6 Trends Shaping a Future for People in the Workplace

The most important aspect of emerging technologies is how people and organizations put them to work.

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A Note From The Editor

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Most businesses agree that the future of work will be rooted in technology, from cloud-based software to AI. But technology on its own isn’t enough. People, not just technology, will define the future of work.

The world is more open, connected and moves faster than we’ve ever known. As a new generation enters the workforce, they won’t just demand tools that are as good as those in their personal life, they have a different expectation of work itself.

They expect to connect with anyone in their organization without having to ask for permission. They expect to have a voice. They expect to be heard. They expect to use new types of tools, too. By 2020, this generation will account for 50 percent of all employees. Understanding what the future of work will look like begins with their needs, expectations

– even their demands.

Following are six trends we think will be critical to the workplace of the future. We believe these will be key principles for all businesses if they're to develop the speed and resilience they'll need to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world:

Trend 1: Open by Default

Young people share more of their lives than previous generations could have imagined. They see instant access as a right – to media and games and also to information and each other.

At work, being open by default breaks down organizational silos, giving people quicker access to information they need. It also helps us feel more connected to the mission and co-workers.

Consider a senior manager who uses an email memo to communicate to a team. Who would hit Reply All to that? No one. But what message does that send? It says, "Do not share your ideas. Do not share your voice." In the future of work, we'll move from the closed culture of email threads and 1:1 conversations to a radically open culture of transparency. The organization of the future will be an one where news travels fast (good news and bad news), where the distance between all employees has been reduced.

Being open and giving everyone a voice is the only way to attract and retain talent today – not the top down culture of the past. Connecting everyone on the same platform lets people understand who they work for and what the values and culture of the company are – making the organization come alive.

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Trend 2: Mobile First and Automated

Mobile stats speak for themselves: 71 percent of time spent online in the US happens on a mobile device (that figure is 61 percent in the UK and 91 percent in Indonesia); mobile penetration is at 84 percent in Europe, 80 percent in the US and 66 percent in Asia Pacific. The next generation of workers will be tied to their phones, not their desks. That means we need experiences that are simple to perform on the go.

Automation will play a major role in this. Bots have taken what used to be tricky or time-consuming tasks and made them mobile-friendly, lightweight, interactive and fun. Bots make operating a business more cost-effective, foster business culture and increase productivity. Increasingly, we will see automation and bots become a key component of next-generation, mobile IT.

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Trend 3: Multi-Modal

The mobile revolution has inspired a giant shift in the way people communicate. We've moved from the written world of email to a multimodal world where video, text, emojis, photos and gifs all have a role.

Video is effective in the workplace for the same reason we love it in our personal lives: attention. At Facebook, our studies show that people spend five times longer looking at video in the News Feed compared to photo or text posts. As the volume of information at work grows exponentially, video remains the most powerful way to cut through the noise and grab precious extra seconds of attention.

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Trend 4: Integrated

People will always want to use multiple tools to get work done. In the future of work, it’s important to enable this flexibility by taking a “best of breed” approach to software and other tools for work.

It’s frustrating when you realize that you can’t access a link or file from somebody on a different team because their software isn’t compatible with your own, as can be the case with legacy IT systems. The tools we use in the workplace of the future will have integration built in from the start.

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Trend 5: Connected

The static, desktop-based way of working no longer reflects reality.

A study by Upwork and Freelancers Union concluded that by 2020, 50 percent of the U.S. workforce will be freelancers with no fixed “place” of work. Other parts of large organizations are often cut off from central communications — people working in factories, shop floors or in the field. In the workplace of the future, everybody will be connected through mobile — giving a voice to people who have been beyond reach of traditional IT.

This is about more than connecting disparate geographies. Connecting companies from top to bottom gives a voice to new people, encouraging new ideas that transform culture. According to Deloitte, 69 percent of C-level executives say company culture — especially transparency in internal communications — is critical to their organization’s ability to realize its mission and vision.

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Trend 6: Personalized and Prioritized

Productivity and collaboration tools will increase the volume of information hitting employees. As the speed of information accelerates, making sense of it quickly and prioritizing it effectively will be a key competitive skill.

Time is our most precious resource, which means we need to make smart choices about where to spend it. AI will play a key role bringing the most important information to the fore, giving people more time to get work done.

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The next generation is upending communication at work, setting a stage for a more collaborative, transparent, democratized workplace. It’s an incredible opportunity to change how people work, how companies work and ultimately even how economies work.

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