

What should businesses consider when hybrid working in the metaverse?

What do Snoop Dogg, JP Morgan, and Samsung have in common? They've all bought 'land' in the metaverse, of course!

To some, these acquisitions reiterate that the metaverse is just the next step in our journey of becoming a society operating almost entirely through digital means. To others, it merely represents a fad with players in industries from entertainment to consulting riding a temporary wave that will no doubt break sooner rather than later.

But whatever you think of the metaverse, it's undeniable that both people and companies are, at the very least, entertaining it.

In the world of work, 52% *of employees in the UK* have called for more immersive, virtual technologies to be used to bridge the gap between people working in offices and remotely. Perhaps this drove *hubb*'s decision to become the first 'metaverse-ready' insurance broker, which has seen the company establish a hybrid working environment powered by the metaverse.

But is the 'hybrid working in the metaverse' model a pipe dream for businesses?

This is a never tried before concept, and those companies looking to implement it will no doubt experience teething problems. Below, I've collated several factors that business leaders should consider when setting up shop in the metaverse.

Will it be useful?

Business leaders should ask themselves if a transition would benefit their company in any way by assessing their customer bases and deliberating on how useful this would be in their line of work. Speaking regularly with employees and clients by asking them how, where, and when they would like to engage with one another is key.

'Logging on' to the metaverse

The main barrier to entry will be how accessible the metaverse is. It's likely both entering and harnessing the metaverse will be expensive. And those businesses looking to establish hybrid operations virtually – particularly smaller organisations with limited funds – could fall behind larger businesses with bigger budgets.

It's vital that firms determine which pieces of hardware they need to access the metaverse, whether that be in the office or from home, to gain a full understanding of all the costs involved. Business leaders should remember that costs also include any follow-on expenses, such as the price of energy when it comes to powering access to the metaverse. Once these parameters have been considered, designating an appropriate budget is the next step.

Burnout and virtual presenteeism

Just like in the real world, employers must be aware of any work-related stresses for employees in the metaverse. Over 40% of employees have said they left a role due to burnout. Given working in the metaverse mimics working in real life, we could see a similar pattern emerge.

Employers should consider the possibility employees could fall into the trap of virtual presenteeism. This is where workers continue to show up to work (in this case, virtually) and power on for long periods of time, even when they're feeling unwell as this becomes the easy thing to do. A study during the pandemic found that presenteeism and burnout are intrinsically linked, so employers need to proactively mitigate these risks.

To combat this issue, recognising symptoms of burnout and presenteeism in the workforce is key. Of course, this is more difficult when interacting with an online avatar, so firms should ensure employees make time for metaverse 'downtime'. Telling employees to log-off at appropriate times and providing

regular catch-up sessions where employees' thoughts and feelings are gauged can help detect and mitigate signs of burnout.

Engagement and belonging

Countless studies have shown that the better engaged workers are, the more productive a business is. So, any business – whether they're operating virtually or in the real world – must ensure their workforce is engaged so they're set up for success. Businesses can drive engagement by developing a sense of belonging amongst employees.

Feeling as though one belongs, or the opposite, is complex and varies between people. However, human interaction connects us all. Since the metaverse is a more interactive version of the internet, there may be some opportunities that businesses can harness.

But as hybrid working in the metaverse isn't yet tried or tested, it will take time to understand how businesses can make employees feel at ease engaging with it. As such, employers should start with what they know – ensuring employees are committed to the business. They can do this by giving workers appropriate guidance about working in the metaverse so they feel confident that support is available.

The degree of exactness

Hybrid working in the metaverse could be too quick a jump from the 'traditional' remote working we saw driven by the pandemic. As it is largely unseen, organisations will have to tackle trial and error in its implementation as business leaders can only act on what they know. Making working in the metaverse as 'real' as possible for employees is therefore key. Tackling human issues, such as driving engagement and mitigating burnout remains vital.

Ultimately, if metaverse working becomes a hybrid working environment in which employees can earn value, behaviourally they are much more likely to embrace it.

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