Uncomplicate your collaboration:
Making collaboration work

Introduction

Australia is often regarded as a leader in the adoption of many progressive work styles and policies. TRA surveyed a total of 1,250 respondents (1000 Australian employees and 250 IT decision makers, HR leaders, facilities managers and other senior line of business executives) in 2018 to capture the current state of Australian workplaces. What did we find? That they are largely characterised by increasing levels of flexibility and this is a welcome circumstance by employees.

In fact, it is fair to say that a flexible modern workplace is now the expected norm. Of course, this has implications for how organisational leaders deliver great employee experiences now and in the future. Without flexibility, it will be difficult to become an employer of choice and get the best out of your people.

## Consider the following data points that support this contention:

69% of organisations have a **modern workplace policy** where either all or some employees can work from different locations, at different times, using different technologies.

32% of employees say they work most of the time in a **traditional enclosed office or cubicle,** while the remainder are in one of the following: an open office, an activity based working (ABW) office, mobile outside or on campus, or remote working. 36% say they don't need an allocated desk.

1 in 2 employees at organisations that don't have a modern workplace strategy say they want greater flexibility.

35%
43%
42%
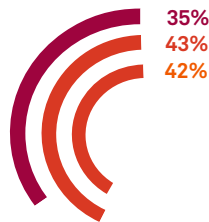
The **composition of the workforce** is changing with 35% of organisations using freelancer marketplaces, 43% contractors, and 42% outsourcers. This is in addition to the fact we now have five generations of employees in the workplace

Employees rate the ability to **balance their work and personal lives** better as the top outcome.

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Collectively the research results point to a mature market for flexible working in Australia and ongoing desire for more flexibility. The main drivers for this wave of flexible working were: digital transformation programs, cost reductions (particularly as relates to real estate), recruitment and retention, customer experience, equality and diversity, and an office move or retrofit. While trends like ABW and mobile working have been around for approximately 10 years in Australia, over 80% of organisations have made a significant change to their workplace strategy in the last 24 months. Yet, 47% say they need to continue to make considerable change to be successful.

Let's repeat that point: despite already embracing a modern workplace, almost one in every two organisations still felt the need to make big changes to workplace strategy in future. When we asked what area of their workplace they needed to improve the most, 80% of Australian CxOs pointed to "collaboration". Indeed, they were twice as likely to say collaboration ahead of the next most important area of employee experience.

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It's time to simplify collaboration

It's time to simplify collaboration

Now that the majority of Australian organisations have embraced flexible working, either for all their employees or for some, the challenge is to now perform and better leverage the agile ways of working. To this end we contend collaboration is the new battleground.

As we noted above employees don't just need to interact with fellow team members across all the different spaces they use and tasks they undertake. They also need to collaborate across teams, with remote and mobile workers, with partners and suppliers, with offshore and outsourced people, with freelancers, and sometimes with customers. Organisational leaders, for their part, need to bring teams together quickly, embrace agile development and design thinking, and to do all this at scale, and at speed without creating roadblocks.

The data supports this view as three quarters of CxOs said they had experienced a greater need for collaboration in the past six months, while 64% of employees said the same. Further, 74% of CxO survey respondents told us collaboration is critical to a digital transformation program.

However, one in three CxOs acknowledged they don't have a formal strategy for collaboration and only 28% of CxOs said their organization was "very good" at collaboration of all types.

Note also that our research found:

There is an average of 17 minutes lost every day setting up tech tools.
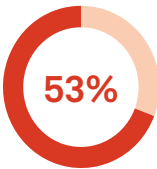
53% The average time spent on collaboration activities is 53% of any typical day.

The most highly rated technology for collaboration in terms of performance was voice calls.

60% Less than 60% of people say collaboration sessions start on time all the time.

The most preferred channel for communication remains by a long way in person (or face-to-face), followed by emails and then voice calls.

Indeed, when asked about speaking directly to someone, employees overwhelmingly agreed that it allowed them to: make decisions more quickly, clarify issues, and align viewpoints.

Employees tell us the challenge with collaboration is they are too busy, have too many pointless meetings, and have too many emails.

There is a clear need for a unified communications solution:

When we specifically asked about collaboration technology, one in two CxOs said they have too many systems from multiple vendors, costs are too high, training employees is hard, and security remains a challenge. Meaning many organisation's collaboration environments are too complex both for employees and CxOs, and they continue to rely on traditional methods.

Advice on tools and next steps

Advice on tools and steps

9 in 10 employees agree with the statement that "Modern collaboration tools are critical in today's workplace to ensure I can work effectively with my colleagues". Also 95% of CxOs agree that: "A modern, flexible workplace requires simple and effective collaboration tools that are easy to use and always available". So, everyone is on the same page. Or, are we? This is a question you need to ask of your own organisation.

Steps we encourage you to consider, include:

Establish a program of improving the 1%ers

What do we mean by 1%ers? These are the low hanging fruit or small issues that impact the employee experience in a negative way. For example, Wi-Fi blackspots in offices, challenges with getting video or web-conferencing systems to work, network dropouts during meetings, and so forth. You should aim to eliminate or reduce all the small frustrations that employees face with workplace technology on a daily basis.

Place a critical focus on simplifying and integrating the collaboration tools that you consume or provide to employees

Voice-based communication should be a key pillar in this mix, and you should make it a priority. If you have multiple vendors' tools in place, then consolidate and integrate. Further, consider how you might consume it all as a service and offload responsibility to a third party for maintenance and service delivery.

Your network performance should be assessed and improved where needed

Especially in light of multi-cloud and service adoption. Consider adopting software defined WAN (SD-WAN) for your branch offices and for on-demand bandwidth requirements.

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Steps we encourage you to consider, include:

Try new things readily and see what sticks

After simplifying and integrating your environment, explore new innovations such as those in the areas of AI. Remember, it is okay to fail, as long as you learn and move forward.

Adopt agile and design thinking practices across the entire organisation

These philosophies shouldn't be limited to software, service, or product development teams alone. They offer many avenues for improving the processes, practices and culture related to overall collaboration.

Give your flexible working strategy a health check

If you have been doing it for some time, it is time to reinvent as the honeymoon benefits will be starting to wane and you need to deliver new gains and better employee experiences.

It is time to uncomplicate our collaboration efforts. The nature of work has changed and Australian organisations and employees have embraced flexible working with gusto. The major challenge now is getting collaboration right. Following the steps above – with a trusted partner – while simplifying and integrating will help you on your modern workplace journey.

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About this report

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