



**Harvard  
Business  
Review**  
ANALYTIC SERVICES

**WEBINAR SUMMARY**

# Recreating Work as a Blend of Virtual and Physical Experiences

Featuring Melanie Frank and Sampath Sowmyanarayan

# Recreating Work as a Blend of Virtual and Physical Experiences

**PRESENTERS:**

Melanie Frank, Managing VP Technology, Capital One

Sampath Sowmyanarayan, President of Global Enterprise for Verizon Business

**MODERATOR:**

Abbie Lundberg, Contributing Editor, HBR Analytic Services

## Overview

Harvard Business Review Analytic Services (HBRAS) recently conducted a survey of global business leaders sponsored by Verizon. A key finding was that remote work during the pandemic has largely been successful, paying off in areas of business agility, business continuity, and collaboration, and leading to the expectation of more remote work in the future. However, digital collaboration remains challenging, with survey respondents split as to whether good results from digital collaboration are easier or harder to achieve. The expectation is a hybrid workplace will emerge post-pandemic. Moreover, the workplace must be inclusive of mobility, not merely remote, with 5G playing a significant role.

A discussion with the technology leader of Capital One (a large financial services firm) and the president of global enterprise at Verizon Business highlighted the technology foundation for a successful digital workplace. At the same time, the need for human relationships remains a hurdle and will drive the hybrid model. Decisions will be made based on role and function, not constrained by technology. The culture must adapt to recognize the investments needed, and leaders must adjust to create new management norms to match the technology. As the workplace evolves, 5G mobility technology will further transform numerous sectors.

## Survey Summary

Abbie Lundberg summarized the HBRAS survey findings about the rapid acceleration of remote work during the pandemic, and expectations for continued progress post-pandemic. HBRAS conducted this survey in May 2020 among over 1,000 participants worldwide. Respondents represented a mix of company sizes, industry, and functions—all of which enable remote work. The respondents were fairly senior, with more than half from executive or senior management roles.

The survey's objectives included:

- Understanding the extent of organizations' digital workplace efforts
- Identifying insights into the drivers behind those efforts and capabilities required for success
- Uncovering how organizations are adapting work processes
- Identifying uses of technology to change how work is done

## Key Survey Findings

### **1. Remote work, normalized during the pandemic, has been largely successful, leading to the expectation of more in the future**

All participants had remote work in their organization, and two-thirds (66%) indicated it was happening broadly across their enterprise.

Respondents (61%) revealed that the quality of remote work is at least as good as in the physical workplace. Only a fraction (22%) disagree, contrary to widespread doubts before the pandemic. This success leads the majority (78%) to predict a future increase in remote work.

According to more than 50% of respondents, investments in the digital workplace are paying off in improved business agility, business continuity, and collaboration. Having a robust digital workplace strategy leads to greater returns. For example, more than half (52%) with a strategy have increased productivity compared to only 40% of those without.

### **2. A hybrid model of remote and in-person work will evolve when it is safe.**

Overwhelmingly, respondents (86%) said the digital workplace must integrate and co-exist with the physical workplace, reflecting the different strengths of each mode. In focus group discussions, executives highlighted the advantages of remote for productivity and independent work. However, in-person environments are seen as superior for building the culture and relationships. Being in the same room is still optimal for intensive, high-collaboration projects.

### 3. Leaders are working to optimize the digital workplace for quality and efficiency.

The digital workplace is evolving. When participants identified the importance of different elements in driving value from investments in the digital workplace, every item seems important. Over 80% of respondents said that each of 10 factors was of high or moderate importance.

At the top of the list was securing data, followed by an infrastructure that can support digital work, and easy-to-use tools. Training for managers and employees was also seen as important. Work norms must be developed around hours and means of collaborating, and must then be broadly communicated.

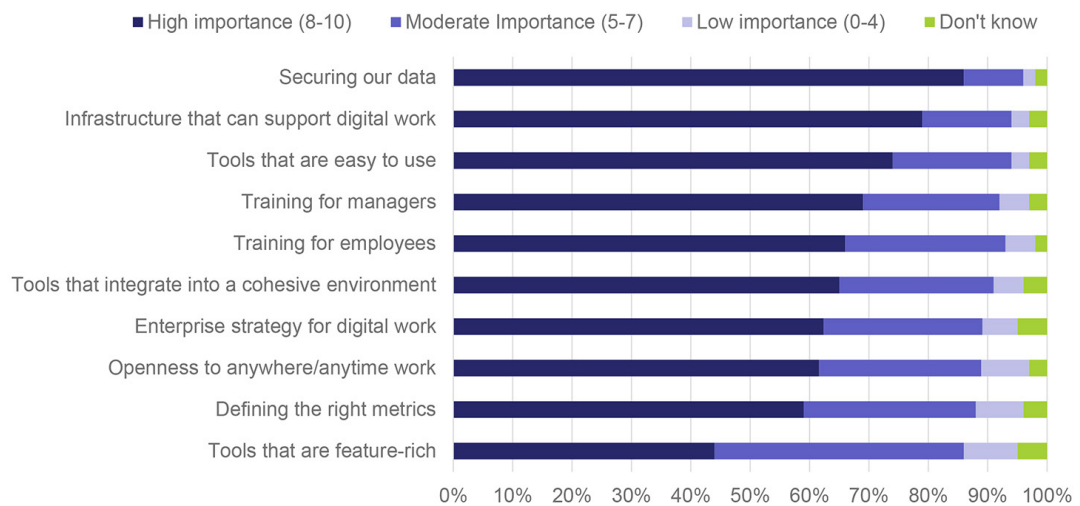


FIGURE 1: WHAT IT TAKES TO GET VALUE FROM THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE

Respondents split on whether it is harder to get good results from digital collaboration; 40% strongly or somewhat agreed and 40% strongly or somewhat disagreed. This is likely based on the organization’s digital maturity.

### 4. Mobility, not just remote work, remains the goal post-pandemic, with 5G to play a key role.

After the pandemic, virtual work will continue to evolve into mobile as people are out more in the world. Customers already embrace mobile and expect a good experience. 5G technology will be an enabler of this transition, paving the way for augmented reality and high-quality, low-latency video to enhance the customer experience. The survey revealed that participants expect this move fairly quickly, with 41% seeing 5G as a reality for their organizations within two years.

## 5. The survey's conclusions.

The main conclusions are:

- The pandemic has normalized remote work and proven the value of digital workplace capabilities.
- The workplace of the future will mix in-person and virtual work based on the nature of the work and the people involved.
- Managing this evolution will take new skills and abilities, and new work norms and tools.
- To maximize the benefits—work quality, business agility, efficiency, and employee well-being—organizations should develop a digital workplace strategy to define the purpose and goals of the program, the approach, and how to measure success.
- Companies should plan for both remote work and untethered, high-quality mobility.

## Discussion – Key Takeaways

Following the discussion of the survey results, Melanie Frank of Capital One and Sampath Sowmyanarayan of Verizon Business shared their perspectives on what the future hybrid workplace model will look like, and the technology, cultural, and leadership requirements for the best results.

### **The blended digital-physical workplace of the future will be driven by business needs and not limited by technology choices.**

The technology that allows the hybrid workplace will not constrain business and strategy choices, which will drive enterprise decisions. As Capital One saw, a preexisting strategy to allow people to work anywhere from any device allowed for a rapid shift to full work from home at the start of the pandemic. COVID has leveled remote work so those working remotely don't feel second class. This technology-agnostic change in the way that organizations work will allow roles and functions to drive the decisions for individuals and teams in the future. For example, certain collaboration-intensive activities and functions will require the flexibility for teams to get together in person, necessitating a physical location.

“If you need to get together somewhere, you have to have a place to get together.”

Sampath Sowmyanarayan, Verizon Business

The physical workspace will also evolve. First, safety requirements will be addressed by limiting the number of people in the space and allowing for contact tracing. Over time, business needs will drive the physical dimensions of the hybrid workplace in an iterative process.

**The technology elements to optimize an effective digital workplace are clear.**

Verizon has found that the technology foundation of an effective digital workplace relies on several key elements including:

- **Scalable network.** A software-defined network, where workloads can move in and out quickly, moves resources to meet demand. Only about 20% of large enterprises currently have software-defined networks.
- **Cloud-ready applications.** Applications spanning collaboration, core operations, and support must be cloud ready and available.
- **Secure mobile connectivity.** Security is increasingly important as work migrates out of the office network to locations ranging from shared apartments, libraries, and even parks.
- **End-to-end monitoring of applications.** Applications were previously accessed in the office, built for that network. Now that critical applications are accessed in ways different than they were designed, managing the application and underlying network is needed to ensure functionality for users.
- **End user support model.** The in-house IT support desk must be reimaged when a substantial portion of workers are working remotely, addressing hardware, software, and troubleshooting.

On top of this technology foundation for a digital workplace the organization can build on softer skills.

**The element of human connection remains a challenge in the digital workplace.**

As the technology meets the needs of remote working, the digital workplace must evolve to recreate necessary human connections. Organizations struggle to replicate the informal interactions in the workplace, the “digital water cooler” or “virtual lunchroom,” as the reliance on intentional engagement swells through scheduled check-ins.

“The folks that I might see in the hallway and learn something new or check in on how their family is doing—I now have to be purposeful about doing that. It’s OK sometimes to have to remind ourselves.”

Melanie Frank, Capital One

Many are finding that they are relying on pre-established relationships and trust during the forced separation of the pandemic. Those in relationship-intensive roles at Capital One, such as sales, report that it is fairly easy to maintain relationships with existing clients, but more difficult to build them with new ones. At Verizon, they have grappled with how to integrate new people into their large workforce. Their experience shows that the social connections and norms are more difficult to solve than the technology. As the hybrid workplace evolves, the hope is that these gaps can be addressed, whether through new technology, new features of existing technology, or creative use of best practices.

**Culture and strategy must work in tandem with technology for a successful hybrid workplace.**

The digital workplace requires an ongoing investment in technology to stay up to date and a culture that supports this investment. A mature enterprise such as Capital One has found that especially for legacy systems this requires time, patience, and continued investment. Capital One's cloud-first approach enabled rapid scaling when the pandemic first hit and serves as a lens for internal and partner applications. Their experience shows that a culture and strategy tightly coupled with technology enabled them to build the workforce who can then reimagine the workplace.

“That constant attention to ensuring that your investment stays modern and secure is the fundamental mentality and strategy that you need to have to be able to pivot quickly and make those changes.”

Melanie Frank, Capital One

The culture and leadership must change to reinforce the technology in the digital workplace as well. Management must adjust to a remote environment, recognizing different measurements, more flexible hours, and more. Verizon has seen an almost 30% increase in the number of one-on-one check-ins with their teams.

“In a remote environment, the style of working in management, you move from an input-based measurement system to an output-based measurement system.”

Sampath Sowmyanarayan, Verizon Business

## Full 5G mobility will enable transformation across many sectors.

The pandemic has not deterred Verizon's 5G plans; indeed, the company anticipates nationwide 5G by the end of 2020. Verizon foresees 5G-enabled Internet of things (IoT) leading to fundamental changes across many sectors, including:

- **Healthcare.** The delivery method, which has not changed in decades, has transformed during COVID.
- **Education.** A more immersive experience is found through augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR).
- **Manufacturing.** Automation and robotics will play a critical role as capacity is rebuilt in the United States.
- **Government.** Information will be at the ready for public safety and first responders to fight floods and fires.



As a managing vice president in PowerUp technology at Capital One, **Melanie Frank** leads associate productivity for the enterprise. Previously, Melanie held leadership positions in card technology where she led customer servicing, fraud and disputes, and payments for the company. Past positions include retail bank tech and digital software engineering, and she also spent eight years in Capital One's quality services organization.

Prior to joining Capital One in 2000, Melanie worked at Honeywell on a government contract at NASA Goddard Spaceflight Center testing software that conducted the scheduling, command, and control for space network communications satellites.

She graduated from the University of Virginia with a BS in Aerospace Engineering, and has a Master's in systems engineering from the University of Maryland College Park.



**Sampath Sowmyanarayan** leads the global enterprise segment for Verizon Business Group. He leads a global team focused on delivering solutions to help enterprise customers—including 99% of the Fortune 500—securely connect to the global economy and intelligently manage business interactions and operations in real time. These include strategic networking, managed services, business communications, security, Internet of Things and professional services solutions.

Previously, Sampath was chief financial officer and head of strategy and transformation at Verizon Media and prior to that, he was the chief product officer for Verizon. Prior to joining Verizon, Sampath was partner and the global practice leader for the telecom practice at the Boston Consulting Group.

Sampath earned his MBA from Boston University and is a Chartered Accountant.



**Abbie Lundberg** is a business technology analyst, author and professional speaker with over 30 years' experience writing about how business and technology leaders transform their organizations. She is a contributing editor to Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, and was part of the founding team at *CIO* magazine, where she served as editor in chief for 13 years. Abbie has contributed to research at the MIT Center for Information Systems Research (CISR) and the MIT Jameel World Education Lab (JWEL). For more information, visit Abbie's website, [lundbergmedia.com](http://lundbergmedia.com).



The way we work has been altered forever. The global pandemic of 2020 has accelerated the pace of workforce transformation and normalized remote work for many organizations, with few businesses likely to return to the way things were prior to COVID-19. Now that we're beyond the first phase of the mass work-from-home experiment, business leaders are reenvisioning the way their organizations work, with people and technology at the center of this transformation.

To better understand how work is being reimagined, Verizon sponsored a global survey of 1,080 business leaders that examines the stages of digital workplace maturity and how executives can help their organizations digitally transform the work experience. From that work comes the webinar, "Recreating Work as a Blend of Virtual and Physical Experiences," which explores what it takes to create an effective digital workplace.

Not surprising, there are different levels of digital maturity, with some businesses more ready for digital work than others. Leaders have advanced digital workplaces with mobility and online collaboration, while Followers employ widespread mobile devices, a growing number of online apps, and some standard collaboration tools. Laggards are the least digitally advanced and use some online apps and services but have few or no standardized tools.

As business leaders help their organizations adapt to new ways of working they should consider the following:

- The workplace of the future will be a hybrid model of in-person and virtual work that requires a strong digital fabric that supports workers wherever they are at any given time.
- To get the most from a hybrid work environment, organizations should develop a digital workplace strategy with well-defined goals and metrics for measuring success.
- Managing and navigating the new digital workplace will require new skills and abilities as well as new work norms and tools.

As challenging as the pandemic has been for many organizations, there's never been a more relevant time for businesses to enable digital workplace transformation. The best organizations are preparing employees to work smarter, not harder, in this new work environment by equipping them with the technology, tools, and training to connect and succeed—whether that's virtually, in the office, or a hybrid mix of both.

The right partner can help you create a powerful digital workplace where your workforce can seamlessly communicate, collaborate, and connect. Verizon has the expertise, tools, and partner portfolio to help you create that digital workplace. To learn more about how Verizon can help your organization expand your digital workplace tools and capabilities visit <https://enterprise.verizon.com/products/business-communications/unified-communications-and-collaboration/>.