

Will the workplace of 2040 still be human-centric?

The workspaces of 2020 and 2021 have been predominantly remote. Employees have been forced to navigate new ways of connecting and collaborating with colleagues they no longer see in person. Changing workforce dynamics and expectations have meant that hybrid work is on the horizon in the immediate future. But what lies even further ahead?

Employees might expect to see a futuristic work design model by the time 2040 rolls around, with new technologies allowing for a more interconnected workplace. This is unlikely to be far from the truth. That said, underlying these expectations, workers might also fear that they will be usurped by a host of next-generation technologies built specifically to automate their roles.

The pandemic has likely pushed these expectations closer to the surface, but is the workplace of the future really something to be feared?

Tech will enable more intentional collaboration

The simple answer is 'no,' and I would wager that the workplace of the future will still be human-centric, if not more so than ever before. Digital solutions

that value flexibility and optimise both employee experience and performance will soar.

In the months and years to come, working models will be built around the premise of providing employees with meaningful opportunities to collaborate when they are apart, without the burn-out and 'Zoom fatigue' associated with working from home. This might take shape through the introduction of technologies like augmented and virtual reality (AR and VR), which boost opportunities for staff to connect across different departments and engage in collaborative projects.

Envisaging what company meetings will look like in 2040 is a difficult task, but imagine putting on a pair of VR glasses and being immediately transported to the same cyber space as your colleagues, no matter whether you are working from home, at the company headquarters, or anywhere else across the globe.

One by one, workers will begin to populate the virtual meeting room to for their weekly brainstorming sessions, exchange their ideas and connect.

These platforms will be able to replicate various aspects of a company's organisational culture to foster a productive environment and encourage employees' affinity to the workplace, while staff will be able to dial into meetings without feeling as though they are talking through a screen.

Even when colleagues aren't spending time in the office, organisations should be able to create hubs for staff to meet, recreating the serendipitous 'water-cooler' moments that are so often used to drive innovation, and that remote working doesn't allow for. Any constraints placed on creativity, productivity and collective-problem-solving should be limited.

In many ways, this set-up has a stronger human edge than many of the set-ups we are working with at the moment.

AI will offer a helping hand

Another development is the dawn of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace, a phenomenon which employees might fear is far from the domain of the human. Headlines outlining fanciful ideas from the likes of Neuralink might seem like a far cry from the future workplace, with plans to implant microchips into the brain to allow people to play video games and to control electronic devices with their minds. The technology implies that ultimately, language itself will be obsolete.

But looking beyond these headlines, AI-bolstered tech will be able to expand the realm of possibilities in hybrid work settings in a way that doesn't undermine the human element. These technologies will be able to off-set our human weaknesses, including memory lapses and forgetting, that can impede our ability to work effectively.

Important information regarding company policies and procedures as well as role-specific knowledge will be available at the touch of a button, allowing staff to complete complex tasks without running the risk of forgetting or making a mistake. For clarity, all that individuals will need to do is pick up their phone or ask their virtual assistant the right questions.

In some cases, these devices will even be able to pre-empt the 'right' questions to ask by suggesting a particular line of enquiry to employees, making the learning process that little bit simpler.

Having AI-powered digital assistants at hand will enable employees to engage in personalised and life-long training. Rather than being outcompeted by sophisticated technology, the tech of tomorrow will help individuals to consistently hone their skills to ensure they are equipped with the right knowledge to succeed in the workplace of the future.

In many ways, the workplace of 2040 won't just be human, it will be superhuman. As companies increasingly look to increase their spend on platforms which employ AI technologies, we can expect that these developments will result in greater staff productivity and satisfaction in the years to come.

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