

Building your technology arsenal for the hybrid workforce

A future of work brief

September 2021



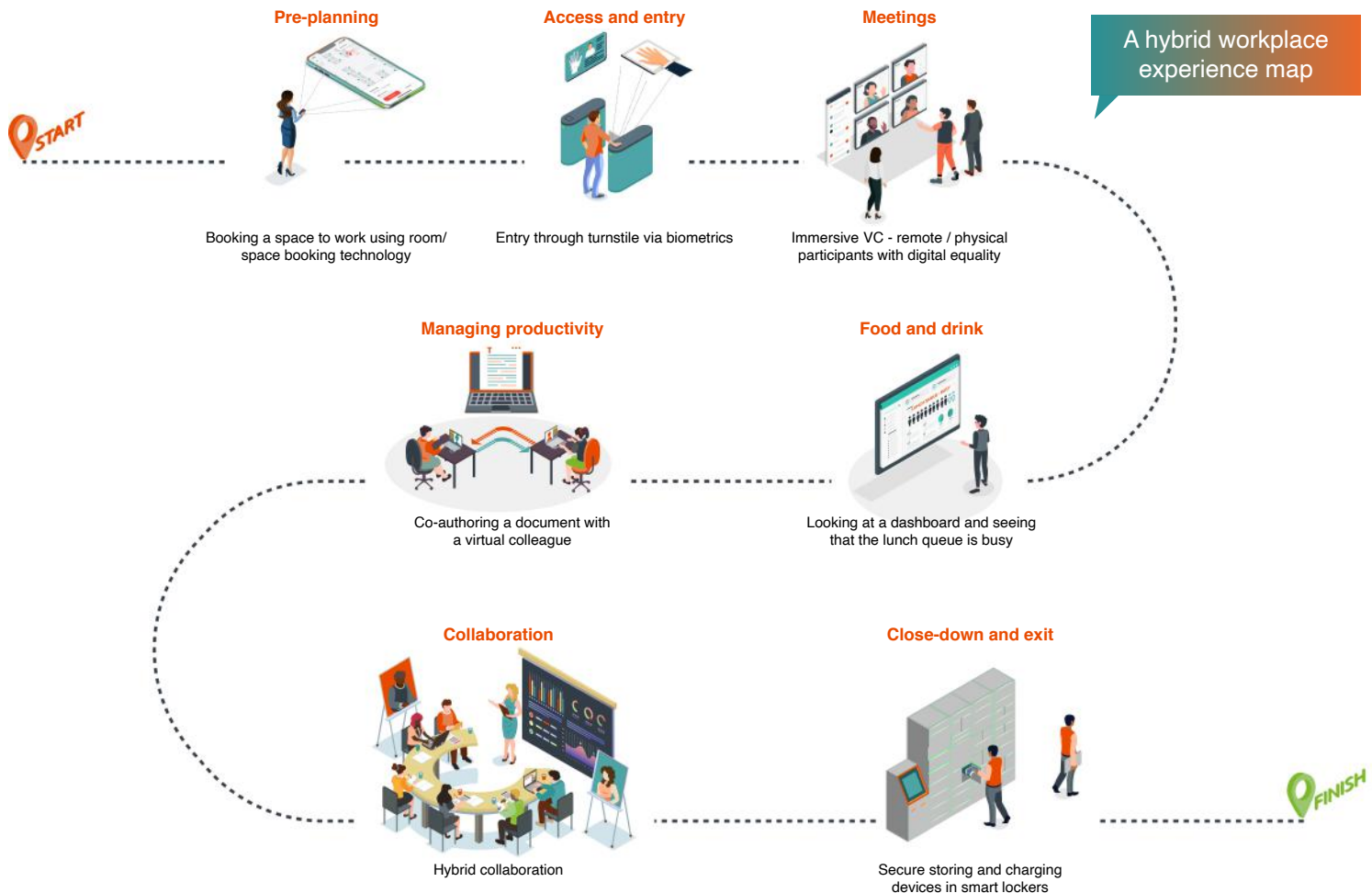
Introduction

No workplace experience is universal. Each employee requires a distinct set of workplace technologies which enable them to carry out their often-unique daily workplace activities and tasks. As much of the corporate world pivots to a hybrid remote and in-office work model, there is a renewed curiosity about the tools and technology which activate and underpin the workplace experience. From video conferencing technology designed to simulate digital equality between in person and remote participants to workflow management tools which enable seamless collaboration across the globe, the technology arsenal for the hybrid workforce is as broad as it is complex.

This brief is a non-exhaustive guide to some of the technologies central to creating a successful hybrid workplace.

Pre-planning

A buzzword that is fast becoming synonymous with the hybrid workplace is “intentionality.” This new intentional workplace empowers employees to utilize the hybrid model to create the most effective working patterns. However, such variability means that employees will require a seamless way of interacting with their physical workplace. Technology which allows colleagues to view, and pre-book spaces suited to their day, or week’s activities will become essential. Room and space booking tools vary in form and



functionality, from desktop software to mobile applications, businesses should undergo a robust selection process to ensure that their preferred vendor is able to fulfil their requirements. This is admittedly no easy feat as the market landscape is made up of a variety of vendors; from the older enterprise players such as Accruent, Condecco, Agilquest, Crestron and fm systems to younger, more disruptive vendors such as Mapiq, teem, robin, Smartway2 and Yarooms.

In such a crowded market, as a bare foundation, users should ensure that that such technology integrates with other more common office software technologies, such as Microsoft Outlook, Google Workspace and Apple Mail among others. Such integration streamlines the user process while augmenting their experience. As an additional fundamental requirement, businesses should ensure that room and space booking tools are intelligently utilized to make a variety of spaces bookable for the hybrid worker. In a hybrid workplace, the employees' decision of where to work based on the needs of their day is almost as critical as the decision of whether to go into the workplace at all.

Room and space booking technology has the additional benefit of being able to impose digital limits and restrictions. During the pandemic, the ability to utilize such technology to impose social distancing requirements, for example by making every other desk bookable, has proven valuable.

In more sophisticated room and space booking technology, AI, suggestions and nudges provide employees who choose to use such features additional insights and a better degree of interactivity with their spaces. Such nudges and suggestions can be configured to unlock a range of additional workplace benefits, for example – a nudge might inform employees of the key days their colleagues working on the same project are in the office, and remind them that it might be worthwhile for them to also come in. In other incarnations, they can also unlock social benefits for example by reminding employees to physical workplaces events such as happy hours or 'lunch-and-learn' events are taking place.

In a variable, and often uncertain workplace terrain, room and space booking technologies which are able to intuitively understand user needs, identity issues and suggest solutions are fundamental as these assist employees by adding clarity to complex work environments.

Intentionality

Much of the traditional workplace experience was driven by routine. In some instances, the entire practice of going to work became an almost subconscious procedure: wake up, commute, work, lunch, meet, commute, dinner, sleep and repeat. With the potential unlocked by hybrid models, those traditional monotonous routines are unseated. Instead, employees are empowered, within parameters, to pick the work patterns that suit them. This requires a mindset shift to intentional thinking; rather than take for granted that the workday will organically emerge, employees can now proactively take steps to book the spaces, arrange the tools, and collaborate with the people they require to succeed. Through intentionality, employees can tailor their workday to their precise needs.

Access and entry

The dangers of COVID-19 have stressed the importance of health, safety and hygiene in the workplace. A touchless, or at least a touch-light workplace brings an access experience, which is quite literally placed at the fingertips of employees and corporate guests. Mobile apps or QR codes used through personal devices, biometrics (retina/fingerprint) and more controversially, facial recognition technologies, are therefore fast forming key components of the hybrid workplace experience. Companies specializing in biometric and facial recognition access technologies, such as IDEMIA, NEC Corporation and HID, boast impressive security and user experience credentials which go some way to explaining the popularity of such technology in recent years.

From a compliance standpoint, it is worth remembering that access technology does not merely empower employees, it can also place restrictions on their movement. For example, some access apps require a health questionnaire be completed before employees can access the space. Similarly, some biometric readers are now integrating with temperature scanners thereby providing an additional safeguard against those displaying symptoms of illness – features already being used in airports and shopping centers.



As a corollary advantage, studies demonstrate that biometrics have additional accessibility benefits which help to create a more holistically equal workplace.

Meetings

Digital equality is the practice of ensuring indistinguishable experiences for remote and physical participants, and fundamentally one of the key hurdles for employers seeking to build a hybrid workplace. Many of us will recall the pre-pandemic remote participant experience: As a faint voice or often small and fuzzy picture on screen, these experiences were less than ideal. Going forward, especially now that hybrid meetings will become an inevitable part of the hybrid workplace experience, there is a renewed focus on ensuring that all participants, remote or in person, are able to successfully participate in meetings.



Technologies such as strategically positioned VC-enabled digital whiteboards (such as MS Surface, Samsung Flip) and double robots (iPads mounted on Segway-style devices) provide a far more immersive experience for remote participants. The latter of these even allows users to physical traverse the space as they might do in person, 'bumping into' colleagues and having impromptu conversations.

Similarly, keen to ensure digital equality remains integral, video-conferencing software

Digital equality

Digital equality is the art of ensuring parity between virtual and physical meeting participants. In a hybrid system where some attendees are appearing virtually and others are co-located together in the same space, additional efforts are needed to ensure that virtual participants are heard, seen and able to interact exactly how those in the physical room can. Technology, etiquette and space strategies can help to create digital equality. Special attention should be paid to understanding specific meeting cultures and including virtual attendees in the pre/post meeting rituals that accompany meetings such as coffee breaks and social small talk.

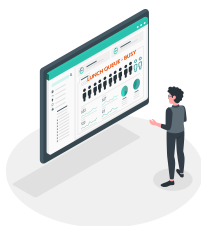
such as Zoom and MS teams are now offering new features and hardware, such as Logitech meetup and NEAT bars, designed to combat digital inequality. Such technology which includes, for example, balanced camera angles, meeting analytics and shared room audio amongst others are essential to the hybrid experience. If hybrid meetings continue to be disadvantageous to remote participants, employees will be forced to return to the physical workplace which would undermine the great potential of hybrid.

Away from technology, cultural and behavioral etiquette such as nominating a meeting chair to intentionally monitor the experience of virtual participants and flag issues they are experiencing, can sit alongside technology to provide an enhanced experience for virtual attendees.

Similarly, furniture and creative spatial structures can also activate technology by providing more immersive VC settings which situate remote and physical participants on equal footing.

Food and drink

Mobile applications which have built-in modules for ordering and paying for food and beverage provide seamless ways for users to safely and efficiently access amenities. Indeed, smart applications which can be used to make coffee, such as that offered by TopBrewer and Nespresso, will also grow in importance as more employees crave touchless workplace experiences. That these coffee



machines can brew barista-style coffee at the click of a button represent just one example of the types of incentives and initiatives that can be utilized to draw employees back to the workplace.

Alongside human colleagues, the hybrid workforce will also embrace robot companions who can help enhance their work days. Virtual assistant such as Siri, Cortana and Alexa for work are clear examples of 'always-on' tools ready to help streamline processes including finding time to catch up with friends at lunch or make reservations for users. Further still, from disinfecting robots to ones that can make salads or milkshakes, their inability to catch and spread viruses have made robots valuable workplace colleagues. That robots can be 'controlled' remotely by humans with alternative abilities, fills another piece of the workplace puzzle, notably how we can create a more equal and diverse workplace.

Similarly, dashboards which are fed with data from a variety of sources and technologies such as sensors and beacons, can also be utilized to show live occupancy information, giving employees an indication as to which spaces are emptier than others. This enables users to make real-time decisions such as optimal times to take lunch, use the gym or access other amenities.

Managing productivity

With some employees physically co-located and others appearing virtually, there is a spotlight on tools which enhance the



ability those responsible for tracking productivity to monitor progress and simplify activities.

Project management software, such as Trello, Monday and Asana among others, allow users to efficiently communicate tasks they are working on and monitor the progress of others. Similarly, instant messaging tools such as MS Teams, Webex, slack and matter most streamline processes even further by connecting employees in real time, diminishing the need for unnecessary meetings or inefficient email threads.

Further still, specialty digital client platforms such as ENGAGE, which track end-to-end workflow processes and detail chain of custodies, are robust tools designed to seamlessly manage and monitor productivity of hybrid business support teams.

Where employees are partially remote for some of the working week, a shift towards digital mailboxes will be crucial, particularly for legal, financial and compliance teams who often have important incoming physical mail and a statutory obligation to safely retain such documents.

Collaboration

While most offices in the hybrid world are being reimagined as nests of collaboration and community, the reality is that the hybrid workplace will also be required to accommodate hybrid collaboration. Digital collaboration tools like smart screens such as those offered by MultiTaction or the Google jam board which enable multi-user collaboration across time and space will therefore become essential. In the physical environment, such screens will operate optimally in specialist spaces designed to immerse remote participants in collaboration activities.



Similarly, where digital whiteboards such as MS Surface or Samsung Flip are not available or desirable, technologies such as Kaptivo, Logitech Scribe and Huddly Canvas which capture analogue whiteboard data in real-time and share it with virtual participants provide additional tools to bridge the gap between virtual and in-person participants. Such technologies are fundamental to activating the hybrid workplace.

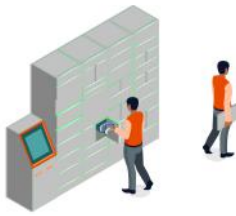
Data-driven workplace

The corollary of a digital first workplace is that it creates a powerful data lake which can be utilized for decision making. Many of the technologies described in this brief have inbuilt analytics features which can paint vivid pictures of how the workplace operates. Tracking anything whether it's room utilization or coffee consumption helps business glean information which can then be used to make decisions. One example of this in action would be that on noticing that the dimly-lit spaces of the floorplate are most underutilized, the business could reconfigure the work floor to provide greater sunlight to those spaces thereby increasing use.

Indeed, where documents and activities are products of multi-user collaborations, monitoring collaboration and managing co-authoring will become equally important. Tools such as track changes on MS Word as well as co-authoring features on digital platforms such as ENGAGE, are clearly easy wins.

Close-down and exit

With working practices split across workplaces, homes and even other third spaces, the end of the hybrid workers day will now need to be more intentional. Indeed, where an employee's previous "close-down" process would be a familiar, traditional routine, the hybrid workforce - at least in the short-term while patterns develop - need to consider



what tools they require to ensure optimum productivity in their next chosen place of work.

To this extent, portable devices or Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) capabilities will be essential for ensuring that an employee's work is able to travel with them, regardless of location. This ability to seamlessly pick up where they left off enables the hybrid workforce to maintain

their productivity while also combatting user frustration. Corporate issued devices and controlled VDI systems also have the additional benefit of ensuring digital compliance walls, information security and data protection obligations are upheld. Technology can also help. Facial recognition log-in software such as Windows Hello, Google Authenticator, LastPass and SecureAuth can securely control access, while specialty digital platforms such as ENGAGE are designed to protect all the information enrolled into workflows and mitigate threats before they even materialize.

As well as security, there will also be a renewed focus on preparation for when users are next in the workplace. Technologies such as smart lockers can now store and safely charge headsets and other portable connected devices in lockers secured with integrated intelligent software until they need to be used again. For hybrid workers, the provision of such technology is empowering; not only does it save time and improve productivity, it also sends a compelling message that the business wants them to succeed by providing the tools they require to make a hybrid workplace work for them.

Conclusion

A core thread through these technologies are enhanced user experiences which promote digital equality, place decisions at the users' fingertips and vitally, combat frustration. In fact, one of the biggest threats to the hybrid workplace is user frustration. If things do not work, people are more likely to revert to the traditional, presenteeism driven, way of working. When building a technology arsenal for your hybrid workforce, selecting tools which streamline processes, provide ease of access and fundamentally enhance user experiences will be crucial. Businesses keen to create an enduring hybrid workplace forgo these at their own peril.

About Williams Lea

Williams Lea is the global provider of skilled business-critical support services to financial, legal and professional services firms. We connect people, processes, and technology to manage documents and streamline key back-office functions. From our humble beginnings as a London-based printer in 1820, to our position today as a global outsourcing leader, our business is built on a strong heritage, great relationships, and a talented team. For more information, visit www.williamslea.com.

About UnWork

UnWork is a management consultancy and research house focused on the new world of work. It sits at the collision between people, place and technology and helps define the opportunities for innovation. It consults with companies in the process of change, helping to catalyze innovation and develop the ideas and concepts for the introduction of alternative ways of working, backed by robust data sets and an evidence-based approach that includes business case and cost-benefit analysis. It has unsurpassed global knowledge of key trends and case studies of all the leading global workplace innovation projects and provides 'opportunities for innovation' consultancy with a focus on supporting culture change, diversity and talent attraction, digital workplace strategies, and wellbeing. UnWork has a team of passionate and talented individuals with backgrounds in mathematics, economics, behavioral science, architecture, anthropology, and organizational design; it provides a refreshing approach for those embracing the new world of work. For more information, visit www.unwork.com.