NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF WORK:

MASTERING HYBRID WORK MODELS

FOR ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

In the evolving landscape of rapid technological advances and shifting societal values, the concept of work is undergoing a profound transformation. This white paper examines the transition towards hybrid work models, recognizing them as a strategic imperative rather than a temporary adaptation. It delves into the complexities and nuances of integrating a hybrid work model, exploring how it intersects with organizational efficiency and employee satisfaction.

This document offers a thorough analysis and strategic insights into key areas: embedding flexibility within organizational practices, harnessing the power of technological advancements, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and prioritizing employee wellness and inclusivity. These aspects are critical in navigating and exploiting the complexities of today's workplace for a competitive advantage.

The paper aims to provide actionable insights and strategies for organizations looking to navigate the intricacies of the modern workplace effectively. It aims to equip leaders and decision-makers with the essential knowledge to effectively respond to the shifting dynamics of work, workforce, ways of work, workplace, and wellness to build resilience and thrive in the future. Utilizing these insights, businesses can gain a competitive edge in the market, striking a balance that fosters organizational development while also enhancing employee well-being.

INTRODUCTION

As we embark on a new era, the global workplace is undergoing a transformative shift, fueled by rapid technological advancements, socio-economic changes, and the unprecedented impact of the post-COVID-19 pandemic. This shift is not only redefining the very essence of the workplace—altering where and how we work—but also challenging traditional notions of productivity, collaboration, and employee engagement. In this dynamic context, organizations are poised to strategically adapt and innovate, capitalizing on the evolving dynamics reshaping work.

Technology as the Catalyst of Workplace Evolution:

Digital communication, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence stand at the forefront of this evolution. These technologies have dissolved the boundaries of traditional workspaces, fostering a fluid, interconnected environment. In tandem, socio-economic factors like changing workforce demographics and a growing emphasis on work-life balance are propelling the transition towards more flexible, hybrid work models.

The Global Context of Change:

Overarching global trends, including the phenomena of globalization, the rise of the gig economy, and significant demographic shifts, are influencing the nature and dynamics of work. The blurring of geographical and cultural boundaries in a globally interconnected economy, alongside the movement towards more flexible, freelance-based work arrangements, epitomizes the significant changes reshaping the workplace.

Navigating New Work Models:

In the realm of these evolving work models, particularly hybrid models, there lies a spectrum of opportunities and challenges for organizations and employees alike. These models present possibilities such as accessing a broader talent pool and realizing potential cost savings on physical workspaces. However, they also bring forth challenges that require robust strategies for effective communication, fostering team cohesion, and maintaining a consistent and inclusive company culture across geographically dispersed teams.

A Roadmap for Future Work:

This paper provides an in-depth exploration of these transformative elements. It will examine the various impacts of automation and artificial intelligence on job roles, the embrace of a diverse and inclusive workforce, the transformative role of digital tools in streamlining workflows, the evolution of physical workspaces, and the growing emphasis on holistic employee wellness. Each dimension meticulously analyzed, offers a panoramic view of the changing landscape of work. Also, presenting strategic insights and actionable guidelines for businesses and individuals to effectively adapt and thrive in this rapidly evolving work environment.

THE EMERGENCE OF HYBRID WORK MODELS

Historical Context and Evolution

The genesis of hybrid work can be traced back to technological advancements that began to erode the traditional 9-to-5, office-bound work paradigm. The acceleration of digital connectivity, cloud computing, and collaborative tools created a foundation upon which hybrid work models could thrive. The recent global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, acted as a catalyst, propelling organizations worldwide to adopt remote work out of necessity, leading to an organic evolution towards hybrid models.
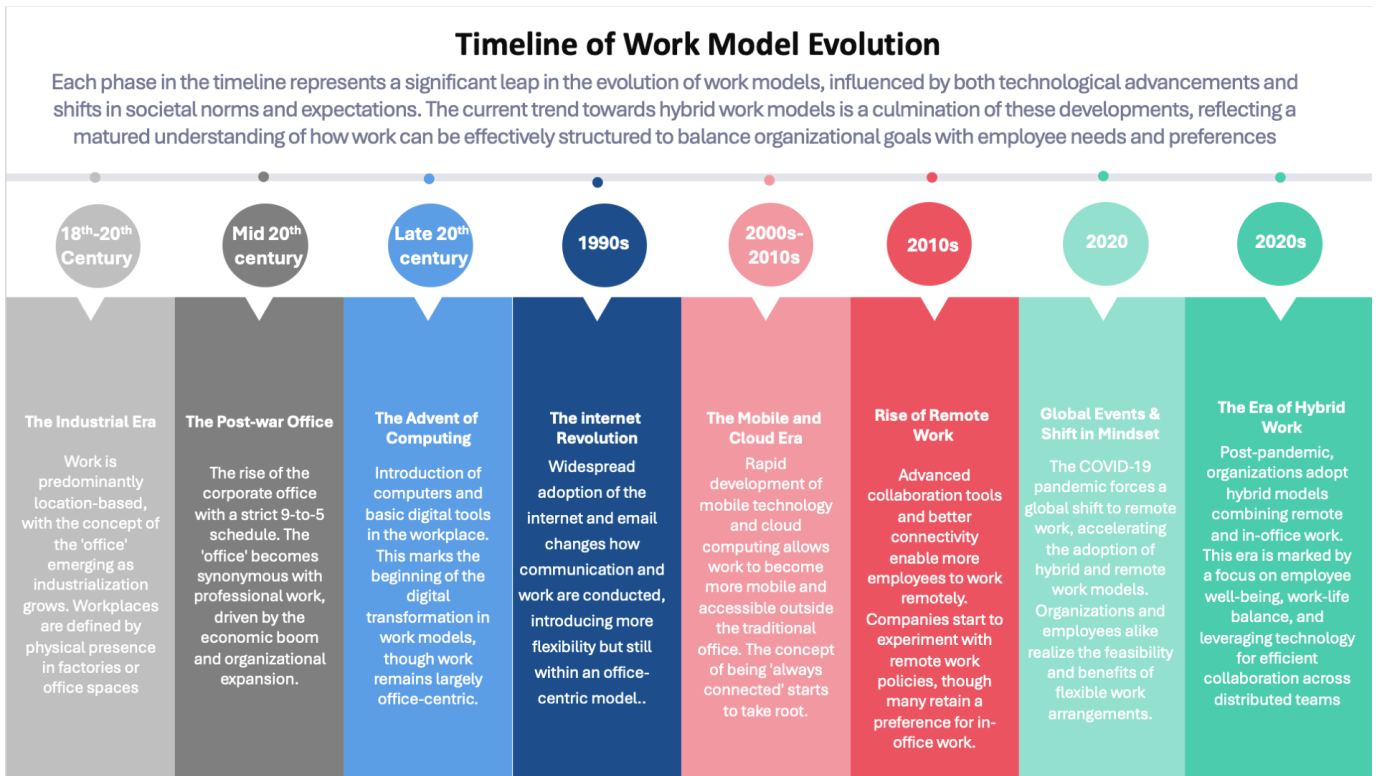
Timeline of Work Model Evolution

Each phase in the timeline represents a significant leap in the evolution of work models, influenced by both technological advancements and shifts in societal norms and expectations. The current trend towards hybrid work models is a culmination of these developments, reflecting a matured understanding of how work can be effectively structured to balance organizational goals with employee needs and preferences

18th-20th Century	Mid 20th century	Late 20th century	1990s	2000s-2010s	2010s	2020	2020s
The Industrial Era	**The Post-war Office**	**The Advent of Computing**	**The internet Revolution**	**The Mobile and Cloud Era**	**Rise of Remote Work**	**Global Events & Shift in Mindset**	**The Era of Hybrid Work**
Work is predominantly location-based, with the concept of the 'office' emerging as industrialization grows. Workplaces are defined by physical presence in factories or office spaces	The rise of the corporate office with a strict 9-to-5 schedule. The 'office' becomes synonymous with professional work, driven by the economic boom and organizational expansion.	Introduction of computers and basic digital tools in the workplace. This marks the beginning of the digital transformation in work models, though work remains largely office-centric.	Widespread adoption of the internet and email changes how communication and work are conducted, introducing more flexibility but still within an office-centric model..	Rapid development of mobile technology and cloud computing allows work to become more mobile and accessible outside the traditional office. The concept of being 'always connected' starts to take root.	Advanced collaboration tools and better connectivity enable more employees to work remotely. Companies start to experiment with remote work policies, though many retain a preference for in-office work.	The COVID-19 pandemic forces a global shift to remote work, accelerating the adoption of hybrid and remote work models. Organizations and employees alike realize the feasibility and benefits of flexible work arrangements.	Post-pandemic, organizations adopt hybrid models combining remote and in-office work. This era is marked by a focus on employee well-being, work-life balance, and leveraging technology for efficient collaboration across distributed teams

Fig 1: A timeline graphic tracing the evolution of work models from traditional office-centric to the current hybrid models

HYBRID WORK: A RESPONSIVE MODEL

The hybrid model is a response to several key factors:

Evolving Nature of Work:

The nature of work is becoming more project-based, collaborative, and reliant on digital tools. The hybrid model supports this evolution by offering the flexibility to work from different locations and leveraging technology for collaboration.

Changing Employee Expectations

There is a growing demand for work-life balance, autonomy, and flexible work arrangements. Hybrid work models address these expectations by allowing employees to have more control over their work environment and schedule.

Customer Demands:

Customers increasingly seek rapid and agile responses. Organizations with hybrid models can leverage global talent and extended work hours due to different time zones, leading to improved customer service and responsiveness.

Technological Disruptions:

The ongoing advancements in technology are continuously reshaping the workplace. Hybrid models are inherently more adaptable to technological changes, allowing organizations to integrate new tools and systems more seamlessly.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Hybrid work models come with their own set of benefits and challenges:

BENEFITS:

- Increased employee satisfaction and retention.
- Access to a wider talent pool unconstrained by geographical boundaries.
- Potential cost savings on real estate and overhead expenses.
- Greater resilience and business continuity in the face of disruptions.

CHALLENGES:

- Maintaining a cohesive company culture and employee engagement.
- Managing communication and collaboration effectively across different settings.
- Ensuring cybersecurity and data privacy in decentralized work environments.
- Addressing disparities in experience between remote and in-office employees.

The hybrid work model represents a significant shift in how organizations approach work. By offering a blend of remote and in-office activities, it aligns with the dynamic nature of modern work, employee desires, and technological advancements. However, it requires a thoughtful implementation strategy that considers the unique opportunities and challenges it presents. Organizations that successfully navigate these waters can harness the full potential of the hybrid model, making it a cornerstone of their operational and strategic success in the new work landscape.

SECTION 1: OPPORTUNITIES IN REDEFINING THE FUTURE OF WORK

The future of work presents unique opportunities that, if harnessed correctly, can lead to significant organizational growth and employee fulfilment. This section delves into key areas where organizations can innovate and adapt.
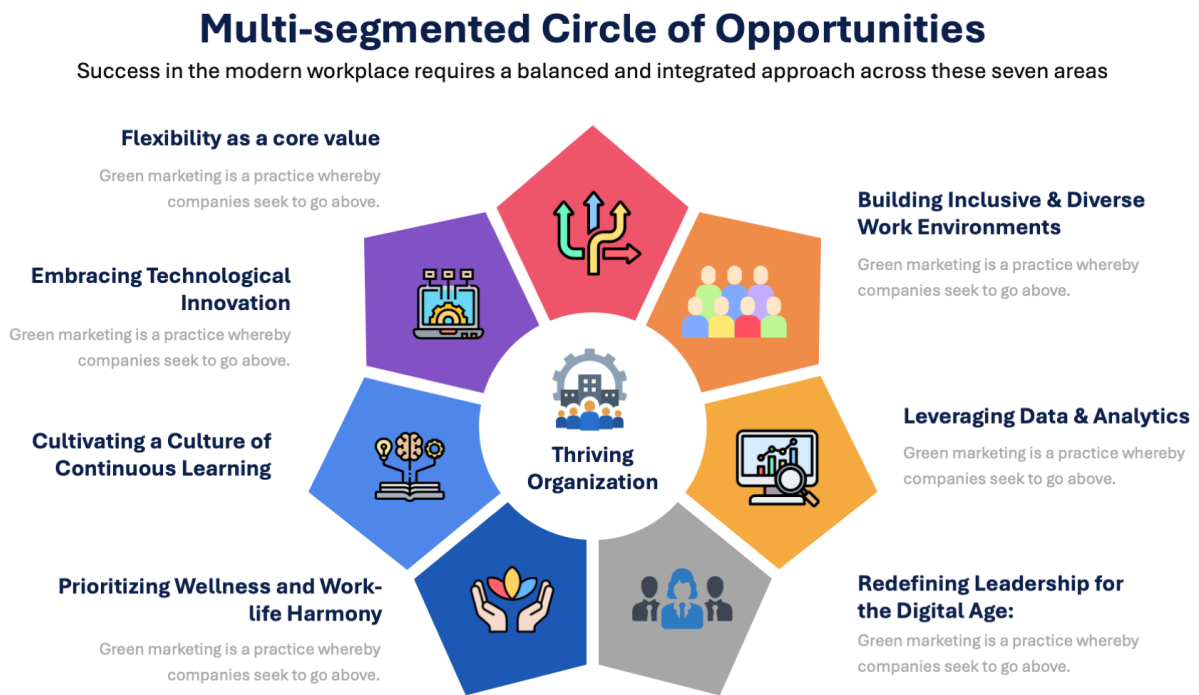
Multi-segmented Circle of Opportunities

Success in the modern workplace requires a balanced and integrated approach across these seven areas

Flexibility as a core value
Green marketing is a practice whereby companies seek to go above.

Embracing Technological Innovation
Green marketing is a practice whereby companies seek to go above.

Cultivating a Culture of Continuous Learning

Prioritizing Wellness and Work-life Harmony
Green marketing is a practice whereby companies seek to go above.

Thriving Organization

Building Inclusive & Diverse Work Environments
Green marketing is a practice whereby companies seek to go above.

Leveraging Data & Analytics
Green marketing is a practice whereby companies seek to go above.

Redefining Leadership for the Digital Age:
Green marketing is a practice whereby companies seek to go above.

Fig 2: Circle of opportunities

By embracing these opportunities, organizations can not only navigate the challenges of a changing world but also set a precedent for success and sustainability in the future workplace.

1.Flexibility as a Core Value

Beyond merely offering remote work options, organizations can embed flexibility into their operational DNA, allowing employees to tailor their work patterns and environments to their personal and professional needs. This involves creating policies that allow for adaptable work schedules, location independence, and personalized work arrangements. This approach can significantly enhance job satisfaction and productivity, making the company more attractive to current and potential talent.

Organizations need to evaluate how various roles can incorporate flexible practices without compromising productivity. This may include staggered work hours, part-time remote work options, or job sharing. The key is to establish flexibility as a norm rather than an exception within the organizational culture.

2.Embracing Technological Innovation

The rapid pace of technological advancement offers unprecedented opportunities to redefine how work is performed. By adopting tools that facilitate collaboration, creativity, and efficiency, organizations can stay ahead of the curve, attracting individuals who are eager to work at the forefront of innovation. This includes tools for virtual meetings, cloud-based project management software, and AI-driven analytics tools.

3.Cultivating a Culture of Continuous Learning

The future of work is inherently linked with the continuous evolution of skills and knowledge. By investing in learning and development, organizations not only enhance their workforce capabilities but also demonstrate a commitment to employee growth, leading to higher engagement and retention. This can be achieved through online learning platforms, professional development programs, and mentorship initiatives.

4.Prioritizing Wellness and Work-Life Harmony

The integration of wellness initiatives into the workplace, including mental and emotional wellbeing support, physical well-being programs, and measures to ensure work-life balance, can make an organization stand out as an employer of choice.

Encouraging a healthy work-life balance is essential in preventing burnout and maintaining productivity. This can involve flexible hours, respecting boundaries between work and personal time, wellness programs, wellness digital applications and encouraging regular breaks.

5.Building Inclusive and Diverse Work Environments

A commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion enhances creativity, innovation, and company reputation, attracting a broader talent pool. Inclusive policies and practices ensure that all employees feel valued and supported, fostering a sense of belonging and loyalty. Diverse and inclusive workplaces are proven to be more resilient, better at problem-solving, and often outperform less diverse peers in profitability and value creation.

6.Leveraging Data and Analytics

Utilizing data analytics, organizations gain insights into employee preferences, productivity patterns, and potential areas of improvement. This information can guide strategic decisions around work models, employee engagement, and talent management. Data can help tailor employee engagement strategies, optimize operational processes, and personalize customer experiences, leading to improved outcomes and efficiency.

7.Redefining Leadership for the Digital Age

The future of work demands leaders who are adept at managing distributed teams, inspiring innovation, and navigating change. Investing in leadership development can prepare organizations for the complexities of the modern workplace. This involves a shift from traditional hierarchical leadership to more collaborative and empathetic styles.

Developing leadership skills such as digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and adaptability is crucial. Investing in leadership development programs can equip current and future leaders to successfully guide their teams through the complexities of a modern, digital workplace.

By addressing these areas, organizations can not only resolve the challenges associated with the transition to a hybrid work model but also position themselves to thrive in the future of work. This requires a holistic approach that considers the needs and preferences of the workforce, the capabilities offered by technology, and the broader socio-economic context. Ultimately, the goal is to create a work environment that is flexible, inclusive, and conducive to both personal well-being and professional growth, thereby securing a competitive advantage in the talent market.

In conclusion, the future of work is not just a distant concept but a rapidly unfolding reality. The opportunities outlined in this section provide a roadmap for organizations seeking to thrive in this new era. As organizations navigate this journey, the focus should be on creating a work environment that is resilient, innovative, and responsive to the evolving needs of both the workforce and the marketplace. By doing so, businesses can unlock their full potential, achieving a harmonious balance between organizational objectives and employee well-being, thereby securing a prosperous future in the world of work.

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> In embracing a future of work defined by flexibility, innovation, and inclusivity, organizations can not only navigate the complexities of a changing world but also secure a thriving and sustainable future, balancing organizational objectives with employee well-being.

SECTION 2: FUTURE OF WORK SYNERGIES: STRATEGIC ROADMAP

In today's rapidly evolving business environment, understanding and integrating five major components is essential for any organization aiming to excel. These components - Work, Workforce, Ways of Work, Workplace, and Wellbeing - each play a pivotal role in shaping the future of work. The synergy among these elements is crucial in developing a resilient, adaptive, and forward-thinking organizational strategy. This whitepaper delves into how these components interconnect and influence one another, setting the stage for an in-depth exploration of their collective impact on the modern workplace.
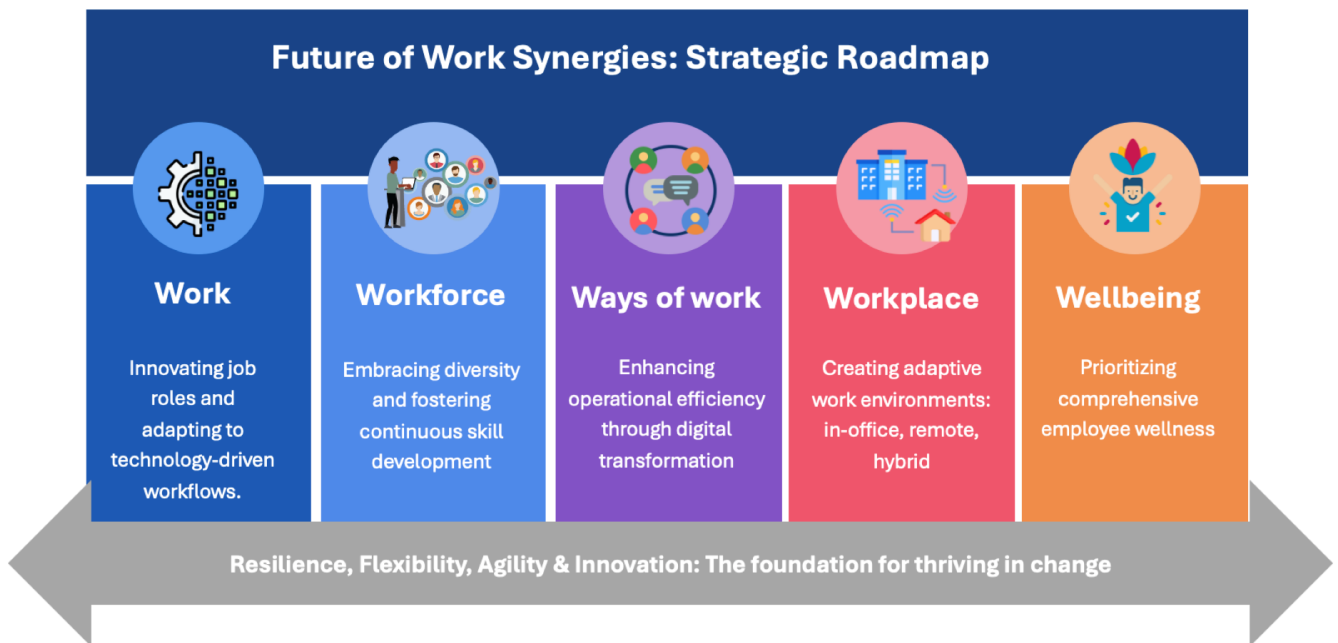

Fig 3: Future of work synergies: Strategic roadmap

The Impact of Workplace, Work Technology, and Workspace on the Future of Work

The intersection of the workplace, work technology, and workspace is fundamentally transforming the future of work. This convergence is reshaping not just where we work, but how we work and the very culture that underpins our work environments. By understanding these dynamics, we can better anticipate and shape the future of work to foster more innovative, inclusive, and productive organizations.

1.Redefining the concept of Workplace

The "workplace" traditionally refers to the physical location where work is done. However, the rise of remote and hybrid models has expanded this definition to include anywhere work can be performed, be it at home, in co-working spaces, or on the go.

This shift challenges organizations to rethink how they manage and support a dispersed workforce, emphasizing the need for flexibility and adaptability in physical workspace provisions and policies. Some of the key trends to strategic adjustments in space utilization, leading to more dynamic and versatile work environments include:

- **Designing Multipurpose Workspaces** catering to various activities such as collaboration, individual work, and social interaction; beyond 'traditional work-related activities'
- **Balancing Space Efficiency and Employee Needs;** striking between optimizing space efficiency, real-estate costs and meeting employee needs.
- **Embracing Co-Working Spaces** especially by small businesses and freelancers, as an alternative to traditional office spaces

2.The Role of Work Technology in connecting and collaborating

Work technology, particularly tools that enable collaboration and remote working, serves as the backbone of modern organizational operations. This includes cloud computing, project management software, and communication platforms. Such technologies not only facilitate seamless collaboration across distances but also promote inclusivity by ensuring all team members, regardless of their physical location, can contribute equally to shared goals.

The adoption and integration of these technologies into daily operations are accelerating the move towards a more digital and connected workplace, where efficiency and productivity are enhanced by real-time collaboration and information sharing.

3.Workspace as the Embodiment of Culture and Leadership

environment, including organizational culture, leadership style, values, and norms. As physical barriers diminish, the importance of a strong, cohesive workspace culture that supports remote and hybrid models becomes paramount. This includes fostering a sense of community, promoting open communication, and maintaining alignment with organizational values.

Leadership style must evolve to prioritize trust, autonomy, and support for employees, encouraging innovation and engagement in a more decentralized work environment.

As we navigate through these transformative times, the synergies between workplace, work technology, and workspace are crafting a new blueprint for the future of work. This evolution is more than just a change in location or tools; it's a fundamental shift in how we approach, execute, and perceive work. Organizations that embrace these changes and adapt to the new dynamics are setting themselves up for a future that values flexibility, connectivity, and inclusivity. By strategically responding to these shifts, they are not just overcoming contemporary challenges but are also positioning themselves as forward-thinking leaders in an increasingly complex and interconnected global work landscape. The future of work, therefore, lies in our ability to synergize the physical and digital realms, harness technological advancements, and foster a culture that resonates with these changes, all while keeping employee well-being at the forefront.

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> In the rapidly transforming world of work, the integration of physical and digital workspaces, alongside evolving work technologies is pivotal in creating dynamic, inclusive and culturally rich work environments that empower organizations to thrive in the future

THE SYNERGISTIC IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF WORK

The interplay among the physical workplace, work technology, and cultural workspace is forging a dynamic and more fluid conception of work. This evolution, driven by the seamless integration of these components, is significantly influencing the future of work across multiple dimensions:

Enhanced Flexibility and Autonomy:

Employees have greater control over where, when, and how they work, leading to potentially higher job satisfaction and work-life balance. This flexibility is not just a perk but a transformation in the traditional work structure, enabling employees to tailor their work environments and schedules to better suit their personal and professional needs, leading to heightened productivity and engagement.

Increased Focus on Employee Well-being:

The emphasis on holistic wellness within the workspace—acknowledging the physical, mental, and emotional health of employees—becomes integral to organizational strategy. Initiatives such as mental health support, fitness programs, and work-life balance policies are gaining prominence. They represent a commitment to the overall well-being of the workforce, understanding that healthy employees are integral to the success of the organization.

Redefinition of Leadership and Management Practices:

Effective leadership in the future of work requires a shift towards more empathetic, empowering, and trust-based approaches to manage dispersed teams. This shift necessitates leaders to develop skills in remote team management, digital communication, and emotional intelligence, all of which are essential for maintaining team cohesion and motivation in a geographically dispersed work setting.

Innovation and Agility:

The integration of advanced work technologies and flexible work practices encourages faster adaptation to market changes and fosters a culture of continuous innovation. This aspect of the evolution encourages organizations to be agile, allowing them to respond quickly to new opportunities and challenges in an ever-changing business landscape.
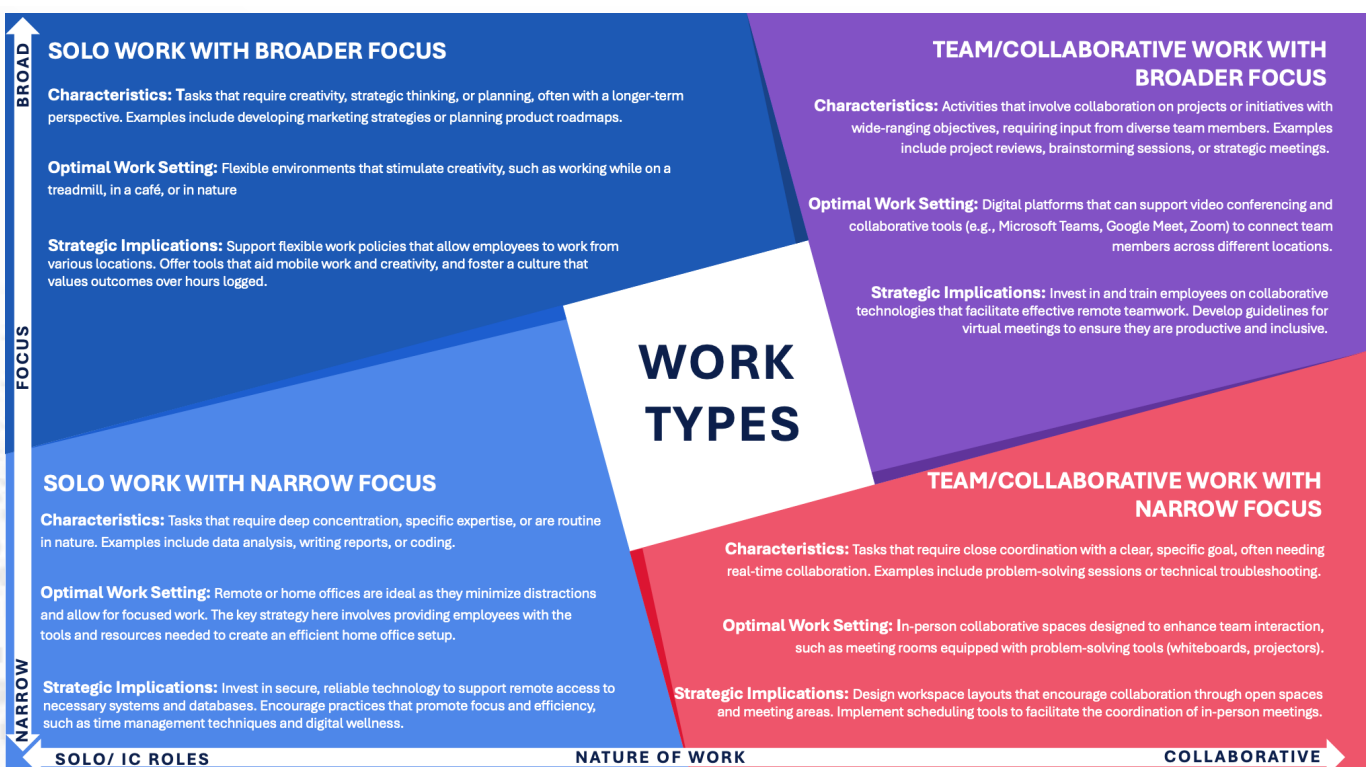
Diversity and Inclusion:

A more flexible definition of the workplace and the widespread adoption of collaborative technologies can help break down geographical and social barriers, promoting a more diverse and inclusive workforce. Embracing diversity and inclusivity is crucial for creating a work environment where varied perspectives are valued, leading to richer problem-solving, creativity, and a broader understanding of global markets.

By strategically responding to these transformative trends, organizations are poised to not only navigate the challenges posed by the evolving work landscape but also capitalize on these changes as a means to gain a competitive edge. This forward-thinking approach involves developing a strategic framework that optimizes work environments and processes to align with the nature of work and the desired collaboration levels.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK BASED ON WORK TYPES

To develop a strategic framework that optimizes work environments and processes, organizations can benefit from analyzing work types through a matrix that considers the dimensions of solo versus team/collaborative work and narrow versus broader focus work. This approach results in four distinct quadrants, each suggesting an optimal work setting or method that leverages the nature of the task and the required collaboration level. Below is a breakdown of each quadrant and the strategic implications for organizations.

WORK TYPES

SOLO WORK WITH BROADER FOCUS

Characteristics: Tasks that require creativity, strategic thinking, or planning, often with a longer-term perspective. Examples include developing marketing strategies or planning product roadmaps.

Optimal Work Setting: Flexible environments that stimulate creativity, such as working while on a treadmill, in a café, or in nature

Strategic Implications: Support flexible work policies that allow employees to work from various locations. Offer tools that aid mobile work and creativity, and foster a culture that values outcomes over hours logged.

TEAM/COLLABORATIVE WORK WITH BROADER FOCUS

Characteristics: Activities that involve collaboration on projects or initiatives with wide-ranging objectives, requiring input from diverse team members. Examples include project reviews, brainstorming sessions, or strategic meetings.

Optimal Work Setting: Digital platforms that can support video conferencing and collaborative tools (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom) to connect team members across different locations.

Strategic Implications: Invest in and train employees on collaborative technologies that facilitate effective remote teamwork. Develop guidelines for virtual meetings to ensure they are productive and inclusive.

SOLO WORK WITH NARROW FOCUS

Characteristics: Tasks that require deep concentration, specific expertise, or are routine in nature. Examples include data analysis, writing reports, or coding.

Optimal Work Setting: Remote or home offices are ideal as they minimize distractions and allow for focused work. The key strategy here involves providing employees with the tools and resources needed to create an efficient home office setup.

Strategic Implications: Invest in secure, reliable technology to support remote access to necessary systems and databases. Encourage practices that promote focus and efficiency, such as time management techniques and digital wellness.

TEAM/COLLABORATIVE WORK WITH NARROW FOCUS

Characteristics: Tasks that require close coordination with a clear, specific goal, often needing real-time collaboration. Examples include problem-solving sessions or technical troubleshooting.

Optimal Work Setting: In-person collaborative spaces designed to enhance team interaction, such as meeting rooms equipped with problem-solving tools (whiteboards, projectors).

Strategic Implications: Design workspace layouts that encourage collaboration through open spaces and meeting areas. Implement scheduling tools to facilitate the coordination of in-person meetings.

BROAD — FOCUS — NARROW

SOLO/ IC ROLES — NATURE OF WORK — COLLABORATIVE

In conclusion, the strategic framework outlined in the quadrant model offers a powerful tool for organizations seeking to adapt to the multifaceted nature of modern work. By plotting work types along axes that represent the 'Focus of Work' and 'Work Collaboration,' we gain invaluable insights into optimizing work environments and processes. This model not only enhances our understanding of various work modalities but also guides us in tailoring our strategies to meet the unique demands of different tasks.

Implementing this framework allows organizations to strike a balance between individual focus and collaborative efforts, and between narrow, detailed work and broader, strategic initiatives. Such a balanced approach is key to fostering a productive, creative, and agile workplace, capable of adapting to the ever-changing business landscape.

Furthermore, this framework underscores the importance of a flexible and adaptable work culture, where diversity of thought and approach is valued, and where technological tools and physical spaces are aligned with the work's nature. Ultimately, organizations that effectively utilize this strategic model are well-positioned to enhance employee satisfaction, drive innovation, and maintain a competitive edge in the future of work.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

As we approach the implementation of this quadrant-based strategic framework, organizations are encouraged to take systematic and deliberate steps to ensure its effective integration into their operational models. Here's a roadmap for executing this strategy, designed to foster a more adaptable, efficient, and supportive work environment:

Conducting a Comprehensive Audit of Tasks and Projects

- Begin by performing an in-depth audit of current tasks and projects within the organization. This involves evaluating each task for its focus and required level of collaboration to accurately place it in the appropriate quadrant of the framework.

- This step is crucial for gaining a clear understanding of the existing work patterns and for identifying which aspects of work would benefit most from the strategic adjustments proposed in the framework.

Assessing Capabilities and Identifying Gaps

- Once tasks are classified, assess the current capabilities of the organization to support these tasks in their optimal work settings. This includes evaluating existing technologies, physical workspace arrangements, and cultural elements.

- Identifying gaps between current capabilities and the needs identified in the audit allows organizations to pinpoint areas for development and investment, ensuring alignment with the strategic framework.

Developing and Implementing Policies and Guidelines

- Begin by performing an in-depth audit of current tasks and projects within the organization. This involves evaluating each task for its focus and required level of collaboration to accurately place it in the appropriate quadrant of the framework.

- This step is crucial for gaining a clear understanding of the existing work patterns and for identifying which aspects of work would benefit most from the strategic adjustments proposed in the framework.

Assessing Capabilities and Identifying Gaps

- Develop clear, comprehensive policies and guidelines that foster flexibility and adaptability in work practices while maintaining high levels of productivity and engagement. These should include policies on remote work, flexible hours, and the use of collaborative technologies.

- Proper implementation of these policies is key to guiding employees and managers in navigating the new work arrangements and ensuring consistency across the organization.

Providing Training and Resources

- Equip employees with the necessary training and resources to thrive in the newly defined work settings. This might include training on new technologies, workshops on effective remote collaboration, or resources for setting up efficient home office spaces.

- Empowering employees with knowledge and tools is essential for the smooth transition to and acceptance of the new work practices.

Regular Reviews and Strategy Adjustments

- Implement a process for regularly reviewing and adjusting the strategy based on ongoing feedback and the evolving dynamics of work. This ensures that the framework remains relevant and effective in meeting the organization's and employees' needs.

- Continuous improvement in response to feedback and changing conditions is crucial for maintaining the effectiveness and relevance of the strategic framework.

By adopting this quadrant-based strategic approach, organizations position themselves to create work environments that are not only more adaptable and efficient but also more attuned to the diverse needs of their tasks and teams. This alignment is key to enhancing overall productivity, employee satisfaction, and performance. As organizations step into the future, this strategic framework serves as a compass, guiding them towards a workplace that is resilient, dynamic, and equipped to face the challenges and opportunities of the evolving world of work.

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He is also the Co-Founder of Visara Human Capital Services a leading Human Capital Consulting and Service firm, powered by AI and the Global HR Community a platform designed to bring together HR professionals, people managers, and leaders from diverse functions and industries to connect, collaborate, learn, and contribute. GHRC aims to create a space where members can bring their whole selves to work and celebrate life.Sreekanth has over 30 years of experience across the service and manufacturing industries. He has a wide range of experience in human resources management, people supply chain management and organizational development, technology leadership and quality management.

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