

Capitalizing on change in the digital workplace to boost productivity



What constitutes a “productive” day? For some, it means accomplishing everything on a long to-do list. For others, it means finally tackling a long-running issue. And for a lucky few, having a productive day means deciding what to have the chef include in their breakfast omelet. Similarly, when we consider how to measure output in the workplace, what do we mean, and what are we measuring? We once used total hours worked in the office as a means of measuring. Today, we use amorphous terms such as “productivity.” While extremely important, the concept of productivity is tremendously difficult to measure. And, as something hard to measure, it is even harder to improve.

Productivity can mean completely different things based on the role or mindset you are in at the time. Productivity to a field service worker is different from productivity to a retail store manager, which is different from productivity to an information worker. Generalizing this, productivity can be equated to an amount of output per unit of input. Because we look at productivity this way, we often talk about efficiency when talking about productivity.

Productivity is the speedometer of business

All of this illustrates why the term is so nebulous. Productivity is critical to employers because it is the basis of efficiency — of performance — and is fundamentally the speedometer of business. For employees, productivity gives a sense of progress and value. But to truly measure it or put a value on it, productivity has to be about business outcome.

Like productivity, the workplace has changed. Devices, applications and data have accelerated the pace of workflow. Ubiquitous connectivity, which enables employees to work from wherever they choose, has redefined “where” the workplace is. These and other influences mean that jobs have become more granular and task-oriented.

As a result, today’s digital workplace is simultaneously redefining, influencing, boosting and impeding productivity, depending on how a company perceives and reacts to the changes it effects. This paper outlines three of these trends — organizational design, user experience and adapting to change — and their resulting influences, and it suggests ways companies can capitalize on the opportunities these changes present.

Everything we knew about organizational design is wrong

Digital leaders and disruptive startups frequently benefit from something about the collaborative, connected digital workplace that more traditional management is starting to recognize: The old top-down style of management and organizational design is a poor fit for today’s hypermatrixed, distributed workplace. A company’s organizational design that fails to evolve to fit this new reality will have a significant dampening effect on the productivity the company needs, no matter how digital a workplace becomes.

“New digital technology brings the data and analytics to help managers see issues and know what needs to be done to best help employees be successful.”

Old notions of one person performing one job for decades simply aren't flexible enough to offer companies the agility and flexibility they need. Work has become more about tasks or activities that are part of a broader plan or strategy, leading to growing ranks of independent workers and the growth of the “gig economy.”

For example, how many items are on your to-do list? How many to-do lists are “just work” or “just home”? How many people have multiple to-do lists to track activities that need to get done? The fact is, we are already activity- or task-driven. Throughout the day, we manage tasks that are paid, tasks that are for the welfare of family and home, and tasks that are for personal happiness and well-being. We sort and reprioritize based on the time of day, the stakeholders, the constituents and the customers — even when it is taking the children to swimming late in the afternoon. In today's task-oriented, gig economy, we don't answer to a single boss; we answer to many stakeholders.

Yet, at work, the old models that persist fail to recognize, and do not create, an environment where people can be rewarded for their contributions. The old model of a rigid manager (sometimes two) and a rigid structure fails to recognize different work styles and different degrees of independence. Progress made toward achieving the final goal is not rewarded until the final goal is complete. Often in these cases, the term “line manager” is applied, yet the person is not involved in the employee's activities, nor in human resources (HR), and often is not a professional coach or mentor.

Organizations need to be flexible and help people succeed by embracing the way people are most productive. A flexible organizational design helps people understand the impact of their work, how their skills fit into the project and the organization, and what they should contribute to be rewarded. Managers should be in place to define what needs to be accomplished and then calibrate efforts to best outcomes.¹ New digital technology brings the data and analytics to help managers see issues and know what needs to be done to best help employees be successful. Seeing real-time metrics on daily performance helps managers make needed changes quickly and provide coaching before a task is completed poorly, which would delay the overall project.

Find ways to embrace flexibility. Gallup research indicates that many workers are attracted to increased flexibility and autonomy in work arrangements.² Whether it is a full-time job, part-time assignment or “side gig,” organizations are competing for talent, and flexibility is a perk they can offer.

One of the disconnects caused by the current rigid organization is the ability to report out and measure productivity in a task or activity-centric world. Automatically generated “stand-up”³ reports sent to each of the project stakeholders can help, but while we are in the current organizational model, this measure of progress needs to be automatically aggregated and summarized to the HR management chain.

Stand-up bots integrated into tools such as Slack and Teams help, but technology needs to help further by aggregating across all forms of messaging and digital

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2018/07/24/crossing-the-chasm-to-the-gig-economy/#20ed32304116>

² https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236183/thinking-flexibly-flexible-work-arrangements.aspx?g_source=link_wwwv98g_campaign=item_2417698g_medium=copy

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stand-up_meeting

“Digital leaders ... make continuing investments in technology with modern capabilities and applications that enhance user-centric experiences. That gives digital leaders a crucial advantage in such areas as recruiting and employee retention.”

assets (lines of code, documents written, comments provided, etc.). This automated approach to stand-up reporting will lead to a system view of productivity (versus personal fiction) that could completely change how we do performance reviews and career development. We see the opportunity, but today the best suggestion is to review performance management approaches to align with a project or activity, and to leverage system data in such a way that the traditional line management approach has a data-driven approach to personal and career development.

User experience is a hungry beast

The quote “Culture eats strategy for breakfast,” rumored to be from organizational design guru Peter Drucker, is almost, but not quite, complete. In the real world, the value of a positive user experience outweighs both culture and strategy. Poor experience is one of the quickest ways to move from being employees to being ex-employees, and from being fans to being ex-customers. Culture might eat strategy, but user experience eats culture.

Whether you use the Net Promoter Score, which is used to gauge the loyalty of client relationships, or employee satisfaction surveys, or some other measure, an enjoyable experience is one of the biggest factors in employee or customer sentiment. Get it right, and the results will be tangible. Consider, for example, apps released by companies you patronize. A positive user experience increases your customer loyalty by giving you more value and convenience and raising the cost of change. A poor user experience will send you looking for alternatives for that product or service.

Productivity can also be profoundly influenced by the degree to which the user experience aligns with expectations. When organizations extend the life of assets such as computers and phones beyond their useful life spans, employees are stuck using ancient devices running on old, vulnerable operating systems. Digital leaders, however, make continuing investments in technology with modern capabilities and applications that enhance user-centric experiences. That gives digital leaders a crucial advantage in such areas as recruiting and employee retention. Morale is higher in organizations that deliver a better user experience because employees are free to focus more on results than on overcoming the limitations of the devices they're obliged to use.

How we change must change

Billions of dollars are spent each year on research, development, marketing and sales by companies trying to establish a competitive edge, eke out the last ounce of productivity from employees, or achieve the last millisecond of improvement in automation.

The challenge is: There's so much change that no IT department can ever keep ahead or even maintain a degree of currency. It's not just the volume of change that poses a barrier to innovation; it's the speed and cost of keeping up, as well as the processes we use to communicate and manage change — all of which can cause companies to fall behind.

And yet, the challenge to adapt is essential to maintaining productivity and a competitive advantage. Avoiding change is a natural reaction. IT policies that start with “no” or “the policy says” erect barriers to change that will ultimately create a drag on productivity.

“Embracing those employees who are interested in change and technology, and adopting them as beta customers, are great ways of accelerating innovation in an organization.”

We need to embrace change, and IT should be an enabler. And, when we do it, it must be done right. Change for the sake of change — to “keep up” and for other poorly considered or executed attempts — results in expensive shelfware that drains precious company resources. By one account, “93% of the organizations surveyed are wasting piles of money on unused or underused application software, otherwise known as ‘shelfware.’”⁴

Luckily, the digital workplace offers us many ways to harness the power of change in ways that create control from chaos and enable a company to thrive in a time when others fall beneath the waves.

The pace of change

The accelerating pace of change is abundantly illustrated every day. Emails announcing new features and services from companies we patronize hit our inboxes regularly. Methods for contacting companies, paying bills and resolving issues change as companies update, enhance and digitize their workflows. And how many apps on your smartphone or computer indicate that an update is waiting?

Luckily, there are early indicators we can take advantage of, if we know how to do it. User preference, personalization, bring your own application, the API economy and build your own services — to name just a few — have led to employees serving as the driving force behind innovation adoption.

A Gallup training course⁵ indicates that managers account for at least 70 percent of the variance in employee engagement scores. If you want to attract and retain a talented, high-performing workforce, it is critical to keep in touch with employees’ needs, goals and experiences. Embracing those employees who are interested in change and technology, and adopting them as beta customers, are great ways of accelerating innovation in an organization. For example, in a large company no one might be given a smartwatch to use as a company tool, and yet you can be sure that when Apple’s watch debuted, hundreds of thousands of employees arrived the next day at work equipped with the new device. How can you involve these early adopters in efforts that yield business value?

Some innovations have the potential to deliver more business value than others, so it’s important to have measures in place to validate ideas, develop a high-level business case and prioritize the ideas according to the value or differentiation they can offer. With the right app, smartwatches might serve as ID badges for employees, a potential added convenience for users and a cost savings for the company. Your employees can help create a list of ideas for embracing technology in new ways that benefit your business.

But, even applying a high threshold for ideas will result in a list of projects that exceeds the time and budget a company can invest. So how can a company move more projects forward with limited resources? One method is to embrace the willingness of individuals to help. HR can play a role here by including employee

⁴ “Shelfware syndrome affects most organizations,” February 22, 2017.
<https://www.performancevision.com/blog/avoiding-shelfware-syndrome/>

⁵ https://www.gallup.com/workplace/229424/employee-engagement.aspx?g_source=link_wwwv98g_campaign=item_2417698g_medium=copy

involvement in the portfolio of internal development opportunities that can be measured and rewarded.

To embrace the enthusiasm for change, IT should start with these simple steps:

- Provide mechanisms for communicating the IT roadmap and strategy, and provide an easy method to capture input and feedback.
- Collaborate with key partners to share and refine the roadmap, and allow employees to provide feedback to partners.
- Establish a community of interest for helping IT review and prioritize ideas. Communicate the results openly. Use this group to define scope and success — and ensure that success is measurable.
- Introduce an early adopter group across all domains of the organization that will work with, help evaluate and measure success.
- Introduce annual awards for the most impactful change (the idea, the testers, the implementation).

The management of change

Companies are good at rolling out new technologies, but considerably less so at the tasks that follow, such as testing, training, communication, support and ultimately, retirement. If your program of change fails, then the business case, business benefit and user benefit all disappear. You drag out the painful transformation; you give people a poor experience because they are having to paper across the gap created between the “before” and “after.” To capitalize on change most effectively, we need to improve our ability to manage it. Here are some tips:

Advocates. One strategy for managing a given change initiative (such as a new software solution or business process) is to create internal fans and advocates for change. Employees who are known, or who self-identify as early adopters, are good candidates to become advocates for change. These are the people who enjoy early access to new systems and solutions, and view it as a reward for their forward-leaning perspective.

Buddies. Building a cadre of informed people “in the corridors” helps usher in a new capability or process. Consider introducing a buddy system, with named individuals per floor or group who have received extra information, or access, to help shepherd other employees through the transition. They can also help IT by bringing that friendly face who can translate how the team’s primary work will change in the new world. Think of it as the IT equivalent of a new-hire buddy. This informal channel of support is an important means of helping colleagues and friends not only navigate the technical aspects of change, but also understand the business use case and the value of change.

Gamification. Another technique that can help with the management of change is gamification. League tables, rewards (not necessarily financial) and dashboards provide visibility into progress of the desired change. This is much like the donation gauge or fundraising thermometer set up outside a school or blood bank to encourage folks who have not yet donated to step up, and to encourage those who have already donated to perhaps put in a little more to take the total to the top.

Messaging. It is important to get the message right. While the message needs to cover many things, one approach is to start with the announcement and some FAQs. The announcement should cover what is changing, the rationale, the benefits, the connections to support and the time scale. The FAQs are meant to answer the fears, doubts and questions people might have — nobody likes to have their “cheese moved” — and to reassure them that their concerns have been addressed.

The cost of change

The perceived cost of change is an anchor that weighs on every organization. For example, a new banking system is expected to save money by making people more efficient. Viewed through a traditional lens, an 18 percent gain in productivity among an employee group of 100 people means 18 jobs can be eliminated. Or, consider the classic “computer upgrade” scenario. In calculating the move from Windows 7 to Windows 10, a chief information officer tabulates the cost of new devices, software, lost productivity and application modernization, and in the final analysis decides that change is just too expensive.

In both cases, companies have the habit of examining just one side of the ledger, which can be easily measured in dollars and cents. To make a fair and accurate decision, however, the true cost of change needs to consider both the costs (savings) and the opportunities created.

Measure the benefits of change. There are ways of addressing the cost of change, with the benefit of delivering more of what the user wants — which is choice. Offering employees a choice, potentially with a stipend, means they are willing participants in the journey toward a modern workplace. It may be measured in satisfaction, lower turnover or the ability to recruit top talent.

An organization can minimize the increased demand on support functions by taking advantage of internal champions, standardizing on software-as-a-service capabilities, specifying minimum device capabilities or application requirements, and using conditional access to ensure device or application compatibility.

By focusing on security and management of the device, including corporate identity, an organization no longer needs to lock down the device, and can put the responsibility of purchasing and supporting the device back on the user.

As productivity increases, rather than look at the result as a chance to cut head count, look instead at the opportunities that can be realized with the extra bandwidth the team now has.

This is a win-win. Users get a choice in what they use and the ability to refresh the devices as often or as rarely as they wish, while the organization gets a modern user platform without the sunk capital expense.

The story continues ...

By its very nature, there is no final chapter or end game in the story of workplace productivity. How we define, measure and boost this essential element of the enterprise will continue to evolve in lockstep with the digital workplace and the tech-savvy employees who drive it.

Organizational design must adapt to the changing nature of work and the way employees view their contributions. A focus on creating positive user experiences creates a positive feedback loop that improves employee morale and leads to productivity gains. And embracing change leads to an organization that can answer customer needs faster, deliver innovative products and keep critically valuable employees.

Understanding these key levers that underpin productivity will help companies develop strategies to boost performance, profitability and competitiveness.

A market leader in advanced digital workplace services, DXC provides enterprises with a more consumer-like, digital workplace experience to attract, delight, engage and retain employees. Together, DXC and our network of strategic and solution partners enable new ways of working, communicating and collaborating to increase productivity and drive profitability. Our solutions support millions of desktops and mobile devices for ~1,100 clients in 67 countries. Contact us for more information on DXC's advanced digital workplace solutions.

**Learn more at
[www.dxc.technology/
workplace_and_mobility](http://www.dxc.technology/workplace_and_mobility)**

About DXC Technology

DXC Technology (DXC: NYSE) is the world's leading independent, end-to-end IT services company, serving nearly 6,000 private and public-sector clients from a diverse array of industries across 70 countries. The company's technology independence, global talent and extensive partner network deliver transformative digital offerings and solutions that help clients harness the power of innovation to thrive on change. DXC Technology is recognized among the best corporate citizens globally. For more information, visit www.dxc.technology.