Chapter 100
Distributed Work Environments:
The Impact of Technology in the Workplace

Edwiygh Franck
The Greatest You Yet!, USA

ABSTRACT

Technology is making the traditional workplace obsolete. Companies are taking advantage of the myriads of digital resources available to make their processes leaner, cut costs and have a larger presence in the global market through the concept of distributed work environment. In this chapter, the author provides an overview of the distributed work environment, as well as the impact it has on the human condition in the workplace. Although this technology driven work concept can be beneficial, companies have to ensure that it is the right business model for them and their employees. The author looks at different factors that companies need to consider in deciding to adopt a distributed work environment model. Several companies, over 125 of them, have successfully implemented the concept and the author shares some examples on how they were able to achieve success and employee satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Technology has had a significant impact on how humans live their lives from entertainment, medicine, education, to family life, dating, and social media. Technology has taking center stage in our lives and have allowed us to achieve things that we would not think possible a decade ago. We are sharing and consuming information at lighting speeding due to the availability and capabilities of technology. Technology has allowed for the development of robotic surgery to enhance the preciseness and accuracy of surgery as well as recovery time for patients. The popularity of online learning has increased tremendously as technology has become readily available for students to learn anywhere and at any time. We have self-driving cars on our roads and we can conduct videos chat sessions with anyone around the world by simply using our cellular devices. In other words, we live in a digital and technologically advanced age and almost everything around us is connected by technology, including organizations and their employees.

As Roper and Kim (2007) stated:

A clear revolution is underway in when, where and how work is accomplished. The workplace of the future will be more physically distributed due to a variety of reasons, such as the high cost of land and buildings in urban areas, air pollution resulting from mass commuting, and changes in the nature of work (p. 103).

In the past two decades the landscape of our workforce has changed dramatically from traditional brick and mortar buildings to distributed work environments because of the advancement of technology. From having all employees in a physical building to having employees spread all over the world in an array of physical locations. By definition, a distributed work environment is an organization structure where "… the vast majority of employees work from wherever they are comfortable and productive. Perhaps most importantly, communication and culture are moved outside the boundaries of a physical location so that everyone is able to be included wherever they live" (Robins, 2014, p. 3). A more technical definition explains the distributed work environment as "… an environment in which a plurality of mobile workers using portable computing devices can gain access to a network via network access stations installed within the work environment" (Cole et al., 2002, p. 1). Both definitions reiterate the idea that traditional company headquarters are gradually changing from one main location to wherever an employee wants it to be.

As we begin to understand the concept of what a distributed work environment is, it is important to also understand what it is not. According to Jeff Robbins (2014), from Lullabot, a strategy, design and development company that has embraced and implemented a distributed work environment for his company, a distributed work environment is not:

- *… One with a prominent central office where the majority of people work most of the time* (Robins, 2014, p. 4)
- *A corporation with multiple locations* (Robins, 2014, p. 4)
- *A company where people are often allowed to work from home* (Robins, 2014, p. 4)
- *A company that takes advantage of outsourcing, freelancers, or subcontractors* (Robins, 2014, p. 4)
- *A co-working space where people freelance on similar projects* (Robins, 2014, p. 4)
- *A single freelancer* (Robins, 2014, p. 4)
- *A department within a large company where most people work from home (for instance, the customer service branch of an airline) – though this may qualify as a distributed team* (Robins, 2014, p. 4)

Robbins (2014) goes on to say that it is also important to understand the difference between a distributed work environment and remote employees. In his words:

…the truth is that in-person communication and activities will always trump virtual/tele/digital communications. After all, humans have been communicating in-person since the beginning of time. It is our default setting. So a company with remote employees begins with the deck stacked against them. It's not an even playing field. It's really going to be a challenge to make remote employees feel like they're

Related Content

An Expert System-Based Automation in Indian Traction System for a One Way Single Platform Station by Introducing PLC

Eshan Samanta, Arif Ahmed Sekhand Debnarayan Khatua (2022). *Research Anthology on Cross-Disciplinary Designs and Applications of Automation (pp. 1039-1054).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/an-expert-system-based-automation-in-indian-traction-system-for-a-one-way-single-platform-station-by-introducing-plc/291679

Understanding Sustainability and How It Impacts People of Color

Kevin Richardson (2023). *Applied Research Approaches to Technology, Healthcare, and Business (pp. 13-27).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/understanding-sustainability-and-how-it-impacts-people-of-color/331638

Brand Humour Advertisements on a Social Network Platform and Their Impact on Online Consumer Engagement: The Case of Instagram

Tooba Ali Akbarand Hatem El-Gohary (2021). *Handbook of Research on IoT, Digital Transformation, and the Future of Global Marketing (pp. 212-236).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/brand-humour-advertisements-on-a-social-network-platform-and-their-impact-on-online-consumer-engagement/286281

Artificial Intelligence and Redress for Damages: Fault, Strict Liability, Mandatory Insurance, Legal Personality, or No-Fault Schemes?

Emiliano Marchisio (2022). *Handbook of Research on Applying Emerging Technologies Across Multiple Disciplines (pp. 176-189).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/artificial-intelligence-and-redress-for-damages/301316

E-Commerce and Its Role in the Development of India's Indigenous Product Base

Javaid Ahmad Bhatand Sushmita Dhar (2021). *Handbook of Research on IoT, Digital Transformation, and the Future of Global Marketing (pp. 164-178).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/e-commerce-and-its-role-in-the-development-of-indias-indigenous-product-base/286277