

FROM OFFICE TO OMNI-CHANNEL

The Rise of the
Omni-Channel Worker
in the Digital Age



A PAPER BY MIRVAC
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WORKTECH ACADEMY



WORKTECH ACADEMY

OFFICE

‘a room, set of rooms, or building
used as a place for commercial,
professional, or bureaucratic work..’

Oxford English Dictionary

OMNI-CHANNEL

‘seamless and effortless, high-quality
customer experiences that occur within
and between contact channels..’

Frost & Sullivan business consultants

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I.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A new scenario for work is emerging in the aftermath of the global pandemic that will change the way that office buildings are used in the future. The acceleration of a trend to more flexible and home working amid the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the potential and the capacity for employees to work anywhere using virtual, cloud-based technologies.

The scene is now set for an omni-channel approach to working in which employees work, synchronously and asynchronously, across time, space and a range of places. The corporate office channel will remain critically important but not as a generic, all-purpose workplace – it will evolve into several work channels with specific functions. This paper describes the first signs of a global shift from office to omni-channel, chronicling the rise of the omni-channel worker in the digital age and mapping the different physical and virtual workspaces of the future.

Omnichannel working takes its name from omnichannel retailing or commerce, which has been successfully adopted by many big brands and provides a single, seamless customer experience across all channels. This retail parallel is valuable because it provides the workplace with a useful precedent in blending physical and digital channels. Omnichannel working substitutes customer experience and loyalty with employee experience and engagement.

The paper discusses the emergence of the omni-channel model in the context of providing more flexibility, choice and consistent experience in work, and balance in work-life. It highlights the continuing importance of office property within this new model as a hub for culture, innovation, learning and production. It also examines the enabling technologies that will underpin the model, ensuring seamless transitions between different channels, enabling creative collaborations, driving digital equality and using data-driven insights to understand and respond to new working patterns.

The rise of omnichannel work has significant implications for organisations in terms of supporting the productivity and wellbeing of their employees. The paper looks at the adjustments that will need to be made in terms of corporate mindset and leadership strategy. Stories are shared on how companies as diverse as Spotify, UniCredit, Facebook, Scotiabank, GitLab, Telstra, Atlassian and LinkedIn are preparing for an omnichannel future.

The paper concludes with pointers and advice for organisations; these relate to using their property portfolio as a platform, and using data to shape and curate new work experiences. Our research suggests omnichannel working is not about a trade-off between physical and digital channels, but rather about a process of digital transformation which in turn offers workers a wider choice of physical places in which to work.

Office property will remain a vital part of the omnichannel world, but it will require repurposing, replanning and redesigning. Where offices are fit for this new purpose, the office property portfolio will take on a new lease of life as an essential part of a smart platform to enable the new omnichannel workforce.

2.

WHAT IS OMNI-CHANNEL WORKING?

A shift is underway from the office as the only channel for working to an omni-channel approach that borrows from retail to provide employees with a seamless ‘customer’ experience.



The traditional office building we know so well has been the main channel for certain types of white-collar work for more than a century. In the past, it has demanded daily attendance for set hours on account of being the only place where the tools and resources for working can be accessed by employees, and the only way for teams to come together.

Today, this is no longer the case. As the global pandemic has demonstrated with unprecedented clarity, people can work productively away from the office, organisations can still run. For the first time, the office is challenged to rethink its approach by a new model in which digital technologies driving more remote and hybrid working no longer rely on a physical workplace to host them.

As remote and flexible working patterns become more established in the post COVID-19 era, the office of the future will no longer be the sole channel for working. However, it will continue to be of fundamental and strategic importance as it provides many channels for work, acting as a catalyst for business to flourish.

2.

WHAT IS OMNI-CHANNEL WORKING?

The strict lockdowns of COVID-19 initially substituted one work channel (the office) with another (the home), but as companies around the world now cautiously raise their head to prepare for the post-pandemic era, it is becoming clear that the future will be about multiple channels for working. People will return to the office, but only for part of the week and for specific reasons, according to research; they will continue to work partly at home as well as in flexible spaces, membership clubs, local satellites, client sites and other settings as office portfolios become more sophisticated.

A study of 2,300 US office workers by the Gensler Research Institute found that only 12 per cent wanted to work from home full-time – most employees preferred to return to the workplace, but with critical design changes implemented to improve the experience. A survey of 162 individuals in 28 organisations carried out by Australian designers Davenport Campbell with the University of New South Wales revealed that while only 3 per cent would choose to work from home full-time, two-thirds of the sample would do so two-to-three days a week, combining this approach with attendance at an office.

It is likely that employees will have the freedom and the tools (including a virtual cloud-based desktop) to work wherever they wish in order to be productive, varying their work patterns

across different channels each week. This asks urgent new questions of corporate real-estate strategy and requires an imaginative response from the workplace industry, rethinking what office portfolios can achieve and unlocking their potential for a new era. We have given this trend a name: The Rise of the Omni-Channel Worker.

HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES

‘Omni-channel’ is a term borrowed from retailing, which has relevant experience in broadening the customer experience from attending bricks-and-mortar stores to engaging with a variety of channels that offer the same seamless experience whether customers are online or not. Omni channel is defined by business consultants Frost & Sullivan as ‘seamless and effortless, high-quality customer experiences that occur within and between contact channels.’ The prefix omni is from the Latin omnis, meaning all or every.

In retail, these channels are mainly driven by mobile applications and include in-store point-of-sale, online platforms, click and collect services, and social media streaming campaigns. The shopping experience is seamless and integrated across all physical and digital channels so that the personal profile and preferences of each customer is captured and updated with data, irrespective of the touchpoint chosen to interact with the retailer.

We see clear parallels with what tomorrow’s employees will want to achieve in terms of offering their workforce a seamless and integrated working experience across a range of channels. But it is important to remember that retailers didn’t develop multiple channels through which to reach customers only with the advent of the worldwide web and the mobile phone – they’ve been alert to the opportunities for decades; think of the ice cream maker, for example, with a factory shop, direct sales, telesales and mobile vans.

In contrast, many large organisations have only had eyes for the office building or campus as the single channel for work. Not even the inexorable rise of digital technology, which has made flexible and remote working achievable at scale, could persuade them to think differently about where and how people might work. Many people were still tied to commuting at peak hour and daily attendance at an office desk even if they spent all day online. Only during the enforceable shelter-at-home restrictions of the global pandemic were companies forced to close down the single channel and embark on implementing a new model.

CASE STUDY

Spotify: Work From Anywhere

Swedish music streaming platform Spotify has announced that it is adopting a ‘Work from Anywhere’ model, which will allow employees to choose whether they want to be in the office full time, at home full time or use a combination of different channels to conduct their work. This move is the first step in many organisations embracing the advent of the omni-channel worker. Spotify describes the initiative as a new way

of collaborating that allows Spotifiers to work from wherever they do their best thinking and creating. Spotify is giving employees the opportunity to select a Work Mode – giving them the choice over location and time to work most effectively. Salary rates will be unaffected. Spotify will also be redesigning office space to accommodate employee preferences for quiet spaces, shared-desk space and collaboration areas.

2.

WHAT IS OMNI-CHANNEL WORKING?

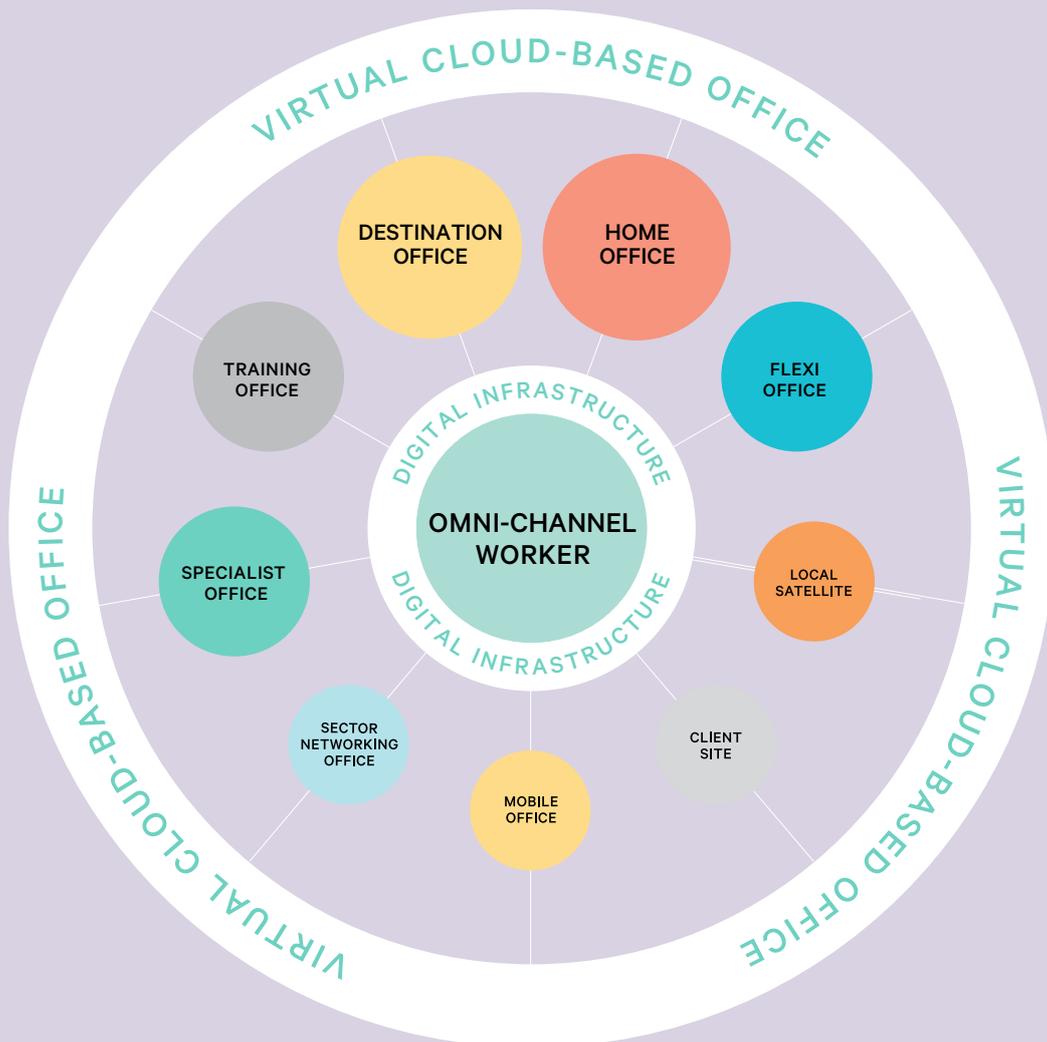
NEW LANDSCAPE FOR WORK

Today, as the smoke begins to lift on the COVID-19 crisis, we believe there is a move underway from office to omni-channel as organisations survey a new property landscape for work. The diagram below maps out several of the work channels, which are sized according to their likely importance.

The corporate office channel will retain its importance but will change its uses, evolving into several work channels with specific functions. A 'Destination Office' will be the place to go for creating culture, building social capital and connecting to the mission and values of the organisation. A 'Training Office' will provide a dedicated learning and

mentoring environment. A 'Specialist Office' will accommodate production and R&D activities with the requirement for regular attendance, such as life science lab facilities or 24-hour media newsrooms.

WORK EVERYWHERE: LANDSCAPE OF THE OMNI-CHANNEL WORKER



2.

WHAT IS OMNI-CHANNEL WORKING?



CASE STUDY

Destination Office: 80 Ann Street, Brisbane

Mirvac has created a 'destination office' at 80 Ann Street in Brisbane which responds to the experiential and flexible needs of future office workers. The project, which will be completed in February 2022, focuses on authenticity, nature and a range of shared experiences in its core strategy. The building is comprised of 35 floors and nearly 60 per cent of the ground level is dedicated

public space, with the main lobby for building tenants located on the first floor. The ground floor includes a marketplace for strategic retail partnerships with local Brisbane businesses, a landscaped garden with indigenous planting, and spaces to sit and socialise. This mix of publicly available space plays into the idea of bringing a range of people together through different channels.

Mirvac saw an opportunity to bring history and authenticity to the site, which was home to the Former Fruit and Produce Exchange, being the first fruit and vegetable market in Brisbane's Central Business District. The Exchange was first established in 1906 and continued operating on the site until 60 years ago,

80 Ann is leveraging this history in its retail strategy by connecting the retail experience to the office building. The building has a dual street frontage on two of the city's busiest streets, making it immediately accessible not only to tenants but to the wider public. 80 per cent of the biophilia is from Queensland's bio region and the building has recently achieved a WELL Platinum Design Precertification. An integrated technology network allows tenants to simply plug in, and the system provides the capability for tenants to obtain data on how their employees are using the building and the spaces within it. There are also three floors dedicated to coworking space.

2.

WHAT IS OMNI-CHANNEL WORKING?

The 'Home Office' channel will play a more prominent and more permanent role in working life than before the pandemic, but the omni-channel worker will have other options too. The 'Flexi-Office' will provide membership of coworking spaces and other space-as-a-service provisions across the city. 'Local Satellite' offices will be located closer to people's homes in a hub-and-spoke model that reduces commuting times; and companies will also experiment with mobile offices that offer local convenience. Working at client sites will become more prevalent; so will working at sector-specific clubs

and associations, 21st century guilds where the omni-channel worker can network with others in their industry or profession. Co-location with others will no longer just be on the basis of who the employer is.

What makes all of these property channels possible is a common and consistent digital infrastructure that underpins the ability for each employee to access a virtual cloud-based office enabling them to work from anywhere. Omni-channel working is not about complementing the physical with a digital channel, as early versions of

omni-channel retailing sought to do. It is about going fully digital and, in the process, offering workers a wider choice of physical places to work to suit their needs.

This paper sets out to describe the context in which omni-channel working is emerging, the lessons from customer-centric omni-channel commerce, the enabling technologies, and what different companies around the world are doing to address wellbeing, productivity and management of an omni-channel workforce.

CASE STUDY

Team Anywhere: Atlassian

Australian tech giant Atlassian is giving all employees the choice to work from any combination of home, office, and other locations where they feel productive. It has introduced a 'Team Anywhere' initiative that embraces distributed teamwork.

There are four principles of Team Anywhere: first, team formation is not centred on physical footprint but on the right talent for the composition of the team; second, it appreciates diverse teams, which

benefits from the largest talent pool available; third, it acknowledges that teams come in all sizes, cultures, and comprise different goals; and fourth, it recognises that ideal communication frequency and style depend not just on professional but on personal lives. Atlassian is using a 'build, measure, learn, integrate' model and a small, dedicated team across the organisation is focused on transitioning Atlassian to a fully distributed workforce.

1

It allows team formation to not center on physical footprint, but the right talent for team composition instead.

2

It appreciates diverse teams, which benefits from the largest talent pool available.

3

It acknowledges that teams come in all sizes, cultures, and comprise different goals.

4

It recognises that ideal communication frequency and style depend not just on professional, but personal, lives.

3.

THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

A drive for flexibility, choice and equality of experience provides the context for the rise of the omni-channel worker.

Just as the retail and hospitality industries have been forced to rethink their approach to the market in the digital economy of the early 21st century, so the workplace has begun to absorb innovations from these sectors to facilitate new ways of working. As these industries collide, there has been a steady shift towards a more 'consumer-centric workplace' where

people are viewed by their organisations less as employees and more as customers, and work tools such as the office are seen as enabling products. This shift in emphasis can be described as from place to people – and it provides the consumerised context and growing network of choices in which the omni-channel worker sits.

Even before the global pandemic, trends were paving the way for an entirely different set of expectations for many office workers, but the shock of COVID-19 sharply accelerated change in corporate real estate. Three key areas in particular are shaping the new world of work and enabling the rise of omni-channel working: demand for flexibility, challenging proximity and creating equality of experience.



TREAT OFFICE AS A CONSUMER PRODUCT. EARN THE LOYALTY OF EMPLOYEES TO KEEP RETURNING TO THAT LOCATION TIME AND TIME AGAIN...



Mark Needham,
Cisco

FLEXIBILITY AS AN EXPECTATION

Flexible workplace design was initially adopted by organisations to create spaces which promote choice and idea generation between people. But over time, with global adoption, the flexible open-plan agenda became a cost-saving exercise for many companies. Density was prioritised over real choice, but now this model is being turned on its head. Flexibility is set to trump density in a post-pandemic era keenly aware of employee safety and health.

Flexibility has traditionally been rooted in spaces and settings, but the level of flexibility required for the omni-channel worker transcends space into time and experience. The introduction of more flexible ways of working has forced organisations to reassess how they manage, structure and enable their employees to perform to the best of their ability. For many organisations, this process enables employees to exercise choice with responsibility.

Choice can be reflected in the physical workspace by enabling workers to escape to quiet space, nooks and corners while also facilitating spaces for collaboration and idea generation. As employees turn to different channels to plug into their work, workplace design will be redefined to create more progressive and agile space plans that focus less on density and more on choice and flexibility.

THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

“ IN THE POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY, CHOICE — THE POTENTIAL TO PROVIDE DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES — WILL BE THE DRIVER, NOT PRIOR PATTERNS. THIS REALISATION COULD RESHAPE THE WAY WE DESIGN OUR WORKPLACES, HOTELS, RETAIL, SCHOOLS, AND CITIES. ”

Diane Hoskins

Gensler/ World Economic Forum

Choice of settings in the office has been a widely adopted concept across the world with ABW (activity-based working), but this new model is expanding outside the traditional workplace and into multiple locations. This could be best described as LBW (location-based working). As new work channels emerge, traditional metrics for measuring productivity – such as hours spent in the office – are no longer adequate. The performance of today’s knowledge-based workforce is reflected in value, innovation and quality of output, and new metrics will be required as flexibility increases.

More flexible work will be the chief legacy of the pandemic because it not only forces a rethink of workspace design and real estate strategies, but it also challenges the traditional

working hours model. Professor Lynda Gratton of the London Business School explains that, in the aftermath of COVID-19, business leaders need to experiment with flexible time as well as flexible space. This could be in the form of staggered working hours or four-day working weeks.

There have already been some successful early adopters of the four-day week such as Microsoft Japan, which tested the concept and found that employees were not only happier but significantly more productive. Its pilot called Work-Life Choice Challenge Summer involved giving its entire 2,300-person workforce five Fridays off in a row without decreasing pay. The shortened weeks led to more efficient meetings and boosted productivity by 40 per cent.

In Finland, this concept has even been passed into legislation with a new Working Hours Act that replaces the concept of workplace with a more neutral term ‘working place’. This means that working hours will no longer be tied to a specific place of work but will simply refer to time spent working, wherever you are.

In the new world of work, flexibility will focus on creating choice across time and space so employees can craft a bespoke working experience across different channels that fits their specific requirements. This approach will require a significant re-evaluation of workspace, property strategy and leadership models to accommodate all employee needs.

CASE STUDY

UniCredit: The Hybrid Bank Branch of the Future

As more of its customers switched to online banking, Italian financial services giant UniCredit asked what its European bank branch network should look like in the future. How could it reach local communities in a more cost-effective way while creating an effective work environment for its staff? Design research with

WORKTECH Academy and the Royal College of Art resulted in a project to flexibly repurpose UniCredit’s bank branches for more hybrid uses and bring in external partners to share costs. A modular architectural kit of parts was devised to create standalone bank settings at different scales within interior space. These settings were layered with digital services to improve access for customers, extending from free wi-fi right up to augmented environments. The first hybrid bank branch was opened in Via Verdi, Milan, in 2017. UniCredit also experimented with mobile branch offices, including taking one to the Venice Film Festival.

3.

THE NEW WORLD OF WORK



CHALLENGING PHYSICAL PROXIMITY

In the aftermath of COVID-19, work-from-home (WFH) is morphing into work-from-anywhere (WFA), a model which challenges the idea of proximity to one central office and opens up a vista of different office spaces flexing and flowing around new patterns of work. It also opens organisations up to a much wider talent pool. In the past, organisations were restricted to choosing talent based on proximity to the central office. Now, a more remote and flexible workforce means that organisations have access to talent that may be across regional or national borders.

According to a recent Remote Work report by software platform GitLab, a quarter of remote work settings are all-remote, where all employees work

remotely. Employees have reported benefits such as increased productivity, efficiency and morale as well as the obvious benefits of flexibility, autonomy and no commute time. As technology and internet access continues to improve, more of the global workforce will opt to work from anywhere.

Despite location no longer being critical for certain business decisions, there is a general consensus that we will still need and depend on physical offices and cities. British economist and academic Frances Cairncross, author of *The Death of Distance*, explains: 'There is a strength and depth in some big cities that cannot be emulated online'. This is especially so in Australia where research on cities has highlighted the enduring appeal of central business districts to employees. Unlike 'urban flight' trends seen recently in the UK and

USA, data indicates enduring appeal will remain for CBDs and city offices in the APAC region.

But while city districts will bounce back and thrive again after the pandemic, there will be growing emphasis on social community and culture, with a greater focus placed on offices providing flexibility, community and building social cohesion through experiences. Planners and developers will need to recalibrate where workplaces fit into the urban mix. Mirvac's own 'Intermix' research with WORKTECH Academy on the future of smart precincts reveals how 'digital districts' such as King's Cross in London, Hudson Yards in New York, and South Eveleigh (formerly ATP or Australian Technology Park) in Sydney are skilfully weaving workspaces into the wider public realm – not closing them off from city life.

3.

THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

A rethink on cities is seeing the reintroduction of polycentric urban design and the 15-minute city concept, where there are multiple urban hubs in the local radius of every urban dweller. The 15-minute city concept is hailed as an ideal post COVID-19 urban planning model. The concept requires that access to work, home, shops, entertainment, education and

healthcare should all be available within the same time a commuter might once have waited on a railway platform. Each neighbourhood should fulfil six social functions: living, working, supplying, caring, learning and enjoying.

The pandemic has shone a harsh light on the inefficiencies of work patterns such as daily commutes during peak

hours and rigid working days. The 15-minute city concept has been pioneered in Paris, but other urban leaders across the world in Barcelona, London, Milan and a number of Chinese cities are all working toward similar visions. The hope is to refashion cities as places to walk, linger, socialise and enjoy rather than simply to commute in and out of.



CASE STUDY

GitLab

Online storage and software platform GitLab is the world's largest all-remote company with more than 1,300 team members in more than 65 countries. Since 2014, GitLab has introduced an 'all-remote'

policy where all employees work remotely and in their native time zone. Being all-remote did not start as an intentional business strategy, but it was a natural evolution as the first team members started to work from home. GitLab the product brings cross-team collaboration and communication into a single platform. With every employee contributing to a single conversation within the tool, GitLab found there was little

reason to congregate in an office. GitLab rival, GitHub, has a 65 per cent remote workforce.

In 2019, GitLab appointed a Head of Remote, a dedicated leader to evolve the company's remote strategy. The business cannot rely on harvesting company culture on-site so it works to organise it. Over the course of six years, GitLab has learnt about how to collaborate effectively and strengthen its culture, all while working remotely.

3.

THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

EQUALITY OF EXPERIENCE

A workplace experience centred around the physical office heavily favoured those employees who commuted to the office every day. Less focus was given to remote workers and digital experiences, which created an imbalance between those employees who were in the office and those who were not – with flexible workers frequently missing out in terms of experience.

This was typically because the majority of employees were not remote. Now, the scales have tipped in favour of remote workers and organisations have to rethink how they deliver their entire employee experience. More employees are set to work from home, at least some of the time, on a more permanent basis. A recent Deloitte survey revealed that to be more comfortable in a work environment, workers want more frequent and more

relevant communication, as well as the ability to access information, make decisions for themselves and engage in a digital experience.

The Deloitte research indicates that choice is an important factor in overall employee experience. Just as a shabby office detracts from staff morale, so a shabby digital experience sends out the message that ‘my employer doesn’t care’ to many employees. To create a more positive employee experience, companies need to meet the expectations of individual employees from all angles.

A sobering report from the IBM Institute for Business, which interviewed 50,000 employees in eight countries alongside 3,450 senior executives, revealed a disconnect between bosses and workers on the subject of how well things are going in pivoting to remote working. Leaders thought they were doing well at

supporting staff; employees disagreed, telling researchers they are tired and overworked, feel disconnected and lack the training and support required. Less than half of workers believed their organisation is doing enough to support their wellbeing and only 38 per cent think they’re being helped to learn the new skills required.

As the lines between professional and personal life continue to blur, employees increasingly want the relevant, convenient and engaging experiences they have outside of work to be replicated inside their organisation. Above all, they want the opportunity to shape their workplace experiences on their own terms. In order to achieve an equal experience for all employees, more and more organisations are giving employees a set of options that will help them achieve their full potential and drive business value.

CASE STUDY

Telstra: All Roles Flex

Australian telecommunications company Telstra has adopted an ‘All Roles Flex’ programme which ensures employees have the connectivity and flexibility to work wherever and whenever they need. Simply put, the policy means any of the company’s employees worldwide

have the opportunity to break away from traditional working hours or locations. The company is committed to creating a seamless experience across all work channels which should be ‘as automated and as intelligent as possible’.

4.

THE RETAIL PARALLEL

As employers explore the potential of omni-channel working amid the biggest shake-up of working life for a generation, retailing appears to provide a ready template.

Many of the world's biggest brands and most successful retailing names have become remarkably effective at reaching customers through the smart combination of different channels. This is important for the workplace industry to observe because retail provides a useful template for how a cohesive blend of physical and digital channels can be achieved – which is no easy task.

However, in examining the lessons for the workplace, some experts in the retail field believe that 'omni-channel commerce' is a better term to use than omni-channel retailing because the concept is really a business-centric rather than a consumer-centric one. According to leading British retail designer, Ian Johnston of Quinine, 'Customers never talk about "omni-

channel" – they just expect a seamless brand experience. It's an operational phrase which is all about making the back-of-house systems work together to create that experience.'

“

**CUSTOMERS NEVER TALK ABOUT
OMNI-CHANNEL – THEY JUST EXPECT
A SEAMLESS BRAND EXPERIENCE....**

”

Ian Johnston,
Quinine Design

Until recent advances in data-driven technologies, many retailers struggled with this operational side. When online retail sales first appeared on the radar, there was a tendency for them to set up a separate online division, with its own profit-and-loss account. The result was fierce competition between different parts of the same retail organisation, with a lack of coordination in sales strategy.

Gradually, lessons were learned and a more integrated approach introduced.

The next phase of development was for retailers to offer exactly the same products in the same way in every channel they provided, whether in a kiosk or superstore or online shop. This generic approach to omni-channel commerce was efficient from an operational perspective, less so in capturing the customer imagination.

Today, there is a shift in orientation towards giving customers a range of different experiences through different channels, even though the overall brand

messaging and the underlying technical infrastructure that delivers them remains cohesive. There are lessons here for organisations who might want to create different experiences in different work channels (home office, satellite office or corporate HQ for example) while offering a single, unified technological platform for app-centric engagement with the company.

4.

THE RETAIL PARALLEL

THE HALO EFFECT

According to Ian Johnston of Quinine, 'There's a new metric starting to emerge in retail which is ROE (return on experience) as opposed to ROI (return in investment). It's harder to quantify but there is evidence of a "halo effect" of increased online traffic in locations where a new store has opened.' The shifting role of the bricks-and-mortar store away from direct sales to become a 'destination site' based around storytelling, discovery, presence and brand reinforcement has been happening for a while. Big brands such as Nike led the charge in opening flagship 'brand temples' in cities around the world. Online-only players then followed suit, opening street-front stores to raise awareness.

However, some consumer experts believe the 'Instagram moment' for stores has already passed – the cost of creating memorable visual experiences is going up all the time and the future instead belongs to smaller, more efficient store formats and smart systems. According to Jon Himoff of Connected Retail: 'We're going to see more "conversational commerce" in which chatbots and virtual assistants make purchasing suggestions, and more use to AI and Big Data to personalise experiences for the customer.'

OPERATORS BRISTLING WITH INNOVATION

When US software developer Hubspot created a top ten company ranking for omni-channel experience in 2020, there were some interesting names on its list. Disney topped the table – apparently its magic starts with a mobile-friendly trip-planning website and includes a Magic Band program that automatically opens your Disney hotel room and stores photographs taken with Disney characters at the park. But such diverse operators as Virgin Atlantic, Bank of America, Starbucks, footwear company Timberland and fashion retailer Oasis also made the cut, every aspect of their omni-channel approach bristling with innovation.

The next phase for omni-channel commerce is likely to see diverse trends playing out. A report by Quinine, Retail Insights 2021, predicts the emergence of more agile store formats to connect with customers with a focus on changing scenes quickly. Retailers will think more in terms of time, not place, so we can expect to see more temporary pop-ups and semi-permanent structures. The 'store as a set' will gain ground with more experiential events, theatrical techniques and 'live-streaming' from inside the retail outlet – and this could be mirrored by more experiential design and stage setting in office environments. One can envisage the 'office as a set' live-streaming key events such as CEO town hall meetings or project set-ups into employees' homes.

TOP 10: Companies for Omni- Channel Experience

- 1 Disney
- 2 Virgin Atlantic
- 3 Bank of America
- 4 Oasis
- 5 REI
- 6 Starbucks
- 7 Chipotle
- 8 Timberland
- 9 Orvis
- 10 VIP.com

Source: Hubspot 2020

CASE STUDY

Toyota e-Palette

Japanese automotive manufacturer Toyota is aiming to commercialise a large autonomous vehicle shaped like a shipping container. The vehicle can be adapted to a wide range of uses that include roving office, ride-sharing, logistics and mobile shop. Known as e-Palette, the vehicle is a large, transparent, oblong carriage on wheels that is battery powered. It can

accommodate up to 20 passengers, with seats that fold up and allow the space to be repurposed. One of the first places the public will be able to see the driverless e-Palette in action is in Toyota's 175-acre hydrogen-powered Woven City, a 'prototype city' planned at the base of Mount Fuji.

4.

THE RETAIL PARALLEL

Retailers are looking to make things easier for customers in 2021, especially in terms of location. There will be growth in local retail, providing community-based convenience, and even a rise in 'retail on the move' – mobile stores interacting with people

– and 'retail in a box', which enables customers to order online and unbox some elements of the store experience in the privacy of their own homes. Retail will continue to revolve around a smartphone-first experience – and it will continue to collect and analyse copious

amounts of in-store data on behaviour and movement. We can expect our omni-channel workplaces to follow much the same pattern in combining an increasingly app-centric approach with data analytics to improve design and experience in physical space.

CASE STUDY

Asia Pacific's Omni-Channel Innovators

Freshippo, Shanghai:

The first of 13 similar grocery stores in China, this is Alibaba's sortie into what it calls 'new retail' which converges online and offline shopping. Also known as Hema, the chain uses data and technology to create a seamless and more efficient shopping experience. Freshippo specialises in fresh food from all over the world, including seafood which can be cooked and eaten in the store. You shop with your mobile by downloading an app and scanning the barcode of each item, which will give you background information on the produce and also alternative suggestions. Each store also acts a fulfilment centre for home delivery in a 1.5 mile local radius and operates a membership club with online rewards and benefits.

Harvey Nichols, Hong Kong:

The British department store only has a 10 per cent overlap between what it sells online and in its HK Pacific Place store. The in-store focus is on discovery and exploration, showcasing local and emerging fashion brands (including from Japan and South Korea) while the online offer is more mainstream and international. Interactive screens are built into the store's windows so shoppers can browse online before entering, creating an entire outfit of clothing, shoes and handbags. Giant 50-inch screens inside the store enable customers to scan a QR code and view items from all angles, which builds engagement.

Bunnings Group, Australia:

The traditional hardware and appliance giant has completed a rapid online sales rollout for 374 stores to transform its reputation into one of Australia's standout hybrid digital retailers. Its strategy integrates click-and-collect, delivery, trade credit and reselling services not available in its stores via Bunnings Marketlink. Bunnings came late to e-commerce but is now a convert. Managing director Michael Schneider is reported as saying that 'millennials might swipe but can't screw'- they are digitally aware but have no DIY aptitude. To switch to omni-channel retailing, Bunnings has opened a technology development centre in Bangalore to source the software skills needed for the new approach.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

Behind the rise of the omni-channel worker lies a broad palette of digital technologies on which the delivery of a consistent employee experience will depend.

Before the pandemic, the role of the office building was already losing its significance as a container for corporate technology, as mobile and cloud-based innovations enabled a work-from-anywhere approach. COVID-19 has simply forced modern technology infrastructure to realise its potential – software, systems and data can now all be accessed remotely by employees through the cloud. We have now reached a tipping point where employees can pick up and carry their work tools with them wherever they go – smartphones, laptops and tablets are now combined with webcams, headphones and peripherals to provision work by connecting to screens wherever you are.

Coupled with the implementation of the Microsoft's 365 Office suite on any device, as well as the now-ubiquitous Zoom for video conferencing, this means it is technically possible to have a completely virtual, cloud-based workplace which bypasses the office altogether. Additional breakthroughs with e-signatures and electronic document management and storage create a position where, in the words of Philip Ross of UnWork, 'The role of the office as the node or nexus of technology is now redundant.'

Jared Spataro, Microsoft's Vice President for Modern Work, told *The New Yorker* that the pandemic has created the conditions for a 'second digital transformation'. The first PC

revolution digitised paperwork, took files off the desk and created a virtual desktop inside each computer. The second will give each employee a digital workspace in the cloud that can be accessed wherever they go to work, whether they're present in an office, working at home or via other workspace channels.

The technology infrastructure that will enable and support the omni-channel workforce will be underpinned by four principles: seamless transitioning between physical to digital workspace; maintaining digital equality; encouraging creative collaboration; and using data-driven insights to inform decision-making and future workplace strategies.

CASE STUDY

Smarten Spaces

Smarten Spaces, an innovative AI and IoT company, has launched a new technology called Jumpree 3.0, which is currently being used by Fortune 500 companies around the world. Employees download the Smarten Spaces app to their smart phones, allowing companies to automate the entire workplace experience from the back-end. The

solution helps companies manage their new hybrid workplaces via a single pane-of-glass dashboard and offers real-time reports to maximise operational efficiency. So far, results have found that companies can save up to 30 per cent of their office space costs. Key features of the platform include a digital workplace app for AI-based contactless access and

visitor management service, as well as contact tracing, alongside desk management, workforce rostering and asset management inventory services. According to Smarten Spaces founder and CEO Dinesh Malkani, the three key technologies for a hybrid workplace are the Internet of Things, AI and the mobile phone.

5.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

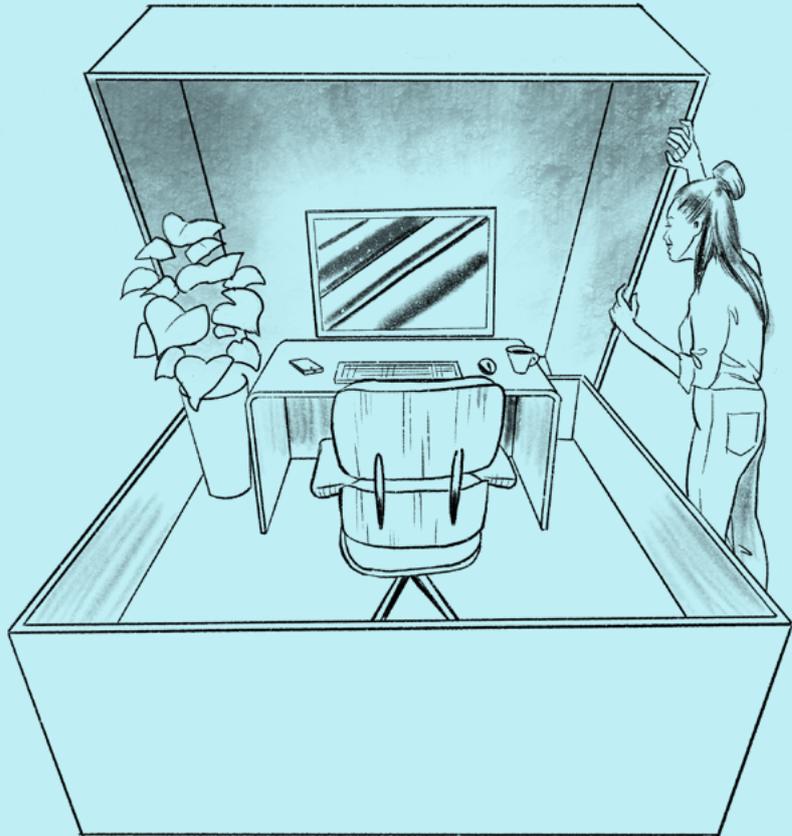
SEAMLESS TRANSITIONING

Cloud-based software, ubiquitous wi-fi connectivity and mobile devices have enabled the 'office in a box' concept. This is the idea that workers should always have the right equipment and tools to set-up a workspace anywhere. In order for this concept to really come to fruition for the omni-channel worker, organisations need to provide technology that is universally accessible and capable.

This approach could start with organisations providing a menu of technologies that employees can choose from based on their personal preferences and their job role. Once employees choose the right tools for their work, management should trust employees to use these tools to enhance performance.

The seamless transition between digital and physical workspace is not only enabled by personal digital tools, but also by shared and collaborative tools. Software-based systems such as virtual scheduling, visitor management, file sharing and instant messaging are also key to developing a seamless transition. Apps such as Microsoft Teams have integrated video, file sharing, instant messaging and team channels in one single platform – this enables employees to easily switch from virtual collaboration to physical collaboration with all documents stored in an easily accessible folder.

The blend between physical and digital is becoming further integrated as technologies such as intelligent mail come into play. This technology scans and processes physical mail and sends the recipient a digital copy of the mail, in which they can choose to reply physically or digitally. This means that employees do not physically have to be in the office to receive or reply to physical mail, or even to physically sign documents anymore with the advent of e-signatures.



CASE STUDY

AgilQuest's Forum Platform

AgilQuest is one of the leading workplace reservation software systems and aims to create a seamless workplace experience. Its people-first focus gives organisations the tools to support Work from Anywhere. Whether employees are in a traditional office setting, flexible office, working from home, or a mix of them all, AgilQuest's platform, Forum, empowers people to find the workspaces, meeting rooms, amenities, coworking spaces, services, equipment, and any other resource they need to be productive and efficient. Forum includes an integrated analytics engine to provide real-time utilisation and presence data detailing how employees are working, and assets are being used. Forum uses a consumer-like interface which is highly visual and includes live floorplans and a Google Maps integration, making it easy-to-use and engaging for users. Employees can create 'teams' to quickly see where co-workers are sitting and can update their own status for staying connected.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES



THE CONVERSATION WILL SHIFT FROM HYBRID TO HUMAN-CENTRIC. IF YOU MISS THAT PIECE OUT, BEING SUCCESSFUL IN THE NEW WORLD OF WORK WILL BE A CHALLENGE...

Dinesh Malkani,

Founder and CEO, Smarten Spaces



DIGITAL EQUALITY

As people start to work in a hybrid way, we will need meeting spaces with advanced audio-visual technology that creates an equal experience across all channels. Apps can also enable digital equality and redefine the blended workplace experience. By sharing who has booked to be in on a particular day, by nudging or suggesting when would be good to go into the office, and by providing great user experience when people arrive work, the app will become the gateway to workplace experience.

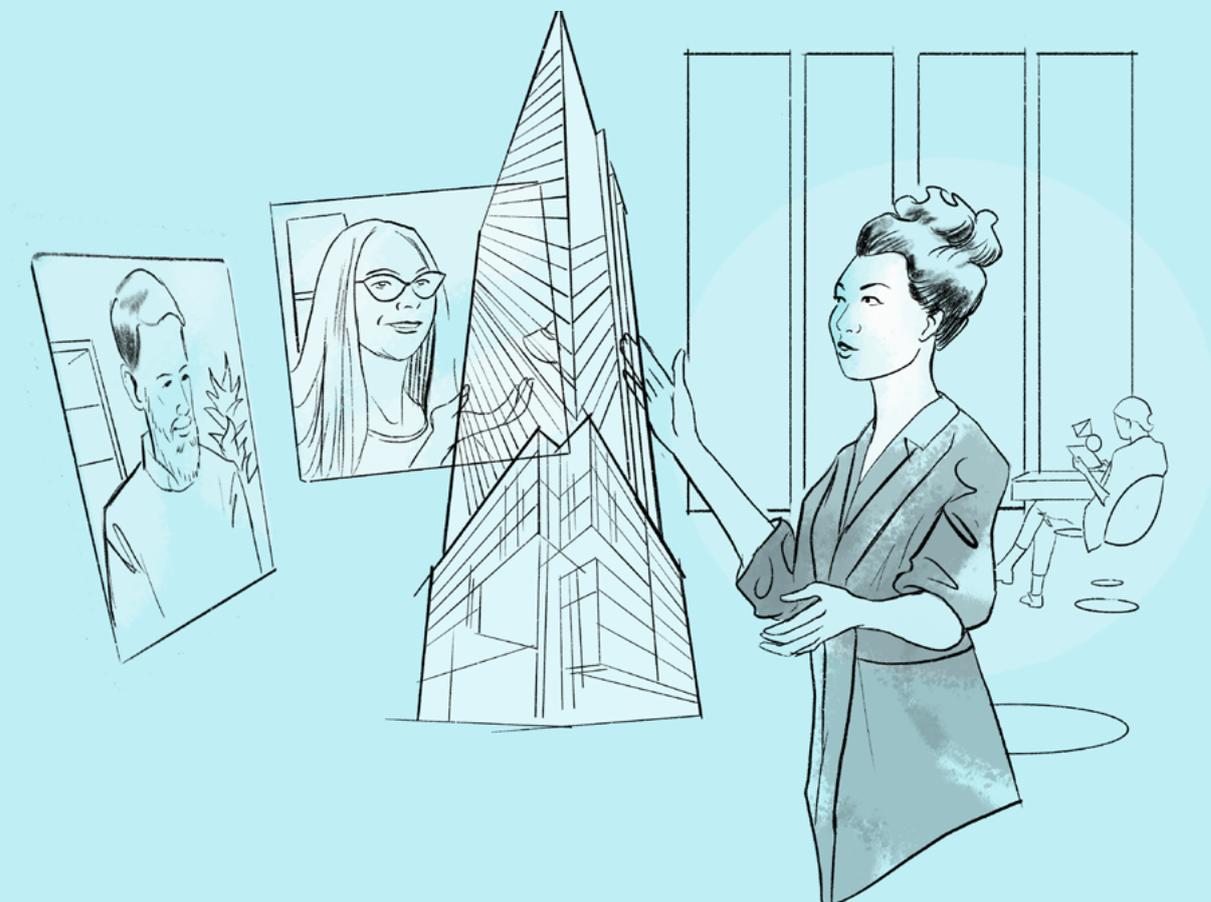
From finding colleagues to navigating to a desk or meeting room that has been booked, ordering food or checking on availability of classes or the queue at the genius bar, the user experience via an app will define the success of the workplace.

One of the big challenges facing large corporates now is creating the right balance between the digital and physical experience inside and outside the office. Organisations need to consider how they can maintain corporate culture and inclusivity

across the different facets of work in a distributed workforce. Digital whiteboarding technologies – such as Captivo – are going some way to bridge the gap between physical and virtual participants in collaboration meetings by capturing all the data on virtual whiteboards and sending it to all participants. This means that at the end of the meeting all participants have the same information shared with them. However, organisations still have a way to go to create a seamless experience across all the different work channels.

5.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES



CREATIVE COLLABORATION

One of the most significant drawbacks of being away from the central office has been the inability to socially connect with colleagues and engage in face-to-face collaboration. While there is still a place for physical collaboration in omni-channel working, there is an opportunity to integrate it with virtual colleagues to create creative collaborative environments for all participants. The physical office remains the best place to collaborate, work in teams and solve problems together, so critical to any omni channel solution.

Architect and academic Kristi Woolsey, Associate Director and lead for Smart Environments Group for management consultants Digital BCG, explains that there is an opportunity to blend physical and digital worlds via an integrated app, creating what she calls 'the bionic workplace'. For example,

virtual employees might see on the app that a colleague has walked into a shared space in the physical office; they might want to chat to that colleague so they project themselves onto an 'always-on' screen in that space to say hi and connect. This type of technology can recreate the spontaneity of the watercooler moments, previously reserved for the physical office. BCG is renowned for developing a 'collision coefficient' in its New York office, a mathematical formula which measures chance encounters in physical space. One could imagine organisations developing a 'collision coefficient' for digital serendipity too.

This concept is similar to collaborating in virtual environments using AR and VR (augmented and virtual reality). All employees can meet in a virtual space which places every participant on an equal footing. Avatars of each

employee present are projected into the virtual space and collaboration and communication can occur. This technology already exists in the gaming world where players from different geographical locations meet in a virtual setting and use headsets to communicate with each other.

Without everyone present in the office, it can be difficult to know who your colleagues are outside your immediate team. This makes it more difficult to find people with relevant skillsets for specific projects. Digital tools such as Profinda's EX system harvests data sources and provides a directory of skills for that organisation. As physical networks get smaller as a result of less people in one central office, this technology allows transparent access to skills to help employees collaborate effectively with the right people right across the organisation.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS

Critical to omni-channel working is an understanding of how teams are working and the ability to analyse emerging work patterns. Data science and analytics will therefore take centre stage as the method to manage the new workplace, with use of AI and machine learning to suggest and nudge people as well as define the optimal clusters and ecosystems.

Microsoft Workplace Analytics has been a pioneer in using data on team and company-wide communication to understand collaboration patterns within the business and inform decision-making. With Microsoft 365 insights and the Workplace Analytics platform, data scientists can look at the organisational network analysis that shows who is emailing whom, who is invited to Teams or other Outlook events and who is sharing documents with others. It builds a picture of the real work at play, the interactions and clusters, as well as correlating who is collaborating with whom. And so we can plan our omni-channel workplaces with science, driven by a logic that determines patterns of occupancy and engagement.

CASE STUDY

Ecosystem by Scotiabank

In 2017, the Canadian multinational banking and financial service company Scotiabank began the implementation of its activity-based working initiative called Ecosystem. This concept saw the provision of space for groups of 500 employees who all have a shared purpose in their work, despite being spread across different teams. This brought people together with shared goals and common outputs. Scotiabank collected and analysed data in each 'ecosystem' to understand how different groups of people use space and what activities are being conducted on a day-to-day basis.

The purpose of the Ecosystem model is to move beyond the hierarchies shown on the organisation chart. Scotiabank relied on well understood digital tools within the company but added more audio-visual technology

to physical space to promote collaboration between office-based and remote employees. Scotiabank is working to understand omni-channel worker patterns through a data-driven approach and an employee-centric viewpoint. Data is compared across different regions and countries within the organisation to understand how employees are working across teams.

The Ecosystem model has been successful with 7,000 people currently working in this model, with 12,000 projected to do so by 2024. This approach has allowed Scotiabank to become an agile organisation where all employees are untethered from a physical place and able to conduct work from anywhere. Employees are empowered with choice over their tools which makes them accountable for their own work.

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ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES



**ONCE YOU PUT DATA ON THE TABLE THE CONVERSATION
TENDS TO CHANGE QUICKLY FROM PROBLEMS TO SOLUTIONS**

James Davis

Associate Director and Change Manager, Fidelity International



As well as tracking collaboration data, organisations can anonymously track an individual's journey and identify trends in how they work. This data can help create a bespoke workplace experience for every individual as integrations with AI can tailor recommendations and services based on data patterns. Fidelity International is one such organisation which uses data to take a forensic look at its workforce. The business has two streams of data: live data which is an app-based approach to give employees access to visitor management and desk

booking systems; and recorded data which is used by leadership to make decisions on real-estate efficiency and effectiveness.

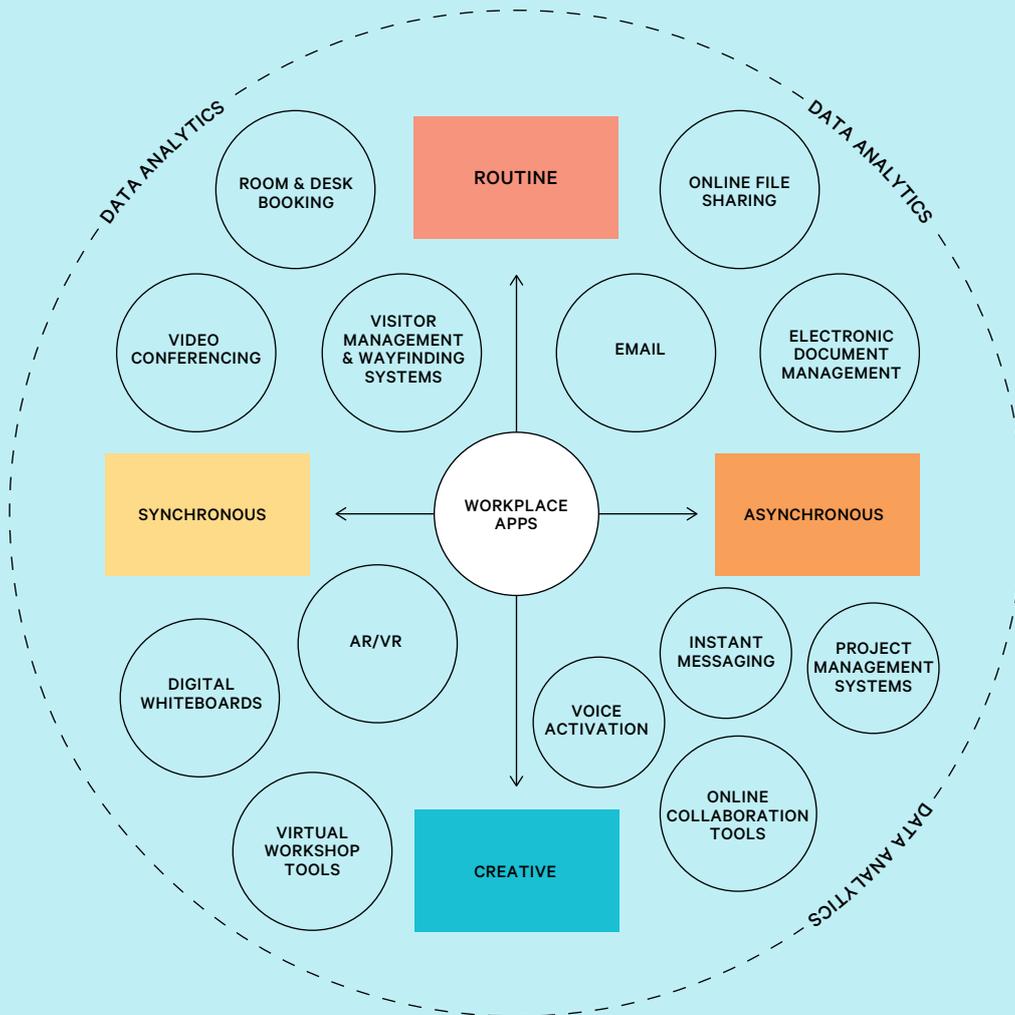
LinkedIn is another great example – it collects data on how its employees work through a survey tool called Glint. Weaved into the LinkedIn platform, Glint gathers feedback from employees. Between this and the people analytics data collected by the HR department, LinkedIn is able to identify trends on where people work and the different work styles of their employees.

It is clear that data analysis can provide organisations with evidence-based insights to help accommodate their employees across multiple channels of work. However, an acceleration of data collection within companies can also lead to employee pushback on data privacy and digital surveillance. The collection of track-and-trace health data in the pandemic has 'softened up' public attitudes on this issue, but feelings within the workplace can still run high.

5.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE OMNI-CHANNEL WORKER



SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS WORK

What companies like LinkedIn, Scotiabank and Fidelity International share is a commitment to using new technologies to support not just a shift from office to omni-channel, but also a shift from synchronous work, in which people work together on things at the same time, to asynchronous work, in

which work doesn't happen at the same time for everyone. Asynchronous work is an important characteristic of the omni-channel approach and an asset for remote teams collaborating with colleagues in different time zones. This diagram summarises technologies that will support the omni-channel worker collaborating across time, place and space.

Routine, synchronous work will be enhanced not only by video conferencing but also by room and space booking technologies, visitor management and digital wayfinding systems so that more sporadic office attendance in the omni-channel era can be efficiently managed. Routine, asynchronous work will be supported by email, online file sharing and

5.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

electronic document management systems that facilitate processes via the cloud. Creative, synchronous work brings people together for collaborative innovation activities using virtual workshop tools such as Mural or Miro, digital whiteboards, augmented reality and virtual reality. Creative, asynchronous work allows ideas to be built on by teammates over distance

using instant messaging such as Slack, voice-activated assistants such as Amazon Alexa, online collaboration tools such as Asana, InVision and Trello, and project management systems such as Basecamp.

Many of the technologies required for omni-channel working already exist and are proven in the marketplace.

The challenge for companies is how to shift the model, as there are important implications for the management of their workforces. A new approach is not without risk, as we shall explore in the next section, not least because greater reliance on a remote working channel can damage company culture and employee wellbeing.

CASE STUDY

Samsung DeX digital workplace powered by mobile

Smartphones have become the centrepiece of the workplace. Employees use mobile apps to communicate, navigate and organise themselves. Recognising this shift, Samsung has created a tool which combines mobile apps with desktop apps to create a virtual desktop accessible from anywhere.

The system creates a single multifaceted device that handles communication and collaboration. Users can access all workplace apps and their Windows desktop to combine desktop efficiency with mobile convenience in one connected virtual desktop. This desktop can be accessed from anywhere if the user

has a DeX docking station and the VMware Workspace ONE software available from the Google Play Store. DeX can be placed in conference rooms to allow employees to present their latest work straight from their smartphone.

LEADERSHIP, PRODUCTIVITY AND WELLBEING

Providing the right support for the omni-channel worker will require organisations to shift their mindset and make significant adaptations.

To transition towards an omni-channel model requires a different corporate mindset. Instead of focusing on digital and physical as separate entities, organisations should follow the lead of retail and look at the journey of their employees in a holistic way. This paradigm shift in perspective will support the rise of the omni-channel worker in terms of their productivity and wellbeing, and require adaptations in leadership.

CULTURE AND PERFORMANCE

At the start of the pandemic, when most employees swapped channels from office to home working, it was reported that productivity received an early boost. But as the future employee looks set to work across a range of channels, performance will become more complex to measure and support. Now, the fatigue of constantly working from home is contributing to a crisis of productivity

that is approaching the level of the global financial crisis in 2008 when corporate performance dived to a new low. New COVID-19 academic research from Cornell University found that ‘while working from home might sound appealing if it offers a safe harbour, the absence of separation between one’s work and home – and the lack of commutes to provide a transition between the two domains – can become a burden.’

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**CULTURE DRIVES ENGAGEMENT
WHICH IN TURN DRIVES PRODUCTIVITY...
WHEN YOU ARE PHYSICALLY DISLOCATED,
YOU ARE EMOTIONALLY DISLOCATED**

Jake Herway,
Gallup

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Culture and performance are more intricately connected than ever. Recent research from Gallup reported that employees are 10 per cent less likely to feel cared for or recognised in a virtual environment, and 5 per cent less likely to feel that their opinions count. The cost to employers of actively disengaged staff is estimated at around 17 per cent of each individual’s salary. Omni-

channel working forces organisations to reconsider how they reflect culture across the full spectrum of work channels to ensure they are engaging the entire workforce.

When looked at in the round, research generally indicates that flexibility and choice has allowed employees to make decisions which increase productivity, but this needs to be supported by a

strong investment and commitment to company culture. In order to support the productivity of omni-channel workers, organisations can no longer rely on physical spaces to intrinsically drive a sense of belonging and social connection. Companies need to invest in culture and in building social capital through all work channels to ensure they are engaging their workforce.

6.

LEADERSHIP, PRODUCTIVITY AND WELLBEING



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**LEADERS HAVE GOT TO BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO KNOW
THEY DON'T HAVE THE PERFECT VISION TO TACKLE THIS
PROBLEM. THEY ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE ADAPTABLE
TO FIND A SOLUTION THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE...**

*Former US General Stanley McChrystal,
co-author, Team of Teams (2015)*

”

LEADERSHIP, PRODUCTIVITY AND WELLBEING

“

ADDRESSING INDIVIDUAL WELLBEING WITH HEALTHY FOOD OR GYMS IS LOW-HANGING FRUIT, BUT THE REAL CHALLENGE IS TO CHANGE THE CULTURE OF THE ORGANISATION AT THE SENIOR LEVEL...

Professor Sir Cary Cooper
work psychologist

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LEADERSHIP AND TRUST

One approach for improving engagement is in taking a more rigorous approach to promoting managers into team leadership roles.

Organisations generally promote managers into positions of authority on the basis of their technical skills and not their people skills. As a result, many line managers lack the emotional intelligence to lead teams through times of crisis or across distance. The omni-channel approach is challenging this model as positions of leadership need to have a strong foundation of trust between employer and employee.

According to a 2020 Gartner study, 40 per cent of employers will change their management style to increase employee autonomy and flexibility. As part of this shift in leadership, employers need to adopt long-term, flexible strategies which can adapt to new challenges as employees conduct their work through multiple channels. One of the biggest

shifts in leadership will be the rise of ‘soft skills’ – the ability to engage with people on an empathetical level will be important for managing omni-channel workers.

The rise of the empathetic leader is intrinsically connected to employee wellbeing and empowerment. Director of Workplace Experience at Netflix, Sara Escobar, says that leaders today need to empower employees to make decisions not only in how they work, but where they work. Leadership needs to support choice and variety for employees across all channels.

According to former US General Stanley McChrystal, a global expert on new leadership styles, ‘In a complex world you have vastly more variables at greater speed. It’s impossible to predict what’s going to happen. Organisations can’t be designed to optimise for efficiency – to do something perfectly; they have to be optimised for adaptability.’

WELLBEING

Since the onset of the pandemic, the concept of workplace wellbeing has altered. Before, wellbeing agendas were mainly rooted in physical place – in corporate gyms, spas, green walls and healthy food bars. Now, the wellbeing agenda is more people-focused, coalescing around flexible culture, mental health, trust and preventing burn out. The omni-channel worker does not have the cue of typical office hours to set the boundaries for working, which can result in many remote workers putting in longer hours. Microsoft research has confirmed a tendency towards overwork, stress and fatigue in remote work scenarios.

6.

LEADERSHIP, PRODUCTIVITY AND WELLBEING

One of the implications of working entirely via remote digital channels is constant collaboration through video calls – this can lead to facing a ‘digital wall’ which deprives people of vital emotional and behavioural cues. Dr Fiona Kerr, CEO of The NeuroTech Institute and Adjunct Professor at the University of Adelaide, explains that team members see colleagues only through a screen without direct retinal alignment, and they’re also starved of external stimuli normally provided by commuting and the random encounters of office life. Without the regular level of electro-chemical ‘hits’ that the brain craves, people can ‘switch off’ and experience a dip in energy and creativity.

Organisations need to understand the implications of working in digital channels to best support remote and hybrid workers. Alternatively, a place-led approach to wellbeing is still critical to supporting the omni-channel worker. Biophilic design features, ergonomic furniture, natural food and smart amenities are still critical markers of supporting employee wellbeing in an organisation. Many office spaces will shift in purpose to become an oasis to escape the pressures of home. This is an emerging theme that will draw on design for user experience and service-led approaches.

As the office becomes a high-value place within an entire ecosystem of work, organisations seeking to maintain employee wellbeing will extend their ergonomics and wellbeing policies beyond the office boundary into flexible third spaces and home offices. Brett Hautop, Head of Design and Build at LinkedIn, argues that organisations need to maintain a level of parity across different channels of working. If healthy food is offered in the office, will it also be offered at home? These are among the new considerations in directing the omni-channel workforce.

CASE STUDY

Facebook at home

Facebook has introduced short and long-term strategies to support the omni-channel worker. One of its key short-term goals was to create parity of experience between office and home work set-ups. Facebook provided every employee with US

\$2,000 to create a comfortable home working environment. Each employee was given access to a site where they could pick furniture to enable them to mirror the office set-up at home. This provision was coupled with access to ergonomic services via video

conferencing where a team could advise individuals on the most ergonomic set-up. Finally, all employees were given access to a workplace design team to advise on interior design in the home to enable work.

THE WAY FORWARD



As more organisations start to accommodate omni-channel working, there will be some significant considerations for corporate real estate, organisational structure and employee experience. Property owners and developers will need to consider how they can best utilise their real estate portfolio to accommodate different channels of work; organisations will need to intrinsically understand the needs and demands of their employees to facilitate a work-from-anywhere model whilst building their culture; and employees will need to hand over their data to receive tailored workplace experiences, which might raise privacy concerns.

THE WAY FORWARD

As Mirvac explores the new landscape of work, we are re-evaluating our own property portfolio in terms of creating a more integrated future. Here are five pointers for organisations to consider:

1. PORTFOLIO AS A PLATFORM

View your real-estate portfolio as a platform to provide a range of services and experiences for omni-channel workers – and not as a generic set of office buildings. Different property assets can be dedicated to performing different functions, for example building culture or training and mentoring employees. Buildings can also be designed to be adaptable to meet changing corporate needs with more pop-up and temporary elements.

Mirvac has a diverse set of assets which enables us to offer our customers a unique platform with spaces in residential, retail, industrial and office, which essentially means we can provide locations at home, near home and in the CBD (Central Business District) for customers to use. LBW (Location-Based Working), when combined with different use types, will give organisations the ability to support a flexible workforce craving choice with quality and reliability.

2. EMBRACE THE DIGITAL

Omni-channel working is not about a trade-off or balance between physical and digital channels. It is all about digital transformation, a process which in turn offers workers a wider choice of physical places in which to work. Office property remains an essential and desirable construct in the omni-channel world, but it will require repurposing,

replanning and redesigning. Mirvac's 2020 report, *Augmented Work: How New Technologies are Reshaping the Global Workplace*, explores how human and machine intelligence can co-exist in the workplace of the future, with provision made in the physical environment for a growth in AI and robotics.

It is clear that the cloud-enabled workstyles of the future will need a robust, intelligent infrastructure which makes all technologies accessible, and the Internet of Things to support a mobile, distributed workforce. Mirvac has focused on creating an intelligent infrastructure which enables customer to plug and play; data from sensors also gives tenants access to data to support their business operations.

3. REWIRE THE ORGANISATION

Consider a complete rewiring of your organisational structures. The idea of being able to work from anywhere, at any time, requires a seamless experience – one that cannot be obtained in a siloed organisation. Traditionally, employees have had to ask the IT department for technology tools, HR for flexible working guidelines and FM (facilities management) for access to space. Bust the silos. There should be one unified source – an 'omni-channel portal' perhaps – to facilitate every request.

4. CURATE ALL EXPERIENCES

Workplace experience has been on the corporate agenda for some time but only acknowledged in one dimension: the physical space. Omni-channel working moves beyond the physical experience and instead looks at overall user experience across all channels. The challenge for organisations is to ensure that all channels offer a first-class experience, especially the digital ones. Remember that the mobile phone will increasingly be the main pivot for work.

Mirvac's 2019 report, *The Super-Experience: Designing for Talent in the Digital Workplace*, gives useful insight into the creation and curation of different types of experiences – for learning, collaboration, social interaction and culture-building. One of the biggest reported impacts of the pandemic has been the loss of learning by employees, with people missing the 'over-the-shoulder' transfer of knowledge and expertise. Many of our customers have noted the need to bring people together to learn by osmosis or through formal training. The office as a learning workplace will be one of the most important channels in an omni-channel future as well as an important source of knowledge exchange for the workforce.

THE WAY FORWARD

5. DEPEND ON DATA

Data will become the fuel that drives omni-channel workplace experience for employees in the future. So, collect and use data to understand the different types of work being conducted in each channel. Based on this data, start to map out what the ideal experience should be in each channel. Once the experience roadmap in each channel is curated, make sure you provide the necessary tools and spaces to accommodate these experiences. Mirvac recognises the primary importance of data and has set up a data governance committee to help facilitate the transition of data to our customers, ensuring the data is clean and relevant, and accessible to enable customer success.

6. EXPLORE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Finally, an omni-channel future for work is likely to involve more strategic partnerships across sectors and disciplines. Microsoft's partnerships with Steelcase and 9am represent early examples of tech and furniture combined, for example. So look out for new partnerships at the bleeding edge of innovation where exciting intersections can occur. Mirvac is focused on identifying strategic partnerships which help to solve customer problems.

CONCLUSION

This paper sets out a vision for an 'omni-channel' approach to working in which employees work, synchronously and asynchronously, across time, space and a range of places. The quest for a seamless employee experience mirrors that provided for customers in omni-channel retailing. Within this emerging model, the office is far from dead – indeed a fit for purpose office property portfolio has the potential to take a

new lease of life as an essential part of a smart platform to enable the new omni-channel workforce.

As people seek choice, they will also seek togetherness and social interaction. They will need to learn and upskill to keep up with digital transformation. They will need to collaborate to solve problems – and, in doing so, be an engine for innovation. As remote and flexible working patterns become more

established in the post COVID-19 era, the office of the future will no longer be the sole channel for working. However, it will continue to be of fundamental and strategic importance as it provides many channels for work. The office we have known to date will be refreshed to ensure it remains a catalyst for business to flourish. New behaviours, strategies and technologies will combine with place to broaden the vistas of our working world.

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ABOUT MIRVAC

Mirvac is an Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) top 50 company and one of Australia's most innovative property groups. We have been making a positive contribution to our cities and urban landscape for almost 50 years, through the residential communities, office precincts, industrial facilities and shopping centres we create, own and manage. Our purpose, to Reimagine Urban Life, inspires us to create solutions that enable our customers to live more connected and sustainable lives, and our This Changes Everything sustainability strategy is a roadmap for how we can continue to be a force for good.

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ABOUT WORKTECH ACADEMY

WORKTECH Academy is the leading global platform and member network exploring how we'll work tomorrow. We look at innovation in the world of work and workplace through five key streams: people, place, technology, design and culture. We engage with our powerful network of over 4,000 individual members and more than 50 corporate, design and technology organisations around the world to deliver content on the latest trends, research and best practice in work and workplace. Mirvac is a Corporate Member of WORKTECH Academy.

www.worktechacademy.com

This paper is intended to provoke
comment and debate. Got feedback?

We'd love to hear from you.

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