

Candid conversations: HR and IT professionals talk about the changing workplace

HR AND IT ARE IN THIS TOGETHER

With the sudden rise of remote work, tech has become the essential tether between employees, the company, and teammates. That means HR and IT need to partner closely and collaborate in new ways. From an employee's first day on the job through every step along their career development path, HR and IT partnerships have a new emphasis. They must now even more deeply coordinate efforts to deliver a positive, secure, and productive work environment for a workforce destined to be more and more remote.

We talked with HR and IT leaders around the world and gathered their insights on this time of tremendous change. *See what they identified as the five areas where their collaborations are now more critical than ever.*

According to a September 2020 survey of HR professionals, **working remotely will nearly triple by 2021 vs. the pre-COVID 12%.***



A DIFFERENT WORLD

While remote work isn't new, it's a new experience for many people. Our HR and IT teams must recognize the need to get employees comfortable with remote work, and this must become a key area where HR and IT dedicate extra collaboration and communication. According to our HR and IT respondents, selecting and implementing the right tools to make remote work successful requires both specialties to work hand-in-hand in new ways.



HR *"Our IT relationship has changed. We've had more interaction making sure employees know what's coming. There's more back and forth, double- and triple-checking."*

— COURTNEY POPELKA
Talent Acquisition Manager

Looking at the communication needs for work-from-home employees, we see some overarching themes. All employees who work outside the office will clearly need tools for virtual conferencing to replace in-office chats and meetings. All managers will need tools that help communicate requirements for assignments and provide feedback that used to be provided by in-person

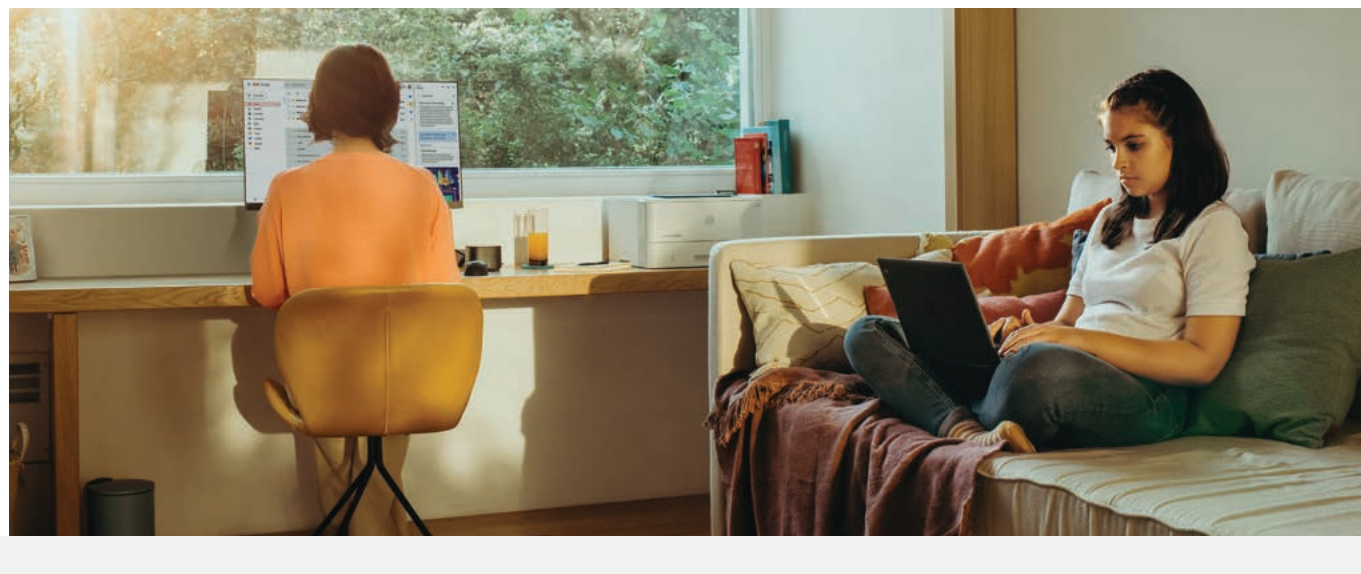
meetings—capabilities provided by a growing number of work-management solutions. And remote workers who are asked to juggle multiple projects simultaneously will need tools that can help them prioritize assignments in ways an on-hand project manager or boss did in the office.

Since March of 2020, technology executive Martin Davis has found himself regularly asking questions along the lines of, "Can you get everything you need? Do you have the necessary equipment and scale of access?" By asking these kinds of questions and collaborating on the solutions, HR and IT can help keep remote work as seamless and productive as in-office work. And in some cases, they can make it more seamless and productive.

"One thing that's actually easier is we can use streaming video, so all-company meetings can happen more frequently and when required, because you don't need to find a meeting room or delay the meeting until a room is available."

— GARETH CLARK
Head of IT Transformation, The Post Office, London

IT



SECURITY MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

Managing remote devices is no easy task. In April 2020, 94% of cybersecurity pros said they're more concerned about security now than before COVID-19.² IT rightly continues to monitor new threats and install cost-effective technical safeguards like hardware-based security that can help protect, detect, and recover from attacks. However, people are often the weakest link in security. Ever-evolving threats—including extortionware, polymorphic malware, and phishing scams—are aimed right at computer users.

Noting concerns with unsecured Wi-Fi networks and with keeping remote systems compliant, 64% of cybersecurity pros said that security visibility is more difficult with employees working remotely.³ Remote work puts the security focus on the endpoints—and those endpoints are now more spread out and exposed than ever in homes and all other kinds of remote work locations.



IT *"Here's an example. Do your self-service password-change capabilities all work over whatever connectivity people are using? In one company I worked with, you could change them all from the LAN, but only some over the VPN. Six months later, when people have still not been in the office, they can't change those passwords. And now the single sign-on doesn't work. It wasn't an issue in the first part of the transition, but different sets of cracks start to show."*

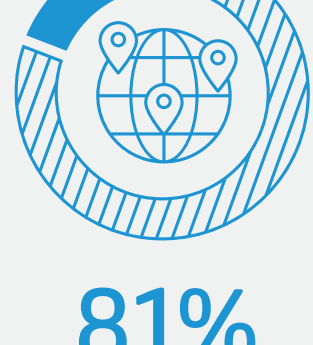
— MARTIN DAVIS
Insurance CIO

HR and IT need to collaborate productively to level up security awareness training and reminders. In one of the most important findings of our research, the professionals we interviewed recommend bringing creativity instead of (or in addition to) just re-circulating quarterly security-policy reminders. This can include engagement approaches like gamification and online videos.

"Our company is implementing more e-learning and group training sessions and workshops. We're conducting formal and informal surveys to get the pulse of different divisions/teams."

— HR PROFESSIONAL IN JAPAN

HR



81%

of IT pros say assessing remote endpoints for compliance has become more difficult than ever³



76%

of HR professionals in a late 2020 survey rated maintaining morale as the greatest challenge with work-from-home employees²

THE CRITICAL QUESTION

How can your company make tech-dependent remote work rewarding and productive instead of isolating, exhausting, and endless?

With 2020's deep dive into remote work, we've come to recognize the tendency for employees to overwork themselves. The absence of a set time to arrive at or depart from the office—along with the loss of routines like coffee and lunch breaks—drives some employees to work nonstop. Healthcare CIO David Chou observes, "Burnout is something I am really sensitive to, even myself. The first thing people do when they wake up is to check their emails. If there's something going on, you may skip a lunch or go all night. I encourage taking breaks and blocking out time. Wellbeing is very important."

The remote work shift of 2020 also revealed how much people actually valued office environments. The office enabled coworkers to share ideas, bond, and enjoy the workday. It often provided perks like snack bars and break areas. It gave them a dedicated workspace, quiet places to concentrate, structure, and a line-of-sight into things happening with their team beyond their own assignments. With so much of that removed from the remote work equation, the HR and IT professionals who talked with us saw a great need to re-create that in-office vibrancy and inspiration to the home-bound employee.

PRO TIPS TO HELP AVOID WFH BURNOUT

1. **Create a schedule**—Turn work devices off and on at specific times.
2. **Ditch the pajamas**—Instead of staying in pajama pants all day, put on some jeans or khakis.
3. **Take walks**—Schedule time on your calendar to get away from the computer to exercise.
4. **Take a lunch break**—Take a couple of minutes away from the computer to eat and recharge.
5. **Schedule "me time"**—Give yourself a moment to decompress by yourself...like you may have done before during your commute.

HR and IT teams need to look out for the wellbeing of employees. Help employees be physically active at intervals rather than staying riveted to a computer screen all day. Recommend that they turn off the computer at a certain point of the day to separate work time from family time.



IT *"Employees are seeing the downside. You don't have those social interactions and interruptions—you can go eight hours and barely move. That intensity is very draining on people."*

— MARTIN DAVIS
Insurance CIO

IT can work together with HR to look out for burnout warning signs and offset the feeling of isolation. Martin Davis says, "We've tried the same things as others. We haven't resorted to a Friday drinking web conference—yet—but we've done things to encourage employees to interact via different channels discussing hobbies.

"Technology is now more and more needed to get data/signals to evaluate engagement and wellbeing. But technology is just a means to an end and should not replace—but supplement—conversation and feedback loops."

— HR PROFESSIONAL IN JAPAN

HR

HR and IT should work together to maintain regular, ongoing communications with remote employees to help counter the potential feelings of isolation.

BRING THE CULTURE

When a candidate becomes an employee, the onboarding process creates a first and lasting impression. According to our HR conversations, onboarding is the most important time to establish company culture and processes. In the past, HR was largely responsible for the company culture part of onboarding.

Now, with so many new hires being onboarded remotely, IT provides the only channels being used to convey company culture. What's more, the kind of tech being provided, and the means of providing it, help set a tone. As observed by HR leader Piper Sheer, "When you have the right tools to do your job, it makes the employee feel good...like the company has its act together."



HR *"It's harder to manage 100% adherence to the new employee training, so we have moved to a hybrid "live" webinar session. We also archive it for on-demand purposes for employees who can't make it or if we need to do a rolling onboarding as a result of hardware availability and delayed delivery."*

— HR PROFESSIONAL IN JAPAN

If HR clearly communicates needs, IT can help provide viable solutions through tech, even if onboarding has presented new challenges.

KEY EXAMPLES OF CHALLENGES:

1. **Work together to find means to convey company values** remotely.
2. **Relate stories that represent what your company culture appreciates and what goes against the culture.**
3. **Find ways to let newcomers know you care about them.**
4. **Equip them from the start as if running a successful business depends on them. Because quite literally, it does.**

By staying in touch with HR, IT teams can gain clear insights into employee needs and more readily recognize the challenges their tech must address.

"We had embarked pre COVID on a significant digital experience effort with HR. IT realized the core of everything we do is in HR. That's where employees enter the company and where they go for help."

— PAIGE FRANCIS
University IT Leader and author of Demystifying IT

IT



GOING PLACES

Employees want to like their careers are taking them somewhere. Employees want to be engaged. They want to build skills, become more valuable, and earn promotions. According to a 2019 survey on Smarp.com, engaged employees are up to 17% more productive than those who don't feel engaged, and businesses with high employee engagement rates are up to 22% more profitable.³

The desire for engagement is every bit as strong with remote employees as it is for those in the office—and arguably even more so because remote employees need extra feedback to know how they're doing. Because remote work is here to stay for many employees, HR and IT need to find ways to extend engagement and career-development opportunities to those working outside the office.



HR *"We worked together with the head of IT on piloting our work-from-home policy—how to do training, how to get the employee buy-in, what technologies did people need, what would we give them to take home, what would we have them buy on their own. His team did the tech training, and I applied my general training experience to help make this most effective."*

— PIPER SHEER
Head of HR for AEW, a Boston-based real estate investment company with offices from London to Tokyo

Quality training is a vital form of engagement. It allows employees to see where their focus should be and what success looks like. Now companies are trying to envision ways their long-standing employee-development programs can translate for workforces who aren't together in an office space. "We are big with mentorship and shadowing and that's hard to do remote," says HR leader Courtney Popelka. "We've implemented collaboration software and found that has helped a lot."

Refining such programs will take time and iteration. IT skills and knowledge of platforms can be integral in helping HR bring this sort of distance training and engagement to fruition. It can include anything from virtual coffee breaks to online book clubs to regular webinars. And IT teams can offer up a range of pathways to deepen remote engagement.

"There is a learning curve from the team-engagement perspective...How do you have watercooler discussions when you're not there? We are trying various things...I hold a town hall every two weeks."

— DAVID CHOU
SVP and CIO at Harris Healthcare in the US

IT



71%

of executives in a 2019 study said that employee engagement is critical to their company's success⁴

Keep deepening collaborations between HR and IT.

While there are plenty of other areas where HR and IT need to collaborate, these findings provide a solid starting place. By cooperating closely, HR and IT can combine their strengths to address remote communication, security, employee burnout, onboarding, and employee development. It will make a difference to remote-employee wellbeing and make their experiences more productive. In a world where remote work is here to stay, that's absolutely vital.

