NTT

The rise of the employee experience

Why enablement is essential for future business success

The rise of the employee experience

The pandemic has changed the world.

From how we live, to how we communicate. From how we meet, to how we work. Like so many others, your organization will likely be adapting to the new world of work and continuing to evolve.

COVID-19 has been the driver for change in every walk of life and the workplace is no exception.

What's clear from NTT's 2020 Intelligent Workplace Report is that when it comes to workplace strategy, there are two items at the very top of the agenda: ensuring employee wellbeing and improving the employee experience.

The focus on employees is no surprise. They're the foundation on which any successful, agile business is built. As such, their wellbeing is vital to that foundation.

During the pandemic, organizations changed how they worked. This was not just for business to continue but to protect the health and wellbeing of their workforce. Fully distributed working – whether at home, in an office, or on-site – came to the fore and is a trend likely to continue.

As we look ahead to a world beyond the pandemic's crisis stage, the challenge for employers is to know how to respond to employees' changing expectations of their workplace.

Without doubt, it's a challenge. But it's also an opportunity. An opportunity to meet and exceed those changing employee expectations. An opportunity to keep employees satisfied. And an opportunity to not just ensure productivity but also retain and develop talent in the business:

Wherever they're distributed. Wherever their workplace.

89% of organizations worldwide recognize the value of employee experience as important to the organizational strategy and a crucial strategic differentiator. Yet, just 38% are very satisfied with their current EX capability.

'The technology you use impresses no one. **The experience you create with it is everything**.'

Sean Gerety, UX expert

What makes a good employee experience in a distributed world of work?

A good employee experience has many facets.

It might include having confidence in your leaders, trust in your colleagues, the right tools and equipment to perform, feeling rewarded and valued, learning and development opportunities, psychological safety, flexible-working and work-life balance, community, and engagement with company culture.

Yet, fundamental to the employee experience is the idea of enablement.

Increasingly, to work as a successful organization – communicating, collaborating and achieving - you must enable your workforce to work securely anytime, anywhere and with anyone they need to.

What's more, you need to ensure not just productivity but wellbeing too.

No matter your starting point, your organization must consider how to modernize and optimize your workplace to offer employees the best possible experience.

1 . All statistics are taken from NTT's 2020 Intelligent Workplace Research. Please **click here** for the full report and detailed information about the research methodology.

86.6% of organizations say that the future workplace **will be designed around employee enablement.**
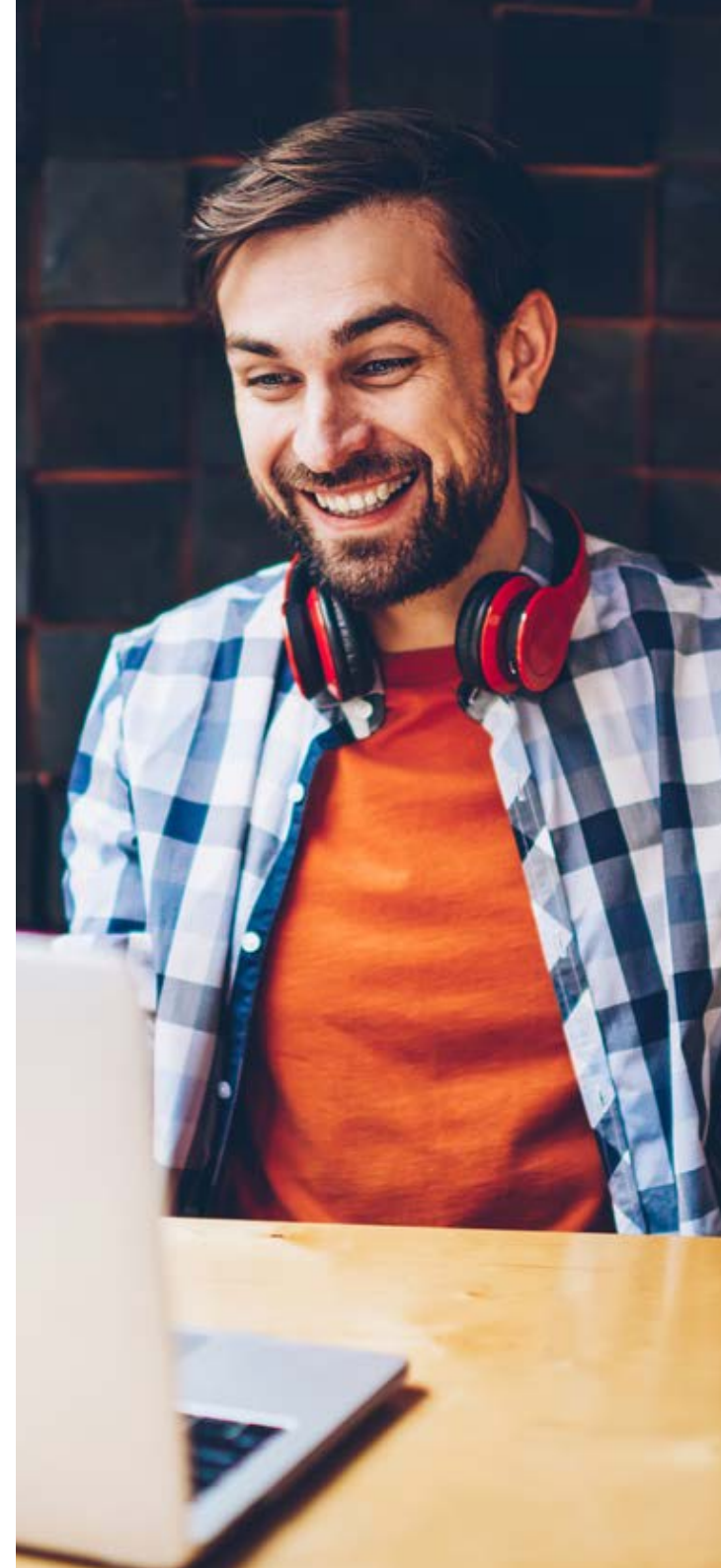
The right technology for a good employee experience

In order to offer a good employee experience (EX), the right technology is crucial. Employees need tools to work efficiently and productively anytime, anywhere and under any circumstances. The global health crisis has shown this need more clearly than ever.

88.5% of organizations have become more reliant on technology since the start of the pandemic. Yet, only **45%** strongly agree that employees **have the necessary technology to work from home or remotely.**

Employees need to be able to collaborate with each other and partners, access their own as well as colleagues' work, share documents, discuss with their team and generally stay connected. Modern workplace solutions such as Microsoft Teams or Cisco Webex offer all these features in a single interface. As a result, user numbers have skyrocketed since the pandemic. Furthermore, as physical in-person events have not been an option, employees have increasingly opted for digital and virtual events to stay connected and updated.
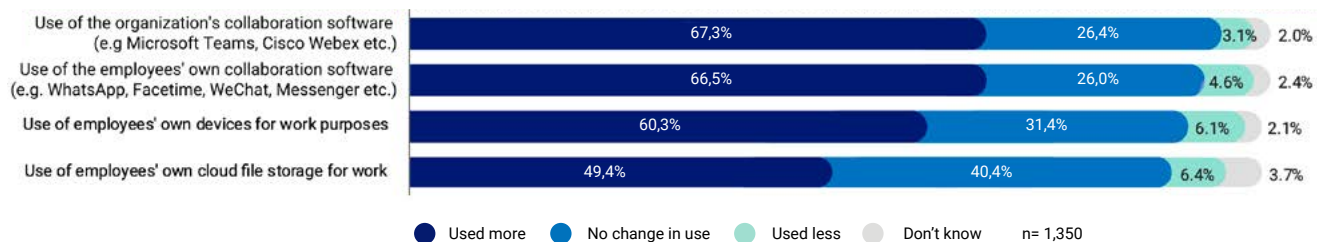
67% of organizations state that the use of their collaboration software such as Microsoft Teams or Cisco Webex has **increased since the start of the pandemic. 65%** say employees **participate more in digital events.**

Employees who do not have the right corporate tools to work from home end up being frustrated and disengaged. Or they simply resort to their own solutions to get work done. But the introduction of employees' own devices and collaboration software to the corporate mix comes with risks for the organization. Security is difficult to maintain and the wealth of different apps provides an unpleasant experience for all employees who need to constantly switch between different apps.

Organizations that are not able to provide their employees with the right tools for remote work will suffer the consequences in terms of frustrated employees, decreased productivity and increased risk to security.

How have the following employee behaviours changed, if at all, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

	Used more	No change in use	Used less	Don't know
Use of the organization's collaboration software (e.g Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex etc.)	67,3%	26,4%	3.1%	2.0%
Use of the employees' own collaboration software (e.g. WhatsApp, Facetime, WeChat, Messenger etc.)	66,5%	26,0%	4.6%	2.4%
Use of employees' own devices for work purposes	60,3%	31,4%	6.1%	2.1%
Use of employees' own cloud file storage for work	49,4%	40,4%	6.4%	3.7%

● Used more ● No change in use ● Used less ● Don't know   n= 1,350

76.9% of organizations are finding it more difficult to spot IT security or business risk brought about by employees when they are working remotely.

The pandemic as a catalyst for change

The pandemic has without any doubt accelerated digital transformation. Organizations worldwide are aware of the need for the right technology to enable new ways of working and offer a good employee experience in these challenging times.

And they have reacted.

For 46% of organizations, collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams or Cisco Webex are part of their current workplace strategy. 45% will advance video conferencing and video collaboration to better enable flexible working. 43% of organizations have already deployed new communication and collaboration tools to support new ways of working since the start of the pandemic. However, there are big differences depending on region, industry and company size.

Countries that have typically been technically advanced, have had less need to implement new technology as they were already well prepared before the pandemic. For instance, in the Netherlands only 18% of organizations have implemented new collaboration technology, in New Zealand 37% and in Hong Kong 35%. On the other hand, countries that have tended to lag behind from a digital point of view have strongly invested in new technology, such as 70% of organizations in Malaysia but also 45% in Germany.

With regard to different industries, automotive and manufacturing have been the most active in deploying new collaboration technology as a result of the pandemic, while the healthcare and pharmaceutical sector as well as the public sector have been least active. (2)

Finally, company size plays a role as well when it comes to implementing new tools to enable distributed working. 50% of very large organizations with more than 10k employees have implemented new collaboration tools compared to only 40% of organizations with 2,500 to 10,000 employees.

(1) Organizations in MEA and APAC have most frequently deployed new communication and collaboration tools.

■ We have deployed communication and collaboration tools to support new ways of working as result of the pandemic.
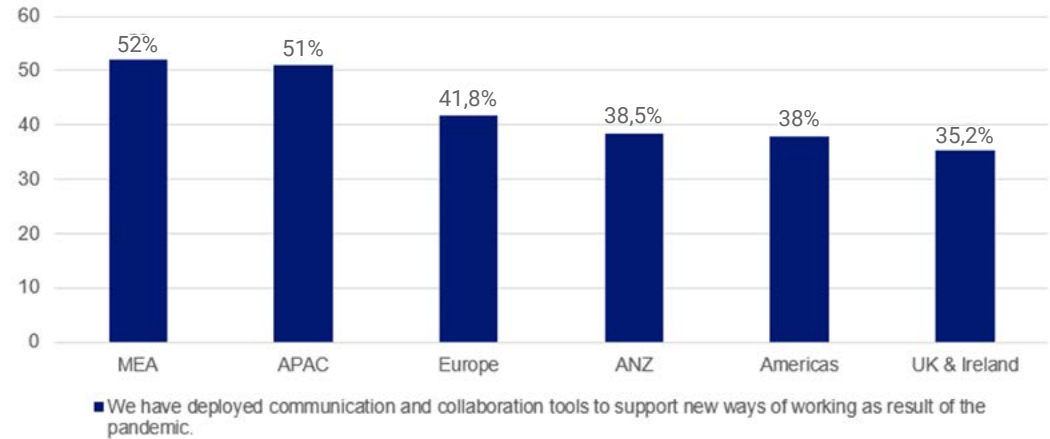
(2) Automotive companies have most frequently deployed new communication and collaboration tools; healthcare and pharma the least.

■ We have deployed communication and collaboration tools to support new ways of working as result of the pandemic.
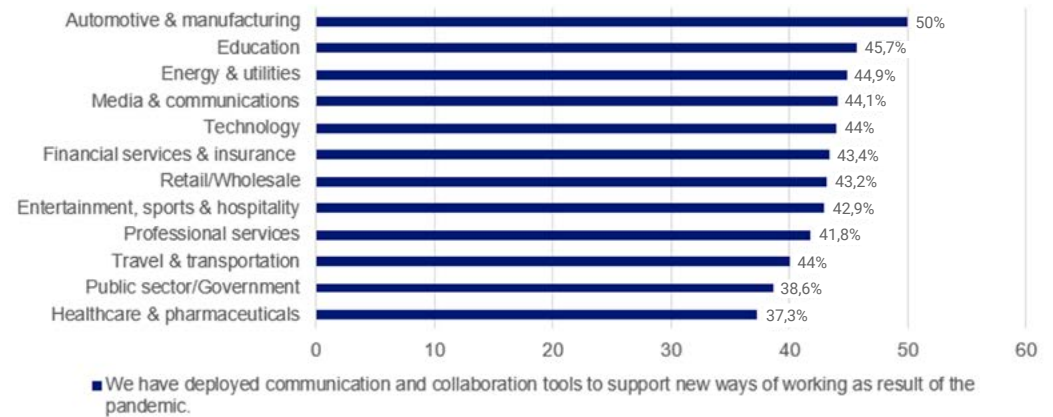
Barriers to change = barriers to a good EX

Reasons vary as to why the switch to new technology is faster in some organizations than in others. For many, the pandemic itself is just as much a barrier to change as it is a catalyst. Budgets are constrained and decision-making is more difficult during a crisis without a clear end in sight.

Despite the pandemic, there are hardware, legal and social reasons that hinder progress. Cybersecurity risks, outdated IT sytems, as well as governance and compliance are mentioned most often as barriers to change. But requirements of different age groups, organizational resistance to change and a lack of board-level sponsorship also prevent progress in many organizations.

Which, if any, of the following inhibit change to your workplace strategy?

Barrier	%
No clear owner/authority of enterprise workplace strategy	14%
Lack of board-level sponsorship	17,5%
Difficult to find the right digital technology expertise	23%
Lack of data analytics to support business case and ROI	24%
Organizational resistance to change	24,8%
Different age group of employees want different things	26%
Physical building limitations	27%
Governance and regulatory compliance (e.g. specific..	28,6%
IT limitations (e.g. systems are out-of-date)	29%
Cybersecurity risks	38%
The pandemic (Covid-19)	45%

This points to an important fact:

Changing and modernizing a workplace is about more than new technology. In order to offer a good employee experience, organizations need to look far beyond new tools and consider the different needs and concerns of their employees, whether they come from IT, C-level, Legal or Operations, or from an older or younger generation.
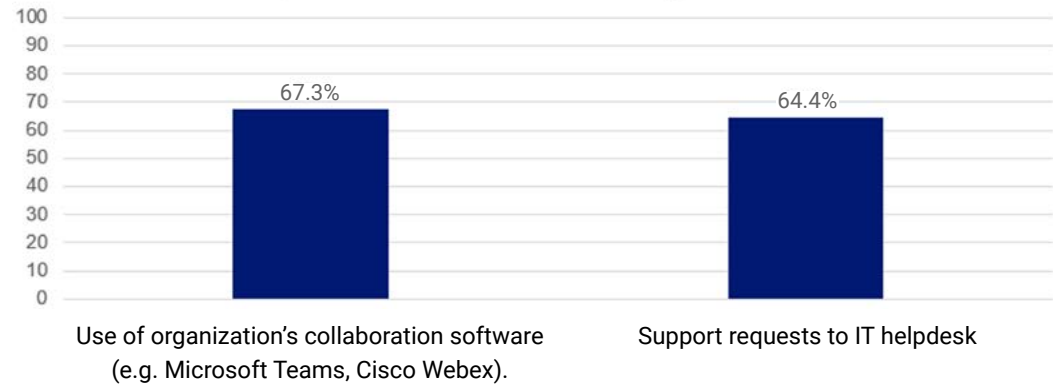
A good EX means having a choice

Every person is unique. And every employee has their own preferences, needs and wishes. Organizations need to offer full flexibility to employees to meet these different demands. And that does not simply mean by providing remote working tools. It also means giving a choice on where and how to work.

> **80% agree** that **home-working** during the pandemic **has been challenging for employees.**

Remote work has often been praised for offering great flexibility and other advantages to employees. And some people do indeed appreciate the benefits of being able to better unite family and work life, or enjoy greater flexibility as to when and where to work.

However, there are also downsides to remote work. Some struggle without clear boundaries between work and private life. Others feel isolated without daily in-person interactions and coffee breaks with colleagues. Increased on-screen time can have serious health impacts. And new technology to work from home can be stressful for less tech-savvy employees. Indeed, employees' support requests since the start of the pandemic have increased almost as much as their use of corporate collaboration software (64% vs 67% increase).

How have the following employee behaviours changed, if at all, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Use of organization's collaboration software (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex). — 67.3%

Support requests to IT helpdesk — 64.4%

The role of IT support for a good EX

Many IT departments find it hard to manage the transition to the cloud, deliver the required support for employees and ensure business as usual. However, employees need support to stay productive and feel enabled rather than overwhelmed by new technology. Consequently, organizations increasingly turn to external partners for support or managed services. The advantage of Managed Services is that internal IT departments can fully focus on their vital job of getting the organization ready for the future, while the services provider takes care of day-to-day operational tasks and incident management related to their cloud technology. This ensures employee support at all times, avoids unnecessary disruption and thereby contributes to a positive EX.

64% of organizations worldwide have **engaged third-party managed or professional services providers** to assist with their cloud journeys, with another 27% considering it.

Frost & Sullivan, 2020

Clearly, not everyone enjoys working remotely, at least not all the time.

In fact, most employees would prefer to work from an office, if safe to do so, than from home. Among the younger generation, this wish is particularly strong, showing the high importance of social interaction with colleagues for this age.

76.2% of those aged 18-29 **would rather work in an office than from home versus 64.3%** of those aged 50 and over.

Older employees may not need this interaction as much as they are more settled, pursuing their social life with family and friends outside of work. Nevertheless, 89% agree that face-to-face meeting time is essential to build a sense of teamwork or rapport with clients.

Impact of remote work on the employee experience

⊕ Advantages	⊖ Disadvantages
More flexibility	Social isolation
Less commute stress	Less sense of teamwork
Geographic independence	Increased on-screen time
Better work-life balance	Technical difficulties
Less disturbances	Lack of clear boundaries

The role of location in the new world of work

Many organizations have already realized the need for increased flexibility and are responding to it. More than half (53.9%) aim to support the wish for employee flexibility by using a more distributed resource and workplace model in the future rather than 'return to office life as normal'.

The picture varies though across the world, with the underlying infrastructure having a crucial influence on plans. 32.5% of organizations in Belgium, for example, say they'll never return to a pre-pandemic model. In contrast, only 5% in India say the same, while 59% plan to go back to office life as normal once the crisis is over. In Vietnam, the number is even higher with 74% of organizations planning to return to the office just like before.

Even for organizations planning to change their workplace arrangements, there will still be an important role for physical office space. Even for organizations planning to change their workplace arrangements, there will still be an important role for physical office space. While you might expect office space to reduce due to increased remote working, only 36% of organizations plan to cut back in the next two years.

What's important is that you give employees a choice. Rigid policies about when people must come into an office or work from home aren't likely to keep employees happy. **Workplace strategies must create a culture that empowers employees to make decisions, while taking care of their wellbeing and ensuring they have the right technology and tools in place to be successful in their roles regardless of location.**
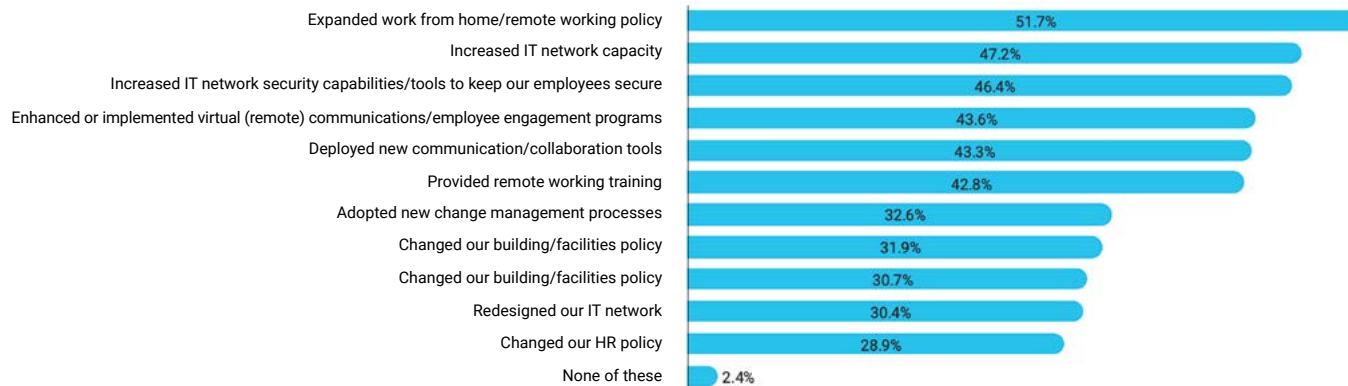
The right framework for a good EX

To nurture a culture in which employees are empowered to make their own decisions, you need to have the right framework. Implementing new technology to enable remote work is the first step. But it's not enough. You must also provide training and support, as well as updated HR and IT policies that provide guidance on secure and flexible working. Without those, collaboration software will be nothing more than a new tool rather than a new way of working that offers a great EX.

As stated previously, since the start of the pandemic, many organizations have already deployed new communication and collaboration technology to enable distributed ways of working since the start of the pandemic. Employees have thus gained access to a vast range of digital platforms and applications. However, the rapid adoption of these technologies has not always been supported with adequate training and governance.

Which, if any, of the following have you implemented to support new ways of working since the start of the pandemic?
n=1,350

Expanded work from home/remote working policy	51.7%
Increased IT network capacity	47.2%
Increased IT network security capabilities/tools to keep our employees secure	46.4%
Enhanced or implemented virtual (remote) communications/employee engagement programs	43.6%
Deployed new communication/collaboration tools	43.3%
Provided remote working training	42.8%
Adopted new change management processes	32.6%
Changed our building/facilities policy	31.9%
Changed our building/facilities policy	30.7%
Redesigned our IT network	30.4%
Changed our HR policy	28.9%
None of these	2.4%

Technology has run ahead **to manage the critical aspects of business continuity;** however, HR and IT policy, training and change management processes are yet to catch up.

Tailored training ensures employee adoption, wellbeing and security

Training is necessary to ensure employees adopt the new cloud communications platforms and feel comfortable using them. Only if they know how to use the features available to collaborate, share content and carry out tasks effectively, will the transformation be a success for the organization.

Besides training on the use of the technology itself, HR departments may also offer training on remote working practices and updates on new remote-working policies. This helps employees stay connected and feel secure while ensuring their own wellbeing when working from home.

44% of organizations have access to analytics measuring employee adoption and utilization of systems but only **32% look at adoption as a measure of their workplace investments.**

46% of organizations have **increased IT network security capabilities and tools** in order to keep employees secure. However, only **one third have updated IT policies and trained employees.**

To support employees best, and reach high adoption rates, organizations should tailor training to different personas and roles. Analytics from cloud-based platforms show which applications and features people are using, and thereby provide guidance on how to tailor training. They also enable organizations to measure the impact on adoption, usage and productivity – all of which contribute to the employee experience.

Lastly, training is vital to guarantee security as employees work in varying locations using new tools. With clear governance guidelines you can ensure proper use of the technology from the start. This will ensure you avoid chaos as potential risks with employees. Clear governance guidelines ensure proper usage of the technology from the very beginning. They avoid chaos as employees try to figure out how to use the tools, reduce the risk of accidental security breaches, and provide a good user experience from the very beginning.
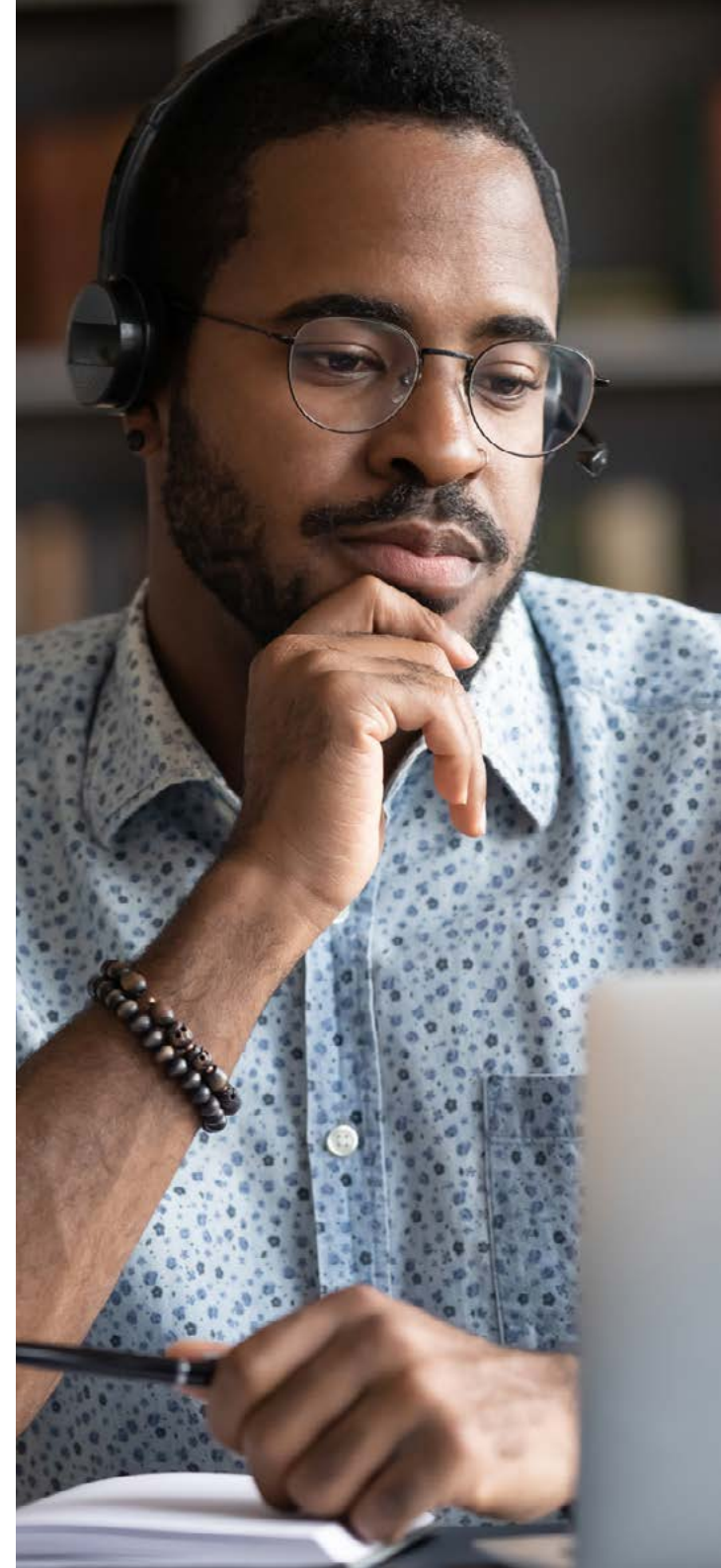
Ensuring a good EX in a distributed world of work

Many organizations have deployed new technology to enable remote work as a result of the pandemic. However, only few have gone beyond the technical deployment and have truly introduced a new, distributed way of working. Many businesses expect to return to a pre-pandemic work model rather than looking to enhance their current work practices towards a durable EX improvement.

Employees on the other hand, have come to realize the advantages and disadvantages of both remote work and office locations. Organizations that are able to offer the benefits of both, and let employees have more flexibility about when and where to work will have a competitive advantage over those that return to pre-pandemic ways of working.

Measures that will help an organization offer this flexibility to their employees in the long-term should concentrate on providing a seamless work experience regardless of location. Modern workplace communication and collaboration technology, updated workplace policies and the right level of training for all employees are the most important steps you can take to start this journey.

Those organizations which have implemented new technology now need to go further to ensure their digital transformation advances from mere crisis management to a new way of working. Taking the right steps to understand your employees' use and adoption of new technology, and adjusting your governance, training and policies accordingly, will yield long-term success.

What's more, beyond improved employee experience, your organization will benefit from a boost in employee engagement. Senior HR leaders recognize that high levels of engagement are vital for increased productivity, retention and business performance and unsurprisingly have employee engagement at the top of their agenda.

Enabled by technology and a supportive culture, people will find greater fulfilment in their work and deliver more value to the organizations that empower them. The outcomes for businesses will be enhanced productivity, high engagement and low employee turnover.

Read more about the workplace of the future in our 2020 Intelligent Workplace Report

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About Cloud Communications and NTT

Cloud Communications is a division of NTT and a core component of its Intelligent Workplace solution. Our mission is to provide leading cloud communication solutions that enable dynamic collaboration interactions for improved workforce efficiency, productivity and engagement. We specialize in unified communications, cloud voice and digital events, delivering tailored end-to-end consulting, value realization services and change management to empower businesses and enable their digital workplace transformation.

NTT is a leading, global technology services provider. We work with organizations around the world to achieve business outcomes through intelligent technology solutions. For us, intelligent means data driven, connected, digital and secure. Our global assets and integrated ICT stack capabilities provide unique offerings in cloud-enabling networking, hybrid cloud, data centers, digital transformation, client experience, workplace and cybersecurity. As a global ICT provider, we employ more than 40,000 people in a diverse and dynamic workplace that spans 57 countries, trading in 73 countries and delivering services in over 200 countries and regions. Together we enable the connected future.

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