

Trust is what makes a success of digital workplaces

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Trusting employees by giving them autonomy is the key to making a success of the digital workplace, according to research conducted by Nick van der Meulen of Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University (RSM) and MIT's Center for Information Systems Research (CISR).

In an era where digital workplaces are quickly becoming the norm, the study found that organisations that invest most into these digital workplaces – in employee connectedness and responsive leadership – performed above their direct competitors in their respective industries. This was assessed on a basis of five indicators, including growth in market share, profit growth and employee satisfaction.

The survey of 313 organisations showed that the high-performing organisations have an integrated and company-wide approach to greater employee connectedness. They achieve this by designing physical spaces, digital technologies, and social networks specifically focused on enabling more collaborative work.

“Connectivity built across silos rather than in an isolated fashion is critical to empowering employees to provide seamless customer experiences,” van der Meulen explains. In other words: a physical and digital work environment designed for a collaborative, integrated employee experience enables the delivery of more complex customer solutions.

In terms of leadership style, high performers adopt a facilitative approach in which managers trust their employees to decide when, where, and how best to work. Management typically encourages employees to share mistakes and failures, but is also interested in their innovative ideas. Staff are allowed to be flexible, while enabling the entire organisation to learn, innovate and remain competitive.

In addition, these leaders articulate a vision that links workplace design to the organisation's strategic objectives. They encourage experimentation with new approaches to work, have a high tolerance for failure of new workplace initiatives and provide continuous learning opportunities. These companies also tend to have cross-functional digital workplace leadership teams.

The research emphasised that responsive leadership - which is critical in getting full value from the digital workspace - requires a shift in mind-set. Leaders in high-performing companies facilitate workplace design rather than direct it.

“The end result is that they empower employees to make decisions in the best interest of customer experience and their work,” Nick van der Meulen added.

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