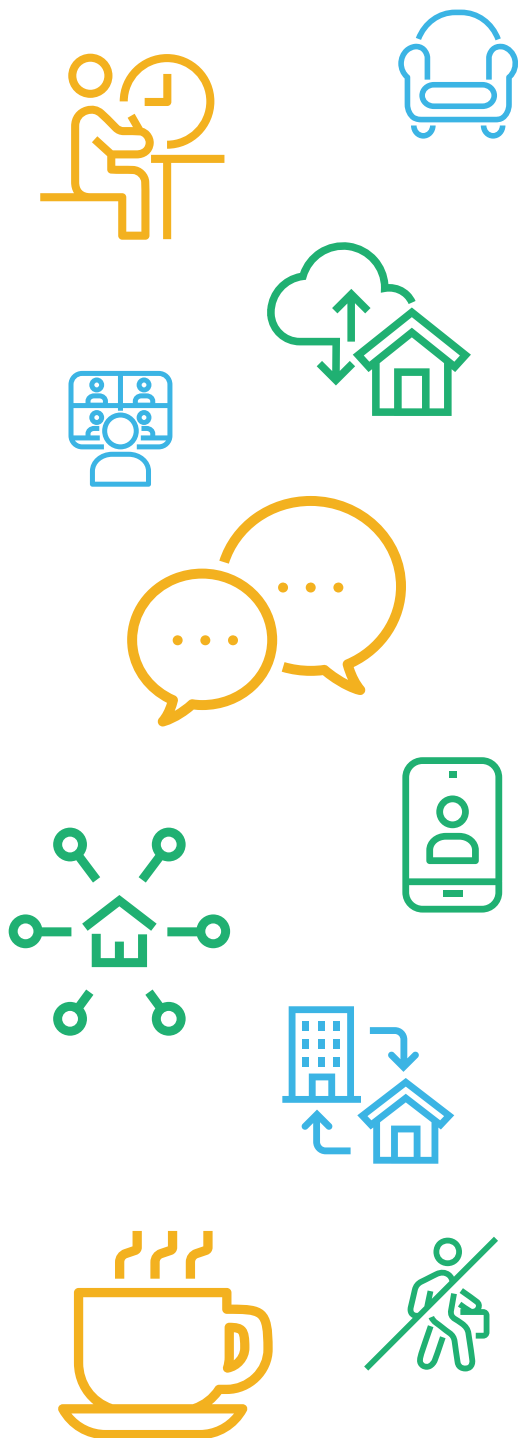




making sense of the  
connected world

# Transforming Employee Experience through Technology in the Hybrid Work Era





## Hybrid work is a certainty for businesses, but it brings new challenges

The pandemic has transformed the way we think about the future of work. While working from home was once a rare occurrence for most employees, the past two years proved not only that remote work is possible, but that teams can still be productive and effective in today's connected, cloud-based world. Information workers learned how to work remotely, how to stay connected with a distributed team, and how to fit work around their personal lives and families. It wasn't always easy, but it showcased a new way of working.

Now that the genie's out of the bottle, there's no going back. According to CCS Insight's Employee Workplace Technology Survey 2022, 90% of information workers see remote work continuing to play a role in their jobs. Most want a hybrid work model that brings the best of both worlds: the in-person social interaction that employees missed during the pandemic, alongside the flexibility of working from home. Business leaders, too, recognize the inevitability of hybrid work and the impact it will have on corporate office space requirements, expecting to need just 60% of current office capacity post-pandemic<sup>1</sup>.

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of information workers see remote work continuing to play a role in their jobs

<sup>1</sup> CCS Insight Senior Leadership IT Investment Survey, 2021



### A lack of clarity about hybrid work in practice

There is still considerable uncertainty about what hybrid work means in practice, and CCS Insight's research indicates that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Employees are evenly split between those who want the predictability of set days in the office every week, those who want to agree office days with their team on a weekly basis, and those who want the flexibility to decide personally where they work each day.

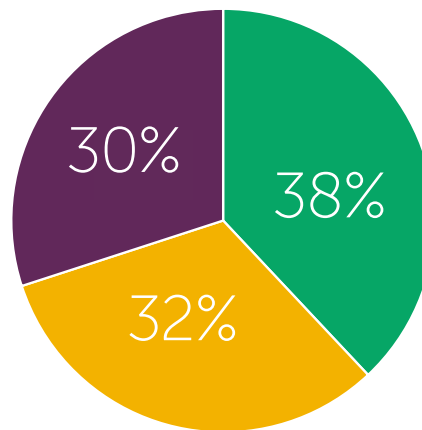
Employees also worry what office-based working will be like in a hybrid world. For example, would they go to the office only to spend all day in video calls? Businesses recognize the need to address this uncertainty, but the enforcement of one-size-fits-all policies risks alienating employees, particularly as senior managers' preferences are often misaligned with those of the wider workforce owing to the differing priorities of disparate life stages and work activities.

### New challenges for IT operations

There is also the challenge of how IT teams manage, secure and support a hybrid workforce – particularly when IT employees themselves may have shifted to a hybrid model. Many IT support teams experienced dramatic rises in workload during the pandemic as processes

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support a hybrid workforce

### HYBRID WORKING PREFERENCES



- Have set days each week when I work from home
- Agree with my team which days we will be in the office each week
- Have the flexibility to choose where I work on a given day

Source: CCS Insight Employee Workplace Technology Survey, 2022

and applications rapidly moved online and workforces shifted to remote work overnight. With hybrid work now a business imperative, IT teams must develop new strategies for supporting employees wherever

they work. Remote IT provisioning and management becomes increasingly important, as does the need to enable employees to self-serve wherever possible to manage escalating IT support requests while maintaining resolution commitments.

## Competing pressures on IT budgets and strategy

For many businesses, the shift to hybrid work also means revisiting strategy and investment in established areas of IT services. This includes corporate office network infrastructure, communications services and security, all of which previously revolved around an office-based work culture. However, decisions about whether these investments remain fit for purpose in a hybrid work era take place at a time when the IT landscape is already in flux, whether from the need to re-evaluate tactical technology decisions made at the height of the pandemic, or because of the accelerated digitization of operations. Already under pressure, IT teams are further stretched by this increased complexity and conflicting priorities.

## The Great Resignation prompts a focus on employee retention

To make matters worse, businesses face a growing skills and resourcing crisis that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. According to CCS Insight's survey, a quarter of employees are considering leaving their employer in the next 12 months. This figure increases to 34% of workers under the age of 40, and 50% of those who have joined their company since the start of the pandemic — highlighting the challenge and importance of building a strong sense of culture and community in a distributed workforce.

With many industries experiencing skills shortages even prior to the pandemic, findings like this mean that employee retention is now a board-level concern pushing businesses to think more holistically about improving employee engagement, satisfaction and experience to future-proof both their workforce and their



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whole organization. It becomes particularly important to ensure a smooth transition into the new hybrid world, and to create a cultural and operational

framework that supports and enables the workforce as each business continues its digital transformation.

For IT leaders looking to match the company's strategic goals, employee experience must play a pivotal role in technology selection, implementation and adoption. In this report we examine the breadth of factors that determine the employee experience, outlining the ways that technology can support and enhance that experience, and provide recommendations to IT leaders looking to plan their IT investments around the shift to hybrid work.

## IT leaders must consider the breadth of the employee experience when planning for hybrid work

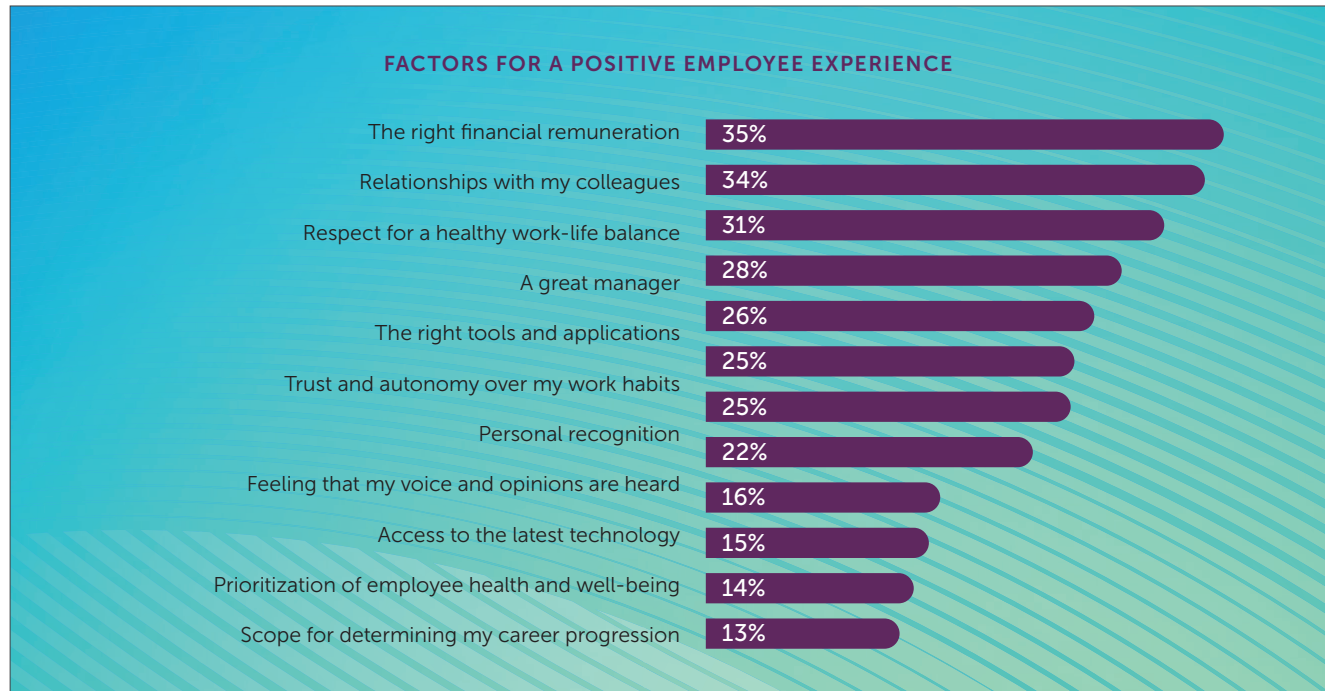
The importance of user experience in technology design, selection and adoption has long been recognized, with rising employee expectations driving business decision-making. However, the concept of employee experience extends much more broadly, incorporating the wealth of factors that affect the employee's experience of their work, their workplace and the culture of their organization.

Once solely the focus of HR, the impact of this experience on a business has been highlighted by the pandemic. Companies are starting to understand the importance of an organization-wide focus on, and responsibility for,

understanding and improving the employee experience to maximize the effectiveness of the workforce and to attract and retain the best-quality talent.

### Relationships, culture and community

For most employees, there is more to a job than the work you do, and it is the relationships with your team, manager and wider network of colleagues that underpin employee engagement and job satisfaction. CCS Insight's research shows that employees identify colleague relationships as a leading factor in ensuring a positive employee experience, second only to salary. This was brought into the spotlight during the pandemic as employees struggled with the lack of social interaction during sustained remote working, rekindling a desire to reconnect with colleagues as a major reason to return to some level of office-based work.



Source: CCS Insight Employee Workplace Technology Survey, 2022

However, with hybrid work a certainty for many businesses, there is an urgent need to address this dependency on in-person interactions for social cohesion. The ability to build work relationships with colleagues is the leading concern for employees in the shift to hybrid work. New joiners — who are unable to rely on pre-pandemic relationships and cultural norms — are particularly concerned by this. In CCS Insight's survey, 58% of new employees said this was a worry, compared with 38% overall.

The topic is now a top priority for businesses, with 39% of business leaders identifying the engagement and connectedness of remote or hybrid employees as a central challenge of hybrid work, according to CCS Insight's research. It is vital for businesses to identify

new ways to facilitate social connectedness, networking and community-building within a distributed workforce, deploying technology solutions alongside new management practices to lay the foundations for a hybrid-ready organization culture.

### Personal satisfaction, development and reward

Another major contributor to employee experience that has been exacerbated by the shift to hybrid work is employees' personal satisfaction and feeling of being valued for their contribution. As noted earlier, salary is the number-one factor determining employee experience (36%), according to employees, but non-financial rewards such as feeling trusted (24%), being recognized for their contribution (25%) and feeling that their voice is heard (22%) are also important considerations for employees.

With the shift to **hybrid work**, employees also worry that their efforts or contributions are less visible

With the shift to hybrid work, employees also worry that their efforts or contributions are less visible, or that their career progression may be hampered if they are not in

the office frequently enough. This problem of proximity bias is also a concern for business leaders, with 28% citing maintaining inclusivity and equal career opportunities as a challenge of hybrid working. It becomes increasingly important to allow employees' contributions to be captured, recognized and rewarded whatever their style of working, as well as ensuring opportunities are available to all.

### Personal effectiveness and removing the work of work

Although sustained remote working during the pandemic reassured business leaders that employees can be productive when away from the corporate office, for many employees the experience highlighted the repetitiveness or mundanity in areas of their jobs, fueling frustration and having a negative effect



on their employee experience. CCS Insight's research shows that employees lose on average 2.1 hours per day doing simple, repetitive tasks such as data entry, generating reports and status updates, or administrative tasks – many of which are ripe for automation.

Added to this, the rapid digitization of processes in the pandemic led to increased adoption of new cloud-based tools in many organizations, often with limited integration between them, leaving the employee to act as the human integration point for various workflows. This takes the employee away from more interesting or value-adding aspects of their work – a negative for the employee and the business alike.

Unnecessary meetings are also a drain on the employee experience, a problem that is again exacerbated in a hybrid and remote work world in which back-to-back online meetings could have been a two-minute chat in an office-based environment. Employees currently spend an average of 2.6 hours per day in online meetings, rising to 3.2 hours per day for those in management roles. Businesses must urgently identify ways to counter this escalating meetings-centric trend, embracing more asynchronous ways of working that maximize the use of employees' time and reinvigorate their work experience.

### **The paradox of flexibility: work-life balance and well-being**

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is a top-three contributor to a positive employee experience, according to CCS Insight's



## **Unnecessary meetings** are also a drain on the employee experience

survey research. However, although the shift to remote working brought aspirations of improving work-life balance by giving employees increased flexibility to shape their workday around home and family needs, in practice many struggled to separate home and work lives, and half of all employees actually worked longer hours as a result. This paradox of flexibility is one of the primary reasons employees look forward to some level of return to office working, with the delineation that the daily

commute brings to the working day. However, with remote work remaining a significant piece of the hybrid model, businesses must find a better long-term solution to this problem if they are to avoid

escalating employee burnout and turnover through this erosion of the employee experience.

There is broad recognition of this problem by businesses, with a third of leaders identifying well-being and mental health as a top concern in the switch to hybrid work. However, the solution requires an organization-wide shift in mindset away from the default assumption of "always on" that demands immediate responses to messages without taking into account the recipient's availability and broader priorities — whether they are work or personal. There is an urgent need for new technology solutions that help overcome the growing problem of notification fatigue, as well as a need for new policies and cultural norms that acknowledge the value of asynchronous work alongside real-time communication and collaboration to create a more healthy, balanced approach for the hybrid work era.

## ZEROING IN ON IT EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE



For IT leaders, not only is it vital to consider these issues in the context of an organization's IT strategy and investment priorities to support the shift

to hybrid work, but it is also important in the context of the experience of employees within the IT function itself. IT employees — and particularly those in IT support and operations roles — are among those most affected by the shift to hybrid, not only because their role is well-suited to remote working, but because of the potential impact on the way they support the broader workforce in a hybrid context.



With demand for and retention of the right skills already a key concern before the pandemic, and 37% of IT employees now considering leaving

their current employer within the next 12 months according to CCS Insight's data, the importance of a holistic approach to improving the employee experience is particularly acute. For these workers, approaches that demonstrate trust in their ability and the autonomy to do their job effectively are on a par with a healthy work-life balance in what determines a positive employee experience (cited by 30% of survey respondents). Their biggest frustrations with work technology are learning how to take advantage of new tools (cited by 29% of those surveyed) and the lack of integration between different applications and systems (cited by 28%).



## The right tools and processes make all the difference in the new world of work

The role of technology in enabling the business of the future is not in doubt, with 90% of businesses in CCS Insight's research planning to increase their IT investment in 2022 to support improved resiliency, digitization and innovation. The shift to hybrid work looms large in this decision-making, as does improving employee experience, with 39% of senior leaders planning investments to support this imperative in 2022.

While ensuring a great employee experience is about more than just having the right technology, it can play a pivotal role in helping transform and level up the employee's work experience. Not only does technology provide access to the information, people and processes an employee needs to do their job, it can facilitate a seamless, consistent work experience from anywhere, ensuring continuity in the hybrid era.

New collaboration and productivity tools fuel employee engagement by introducing new ways to connect individuals and teams, prompting new perspectives on daily work processes and interactions that help employees feel more effective, more valued and more connected to their peers and the organization as a whole. However, there are several key capabilities you should consider when choosing your solution, which are outlined below.



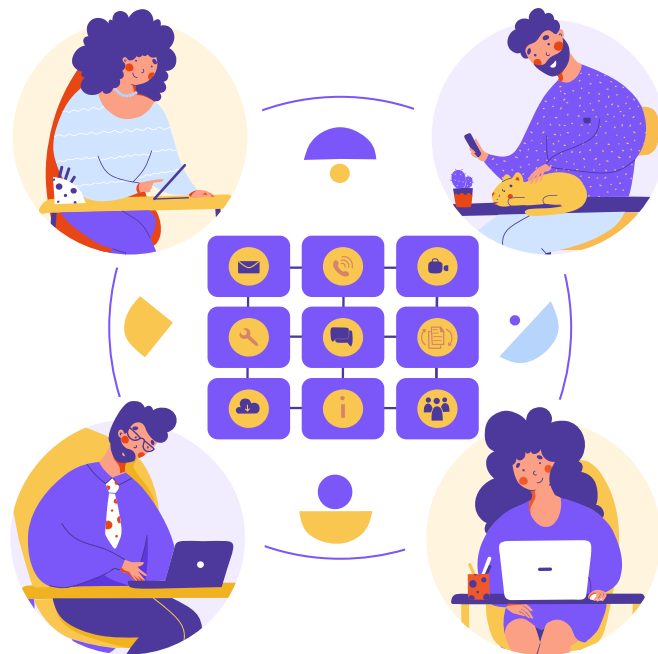
## 1 An integrated technology experience

At the heart of every collaboration tool is a set of features to support communication and teamwork.

But collaboration does not take place in a vacuum; it is inextricably intertwined with the processes and workflows that underpin a business's operations. As such, you must ensure your chosen collaboration solution integrates tightly with your broader application and technology ecosystem. CCS Insight's research shows employees are becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of integration between their work tools, with over a fifth of survey respondents flagging this as a frustration. The constant context-switching, often combined with the need to manually transfer information between applications, leads to wasted time and the potential for errors in processes.

Solutions that bring this disparate information together in one place and streamline processes through automation and digitization help reduce the friction for employees, improve visibility and transparency of progress, and allow employees to focus on more valuable work.

In a hybrid environment, this also allows the creation of a digital-first approach to work, with a single, unified experience that employees can trust wherever they are working.



**At the heart** of every collaboration tool is a set of features to support communication and teamwork

Security remains the number-one investment priority for businesses, according to CCS Insight's research, with its importance redoubled by businesses' growing reliance on technology as part of their digital transformation. As

## 2 Balancing experience and enterprise security

Because hybrid work introduces new complexities when it comes to securing a distributed workforce, it is critical that efforts to deliver a better employee experience through technology are not made at the expense of corporate security and compliance requirements. This is a careful balance for IT leaders to maintain: the growing use of personal devices for work, in conjunction with the need for employees to be able to work from anywhere, puts an increased strain on traditional, perimeter-based security strategies.

businesses increasingly shift to a zero-trust approach to security, it is important that your collaboration solution provider prioritizes enterprise security and compliance in the development of its solutions, proactively ensuring the security of employees and organizational data and processes within the platform, and integrating with your broader IT security tools and policies.

However, it is also important to view this push and pull of security and experience from the other direction. If security restrictions are too limiting and hamper the experience for employees, businesses risk their employees embracing unapproved "shadow IT" solutions that allow them to circumvent the restrictions and get their work done. More than



80% of IT leaders express concern about shadow IT in their business, with the main worries being personal productivity and communication tools. Although the existence of shadow IT can be a good way to tell that your technology solutions are not meeting the needs of employees, it is also critical to ensure that your strategic solution maintains this careful balance of user experience and compliance with enterprise security policies.

### 3 A platform for community and communication

Collaboration tools that focus on enabling work productivity are only part of the answer. For your chosen solution to play a central role in improving employee experience in a hybrid work era, it must also provide a platform for social interaction and community building, helping employees forge personal connections and build relationships without the need for in-person meetings. Enabling and encouraging employees to establish social groups and communities alongside work channels reinforces team bonds while injecting levity into the workday, helping nurture a supportive culture that recognizes the needs and well-being of employees. Tools should include features that facilitate informal conversations and interactions alongside more-structured meetings, as well as giving employees the ability to share their availability to help manage expectations and avoid reinforcing an always-on, always-available culture.

### 4 Extending community and processes beyond company boundaries

As well as supporting collaboration and team workflows within your organization, consider whether your chosen solution supports collaboration with customers, suppliers and other third parties as well. CCS Insight's research shows that 78% of employees work with people outside their organization every day. Extending collaborative capabilities to this set of processes helps reduce the number of applications employees must use to get their work done, and can also help improve relationships with customers and partners through better engagement and information sharing. It is critical that the external collaboration capabilities are a seamless, frictionless extension of the internal collaboration experience, while still recognizing and maintaining corporate security, data governance and compliance policies for all parties involved.

### 5 Balancing real-time interaction with asynchronous working

In addition to providing support for real-time, synchronous collaboration where participants work on the same thing at the same time, collaboration tools must also provide support for asynchronous collaboration, empowering individuals to contribute to a shared project or group discussion at a time that suits them. Not only can this help teams in the shift to flexible working when employees may need to flex their workday around other commitments, it is also vital for cross-timezone teams, and for people working on many projects

# 78%

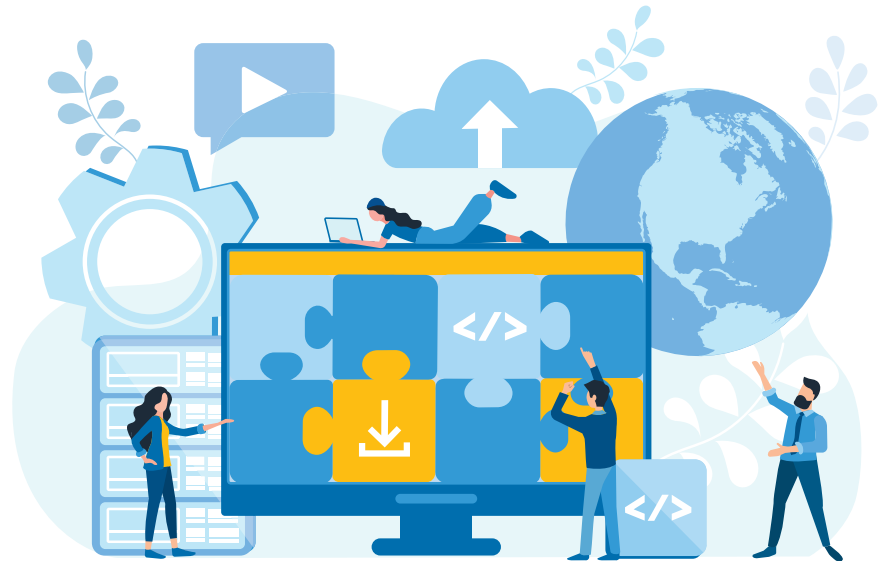
of employees work with people outside their organization every day

at once. Asynchronous interactions help avoid unnecessary meetings and provide a better platform for introverts who are less willing to jump into a lively group discussion, or people who take a little longer to gather their thoughts, helping improve inclusivity. And a shift away from a real-time response culture also gives more space for focus time, something that many have struggled with while working remotely throughout the pandemic.

Not only do chat-based platforms capture a written, searchable record of interactions that can be reviewed when convenient, they ensure that every member of the team has visibility of the same information, no matter their availability. Alternatively, when text is not quite enough, products like Slack offer video messaging capabilities that allow individuals to record and share video clips with their team. Not only can this be a quicker way to send a message, it is also often easier for recipients to consume with the added benefit of capturing non-verbal expression as well. Support for automatic transcription of these video messages improves accessibility for those with disabilities or non-native speakers, as well as for those in situations where audio playback is not possible, and ensures the messages remain searchable.

**6 Employee-led automation through low-code tools**

Workflow automation is a growing area of focus for many organizations, with CCS Insight's research finding that 45% of businesses plan to invest in tools that improve employee workflows and save time. As well as streamlining processes through improved collaboration, leading collaboration software solutions now include low-code workflow automation



## Leading collaboration

software solutions now include low-code workflow automation tools

tools to help individuals and teams automate mundane, repetitive tasks, freeing up time for more meaningful work and relationship-building, and improving the overall employee experience.

Half of all organizations now use low-code tools, driven by the need to improve agility as they embrace digitalization, and almost 70% of employees have already used or would consider using them. Common scenarios for these employee-created automations include employee paid time-off requests, custom reports or notifications, and document approvals. By giving employees tools that allow non-technical users to create custom or templated workflows using a drag-and-drop designer, businesses can reduce pressure on the IT department and remove bottlenecks for employees. As they deal with the shift to hybrid work, IT teams can scale their capacity and reduce their workload by automating activities like IT helpdesk requests for password resets and provisioning processes for new employee laptops.

## Recommendations for IT Leaders

There is no doubt that the hybrid model is vital to the future of work, but this is the only certainty about hybrid work at present. There are broad differences in how employees expect hybrid work to play out, their perspectives shaped by their personal situation, their stage of life and their seniority within their organization. Technology plays a central role in enabling this new way of working, but at a time when employee ties to organizations are at their weakest, it is vital that leaders prioritize the employee experience when making strategy decisions and purchasing technology.

CCS Insight makes the following recommendations to IT leaders as you plan your IT investments in the shift to hybrid work.

# 1

### Think holistically about employee experience as part of your IT strategy

Technology strategies have long recognized the importance of user experience, but now is the time to consider the whole employee experience and the role that technology can play not just in making work more productive, but also more enjoyable. As businesses adapt to the new world of work, technology can help shape the company culture by providing a platform for building and nurturing relationships, helping employees to be more connected and engaged wherever they work. By allowing employees to focus on the most valuable and meaningful work through automation, and providing tools that encourage a more healthy, sustainable work environment that attracts, retains and develops the best talent, IT leaders can play a role in transforming the employee experience while maximizing the value from IT investments.



## 2

### Revisit and reimagine processes to meet the needs of the new era of hybrid work

Hybrid work is not just about changing where people work, it is about changing *how* they work in a new digital world. Look for opportunities to re-examine and re-imagine established working behaviors and norms for this new hybrid reality, to ensure the employee experience is inclusive and fair, meeting the needs of every employee wherever they are working.

Lead by example, adapting and modeling your own ways of working and the way you connect, communicate and engage employees for a hybrid era. Embrace asynchronous collaboration where real-time processes are not necessary, for example when gathering status updates or for daily stand-ups. And automate wherever possible, giving employees the tools and the autonomy to improve their own workflows and experiences without needing technical skills.

## 3

### Look for opportunities to transform the experience for your IT organization

Although improving employee experience is a company-wide imperative, there are also specific opportunities to transform the experience of employees in your IT organization.

Whether through automating repetitive processes to help scale IT operations and enable IT teams to focus on more-valuable and meaningful tasks, or using collaborative tools to support a hybrid IT workforce, focusing on the needs of the IT organization will improve the overall experience for this group.

But perhaps more importantly, a focus on the IT organization's employee experience will provide success stories that can be shared with the wider business to help show value and contextualize the opportunity for leaders and stakeholders in other divisions.



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