



FUTURE OF  
**Work**

# Embracing the Hybrid Workforce with an Intelligent Digital Workspace



MARCH 2021

## EMBRACING THE HYBRID WORKFORCE WITH AN INTELLIGENT DIGITAL WORKSPACE

*The pandemic changed the landscape of how and where employees work, the way families live, shop, and communicate and how communities interact and grow.*

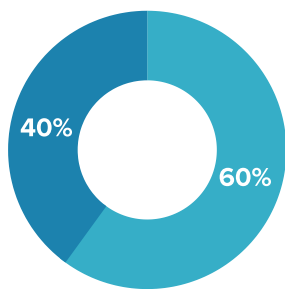
While we may be seeing an end to the crisis phase, many things will not go back to the way they were. That change may be most strongly felt in the way that technology is delivered to workers to support their day-to-day tasks.

The global pandemic caused IT teams and business leaders to rethink and reinvent decades of practices around delivering, securing, and managing workers' personal computing technology or digital workspace. A hybrid workforce is here.

The circumstances surrounding COVID-19 and the shift to hybrid work reinforced how important the already **emerging intelligent digital workspace** was. Due to the pandemic, businesses had to accelerate their transition to a more agile workspace.

The intelligent digital workspace is where people, data, content, community, and context meet with the technological solutions workers need to do their jobs. Intelligent digital workspaces encompass multiple facets of modern digital work and are not limited only to carpeted offices and white-collar or "knowledge" work; they can effectively deliver technology to a range of functional roles across every vertical industry and use case.

The primary differentiator of the new digital workspace is intelligence. In the new work experience, the workspace is personalized for the user and proactively provides the specific resources that worker needs for the task at hand.



*According to a recent IDC survey, almost 40% of the workforce was forced to shift to remote ways of working almost overnight, while the remaining 60% continued to adapt and find new, safer ways to do their jobs.*

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\*Source: IDC PERSPECTIVE - Future of Work: Strategies for the New Work Experience — Update



*The agile workspace is constructed around the primacy of responding to work as it emerges from the chaotic data, people, process, partner, and technology environment of modern business.*

## WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF AN INFLEXIBLE WORK ENVIRONMENT?

The evolution of work environments throughout the first two decades of this century is neither agile nor dynamic enough to allow businesses to thrive, let alone remain competitive.

Inflexible work environments were a primary challenge to businesses pre-pandemic and continue to impede the productivity and potential innovation of organizations. This challenge is exacerbated by new in-office requirements around worker safety and compliance, as well as the long-term challenges of supporting extensive remote and hybrid work environments.

Here are a few common challenges across organizations with inflexible work environments:

- **Monolithic nonintegrated apps.** Many organizations provide digital workspaces for employees based on cobbled together integrations and tie-ins with large, nonintegrated legacy application platforms. These environments did not scale well during the pandemic.
- **Context switching.** With multiple apps, having to move from one digital task to another will result in less productivity. On average, a worker uses 7 different apps and 7 different content types to accomplish their day to day work. This challenge magnified when workers moved to home offices and new, remote-work-related technologies were introduced.
- **Security barriers.** Badly implemented security technologies hinder worker productivity. Rigid or outdated VPN architectures or data protection policies buckled under the unanticipated surge of work-from-home activity. Remote work also increased risk exposure and broadened the risk of digital attacks.
- **Outdated key performance indicators (KPIs).** There is an assumption that all new technology must make workers more productive. Most businesses are not effectively measuring the true effects of a technology initiative relative to overall business success.

## WHY SHOULD MY ORGANIZATION INVEST IN AN INTELLIGENT DIGITAL WORKSPACE?

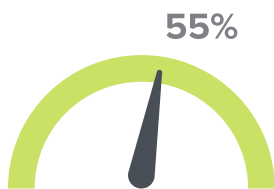
For many, the pandemic was the event that proved the value of agile teams that can quickly adapt to business demands and new market requirements with flexible end-user computing technology. Firms that lagged in this workspace and workplace modernization effort suffered more.

Organizations that were on course to revamp or modernize their employee computing environments to support agile, dynamic, and reconfigurable teams were ahead of the curve in terms of dealing with lockdowns, closed offices, and a vastly expanded remote workforces.

The intelligent digital workspace provides the following benefits in this dynamic environment:

- **Consistent context:** Proactively provides the resources required for the task at hand to increase employee focus.
- **Flow of work:** Allows the employee to deliver in the moments that matter.
- **Swarming teams:** Uses collaboration to organize digital and human workers to address opportunities as they emerge.
- **Augmented process execution:** Sorts the vast amount of incoming data into meaningful insights and actions automating what can be automated and leaving the work only humans can do.
- **Support for behaviors as well as tasks:** Supports critical behaviors as well as task execution with enhanced learning and knowledge sharing.
- **Anywhere, anytime:** Enables transparent access to the data, digital, physical, and social resources that are required to complete the work anywhere at any time from any device.

A well designed and thoughtfully implemented digital workspace can infuse flexibility and dynamism into rigid work environments. It is a personalized, federated environment that puts the worker at the center, and provides the data, content, applications and collaborators that the worker needs to get the job done. It is device agnostic and available 24/7, in any location.



*According to a recent IDC survey, in 2021, 55% of respondents say that Workplace transformation programs will be a priority or high priority to ensure the long term resilience and success of the business.*

What's new and different is the layers that enable configuration and personalization, authentication and security, and ultimately intelligence driven by analytics and machine learning. In the intelligent work environment, the worker does not need to search for the tools he or she needs for the task at hand; rather, the environment “serves up” the resources required for the next priority task.

Today, there are a number of vendors and service providers working towards this vision. It's up to business leaders to eliminate inflexible work environments and make the intelligent digital workspaces a priority for future success.

### THREE LAYERS OF THE WORKSPACE

IDC believes there will be a number of different “flavors” of intelligent workspace solutions, depending on the focus and heritage of the workspace technology or services provider. The architectures will be similar and are composed of three layers:

#### 1. Physical devices and spaces:

The first layer is the physical devices we interact with every day: laptops, smartphones, tablets and PCs. It also includes connected, digital things in the workplace such as wearables, digital assistants, connected/smart whiteboards, and even industrial or specialized equipment.

#### 2. Digital Workspace infrastructure:

This is the critical glue of the digital workspace that puts up guard rails and controls the framework for the digital workspace. Here we see identity authentication, provisioning, management, monitoring and support. This is where we can personalize and optimize the environment and provide proactive recommendations for next best action.

#### 3. Digital Interfaces/experiences:

This is the customer interface and controls the experience. Here are the applications, tools and digital experiences that workers live in every day. It also has connectors to everything that the worker needs including LOB apps, enterprise applications such as ERP or CRM and vertically-focused apps.

To learn more about the Future of Work and the Intelligent Digital Workspace, view our research "**Intelligent Digital Workspaces: Enabling the Future of Work for the Resilient Workplace — Update**" (<https://www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=US47447421>).

For more on IDC's other “Future of X” practices, visit <https://www.idc.com/FoX>