees appeared to lack interest in the traditional professional services career path, one that required intense work commitment early in their career in exchange for the chance to make partner later on.

PwC used the study as a tool to assess its attrition challenges and to rethink the way it attracts and retains talent. Through its annual people survey, social media, focus groups and the NextGen study, PwC provided its employees with more opportunities to express their needs and priorities, and it applied what it learned from that feedback to make changes to how it operates its business. Some of the business practices and recommendations PwC makes, based on its research, includes:

- Create a flexible work culture.
- Fully leverage technology.
- Increase transparency around compensation, rewards and career decisions.
- Build a sense of community.
- Consider introducing or accelerating your global mobility program.
- Evaluate the impact Millennials may have on the contingent workforce strategy of your organisation.
- Invest time, resources and energy to listen and stay connected with your people.



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Make Sure Your Employee Training Strategy Gets a Proper Makeover, Too

Making the transition to the Next Gen Workplace is not an instantaneous single step; it's a fluid process driven by education and training. Like other areas within the NGW strategy, companies should incorporate new methods of education into their processes. In the past traditional classroom instruction, manuals, mentoring and conferences were primarily how information was passed on to newer workers.

Today, cutting edge companies have embraced progressive methodologies that appeal to millennials and team members, such as virtual classrooms, online quizzes, self-paced courses, discussion forums, blogs, and even video games (i.e. gamification).

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