



FUTURE-PROOFING YOUR BUSINESS: THE NEW WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

These days, there is a lot of talk about the “new normal”. What is the post-COVID world going to look like? What are the economic and operational consequences for businesses? Just how digital and remote is the world going to be?

The new normal also seems to mean different things to different people: ranging from a remote world where physical office spaces are rarely used, to back-in-the-office, AI-managed buildings and touchless offices¹.

It can be quite a challenge to try to keep up with the latest trends and predictions, attempting to navigate the fragile balance between cutting costs to survive through crisis and investing in more optimised, future-proofed operations, management and workplace strategies.

It seems clear, however, that long-term growth will require digitalisation at a considerably higher capacity than before the pandemic. Similarly, it may no longer be just specific demographics who believe that flexible working arrangements support better productivity.

What does the workplace experience (WX) of a fully or partly remote company look like?

How can employers ensure their workers are engaged, content and productive, online as well as offline?

The new WX will require a holistic approach, agility and a strong focus on long-term gains, starting with maximising the potential of the resources you already have.

¹WorkDesign Magazine, *A New Normal: Touchless Offices In The Post-Pandemic World*

THE NEW NORMAL OF THE WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

It will be a few more months at least until we can even consider a full-fledged return to the “old normal” – if ever. Most schools will not be fully open before September, and international business travel is unlikely to rebound quickly.

Even when restrictions are lifted, many employees may not be as ready to go back to the same level of travelling and in-person meetings as before. Reportedly, 41% of employees will prefer to continue working remotely². And, seeing a rise in employee engagement³, the considerable budget costs, as well as the significant resources spent in acquiring home working equipment, additional video conferencing and security licences, employers may be tempted to agree.

Meanwhile, not all jobs can be done remotely, nor is it the answer to all workplace challenges. While remote workers are proven to be highly productive, some studies have reported a link to a higher turnover risk⁴. Hence, the question isn't just “To what extent will companies continue to operate remotely?” The question is also whether we should give into the urge to go back to the “old normal”

After all, working remotely isn't just safer for health. It is also cheaper and more convenient. And it offers new opportunities for single parents, caregivers and people living with disabilities, leading to a bigger and more diverse talent pool for companies.

A more remote world also means a small fortune saved in real estate, leaving more to invest in business growth and innovation - a change that was already taking place pre-COVID. In response to the fact that workspaces were occupied only around 20% - 40% of the time⁵, an increasing number of companies were reducing the average office space per employee and switching to an Activity-Based Working paradigm⁶.

Technology and WX strategies that improve employee engagement on-site as well as off-site appear top of the list in numerous studies. Gallup names the right equipment as one of the five elements that differentiate resilient businesses from others⁷, while Gartner's NEAR model of managing remote workers during the pandemic⁸ covers enabling new relationships as one of its four key elements.



²Gartner, [HR Survey Reveals 41% of Employees Likely to Work Remotely at Least Some of the Time Post Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

³Gallup reports that in early May 2020, [the percentage of engaged workers in the US - those who are enthusiastic, committed and highly involved at work - reached its highest level since Gallup began tracking it - 38%. The result is even more surprising, given the well-established link between employee engagement at work and their overall wellbeing. Possible reasons behind this number are a smaller number of employed and feeling fortunate about still having a job.](#)

⁴Gartner, [HR Survey Reveals 41% of Employees Likely to Work Remotely at Least Some of the Time Post Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

⁵WSJ, [Don't Get Too Used to Your Own Desk](#)

⁶WeWork, [The essential guide to activity-based working](#)

⁷Gallup [Is Your Culture Resilient Enough to Survive Coronavirus?](#) The other four elements are clear expectations, opportunities for employees to use their strengths at work, connection to the business' purpose and commitment to high quality work and efficiency among coworkers.

⁸Gartner, [HR Survey Reveals 41% of Employees Likely to Work Remotely at Least Some of the Time Post Coronavirus Pandemic](#). The other three elements are: Normalize Self-Direction (focus on output rather than processes), Accentuate the Positive and Revamp Team Expectations



THE COST OF DISENGAGED EMPLOYEES

The reason for that is simple. There is a direct correlation between employee engagement and business performance, from profitability to customer relations and employee turnover - a link that is even stronger during recession.

In fact, research shows that businesses with engaged workforce recover from recession faster and can reach as much as 147% higher earnings per share than their competitors⁹.

According to a Stanford University study, the productivity increase among remote workers equals an extra day per person per week¹⁰. Highly engaged employees¹¹ also produce substantially better outcomes in sales and customer service; they are healthier and more likely to stay with the current employer¹².

The alternative is expensive. In the US alone, disengaged workers cost companies \$450 - \$550 billion a year¹³.

⁹ Gallup [How Employee Engagement Drives Growth](#)

¹⁰ Stanford Business, [Researchers: Flexibility May Be the Key to Increased Productivity](#)

¹¹ Understanding engaged employees as those who are clear about their role, feel a sense of purpose in what they do, have the right equipment, opportunity to do their best, and equally committed coworkers.

¹² Gallup [Employee Engagement Continues Historic Rise Amid Coronavirus](#)

¹³ Gallup [Report: State of the American Workplace](#)





FUTURE-PROOFING THE WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

In the short term, WX will be affected by various safety measures. Organisations will need to rearrange spaces to accommodate the requirement for a two metre distance and survey employees about their health – both physical and mental.

Some may choose to use testing, thermal scanning, mobile apps and other technology to monitor their employee wellbeing. And that's on top of business security measures that needed to be put in place with the upsurge in video conferencing and remote work.

Since the start of the pandemic, a certain cultural shift has taken place in the business world. If before, asking for a video call instead of meeting in person might have been considered impolite, now it has become a norm that is likely to stay.

This means increasing engagement, facilitating interaction, building richer meetings that can replicate the relationship-building benefits of meeting face-to-face: all have to be an equally integral part of WX.

The strategy for the workforce comeback to the office, to whatever extent that may take place, should be tied into a long-term business and WX strategy - one that takes a holistic approach to employee wellness, maximises the potential of the existing resources, and treats remote working as part of the business strategy rather than a perk or emergency solution. In other words, a high ROI WX strategy covers technology, social and emotional connections in equal measure.

There are several elements to achieving that:

- 1- Listening and personalising
- 2- Recreating the company culture
- 3- Building richer meetings

1 Listening and personalising

A Harvard study found that wellness programs and office perks like onsite gyms, meditation rooms and technology-based health tools have little effect on employee satisfaction and productivity.

Instead, better air quality, access to natural light and the ability to personalise their workspace could grow employee productivity by as much as 16%¹⁴, as well as increase the retention rate.

This means that carefully laid out strategies in response to a rising demand for more flexibility in working conditions, and remote WX management will have a direct positive effect on employee engagement and company outcomes. And a strong line of two-way communication will probably top your to-do list.

¹⁴ Harvard Business Review, [Survey: What Employees Want Most from Their Workspaces](#)

2 Recreating the company culture

Neither the concept of WX, nor the company culture disappear with a shift to remote work. At least, they shouldn't.

Were huddle spaces, one-to-one feedback, and occasional conversations over a cup of coffee part of your company culture before the pandemic? You can still recreate those in the digital realm. TED Conferences, for example, designed virtual spaces for people to feel together while alone¹⁵, whilst Zapier regularly sets up random video pairings to recreate the experience of stumbling upon each other in a corridor¹⁶.

Besides much-discussed communication best practices, it is also important to recreate some form of an office-home rhythm for those who work remotely, from setting expectations to the choice and use of project management tools.

Whether your company decides to become fully or partly remote, taking care to recreate the company culture and a workplace community online will be key to successful operations.

¹⁵ McKinsey & Company, *From thinking about the next normal to making it work: What to stop, start, and accelerate*

¹⁶ Zapier, *How to build trust on a remote team*

3 Building richer meetings

There is a reason why meeting in person has been the number one choice for most. It establishes a stronger connection and helps build relationships. Just ask your sales team.

Now that video and conferencing calls have become an integral part of business, be it internal team management or client and sales calls, creating richer and more engaging experiences is essential.

Firstly, you need to define clear goals for the meeting. People's attention spans and availability will soon have their weight in gold. The more focused the agenda, the better the outcome.

Secondly, have the right tech in place. Hearing 'Can you see my screen?' and 'Next slide please' on nearly every call isn't just tiring. It also causes a drop in focus and activity.

Imagine having a meeting where you can show a product demo, share the latest plans and strategies on the screen for everyone to see and instantly comment on, regardless whether you're together in an office meeting room or on a Zoom call.

Imagine getting instant feedback on product plans and sketches without having to leave the house or chase for answers via Slack, email and WhatsApp.

The right collaboration software can massively increase engagement during any meeting, fostering teamwork and productivity. This means an accelerated transition to agility, shortening the path from strategy to a positive ROI. With solutions like **SMART for Business** this is easily achieved.

The "new normal" may come with its challenges, but it also brings a renewed focus on wellbeing and communication. It offers the opportunity to embrace new solutions and technologies, to introduce more agility into the business. It questions everything "traditional" and "standard" in a new quest for better business practices and workplace experiences.

ABOUT SMART® TECHNOLOGIES

SMART Technologies comes with more than 30 years of innovation. Our hardware and software solutions have garnered over 20 awards worldwide in the last 5 years alone.

SMART Technologies is the inventor of the SMART Board® interactive display and the developer of SMART Notebook®, the world's most popular collaborative learning software, and part of the SMART Learning Suite.

Our mission is to provide simple, intuitive and connected solutions to help our customers inspire greatness in themselves and the colleagues and teams they interact with. SMART Business solutions are therefore designed to speed up cooperation, so everyone can contribute from any location or device. We make collaborating in person and remotely as easy as meeting over coffee.

SMART Board® Pro

SMART Board® Pro interactive displays enhance team productivity by enabling collaboration across devices, offices and time zones. With a lag-free, pressure sensitive writing, automatically powering up in reaction to ambient light sensors, saving files straight from the whiteboard to your computer, and iQ embedded computing that lets you switch between showing a video and writing on the whiteboard with a simple tap, these digital displays take the meeting experience to a new level.

SMART Meeting Pro®

SMART Meeting Pro® gives teams the opportunity to capture ideas in a virtually unlimited interactive workspace. Add as many images, files and links as you need, have your colleagues write as many comments and notes as they want - this workspace will keep expanding to fit your needs.

SMART TeamWorks

SMART TeamWorks™ software gives your teams the ultimate end-to-end collaboration experience, from any device, on any conferencing platform. It launches web-based conferencing with a single touch at the display, using any conferencing solution, enables parallel collaboration and lets you email, save or erase the whiteboard with a simple voice command.

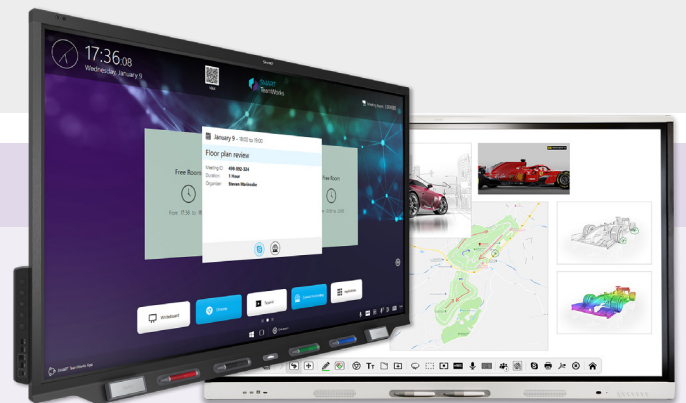
With SMART Business solutions comes

Ease of use - It integrates seamlessly with any existing software and video conferencing platforms. Change them as often as you'd like, the SMART experience remains the same

Collaboration, not just conversation - Switch between tabs and windows in one shared screen, type notes and read documents from several locations and devices all at once

Secure and easy installation - Windows setup wizard that takes only a few minutes, password protected settings, and support and guidance during installation

The ROI you're looking for - from cutting costs to improving WX and employee engagement. SMART innovative, forward-thinking side of the business to your partners, clients and employees.



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