

NURTURING THE
future
OF WORK

HOW ORGANIZATIONS EMPOWER TALENT



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SHAPING THE NEW POSSIBLE



Jared Spataro leads Microsoft's Modern Work & Business Applications team. On a day-to-day basis, he leads the delivery of new products and features across Microsoft 365. His wider remit is driving research to predict and shape the future of work across industries, to enable people and organizations to thrive in the new era of work.

The Capgemini Research Institute spoke to Jared about new working trends: the role of physical workplaces, which tools and technologies we will need to get hybrid right, and ways to collaborate effectively in a hybrid environment.

THE PRODUCTIVITY PARANOIA

In Microsoft's latest Work Trend Index, 87 percent of employees report being highly productive at work, but only 12 percent of leaders agree. What do you think is the root cause of this "productivity paranoia" on the part of managers?

— The disconnect between leaders and employees isn't surprising. But part of the problem may be that managers don't understand adequately how to measure employee output. Many employees even feel that employers should pay them for impact or outcomes, rather than traditional productivity metrics such as number of hours worked. It's both a question of trust on the managers' part and of their understanding what exactly it takes to get the work done effectively.

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"Managers don't understand adequately how to measure employee output. Many employees even feel that employers should pay them for impact or outcomes, rather than traditional productivity metrics such as number of hours worked."

That said, there is plenty of pressure on managers too, and I empathize with both sides. Expectations for managers and leaders haven't abated or been dampened in the modern world of work.

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Which managerial practices can help build trust and motivation among employees in a hybrid setup?

— Many managers are still in shock at the realization that the old work environment has gone for good. When people returned to the office on specific days, leaders expected that those days, at least, would look like 2019, but that has been far from the case.

Now, work patterns and practices must balance the requirements for team unity and collaboration with the requirements of the individual team member, considering business necessities and a desire for greater flexibility. The more effective teams now work around the concept of “core hours,” during which employees are expected to be available and, on some days, present in the office. Outside of these hours, individuals can work more flexibly and integrate their work and home lives.

New tools, technologies, and practices are emerging all the time to help people navigate the new normal, but it still takes some adjustment on the part of both leadership and workforce.



Executive Conversations

Microsoft research shows that the number of meetings per week has increased by 153 percent, and double bookings have increased by 46 percent per person. How to avoid employee burnout in this context?

— It isn't just bosses who have productivity paranoia; employees are affected too. They want to be seen to be productive, and this can lead to “productivity theater”: attending meetings in order to be seen, making sure they chip in from time to time, but really their attention is on something outside the meeting.

Average meeting attendance has grown but so has the incidence of multitasking in meetings. People are afraid to be seen not participating, and there's no question that

this is leading to burnout. There's been a lot of talk about “well-being” since the pandemic began, but hybrid working has led to blurred work-life/home-life boundaries and we found that after-hours and weekend work are up 28 percent and 14 percent, respectively.

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How is the role of office spaces evolving?

— Many companies are reducing office space in response to falling occupancy rates. Employees used to be in the office from 9am to 5pm; while this could now be seen as too inflexible, it also generated a sense of togetherness that is difficult to recreate in a hybrid environment.

Working together in the office allows people to connect more deeply and for a mentoring dynamic to develop. Moreover, group problem-solving builds a sense of teamwork, learning to collaborate, and getting to know the work styles and strengths of colleagues. We are very aware of the importance of maintaining this collaborative dynamic.



**87 PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES
REPORT BEING HIGHLY
PRODUCTIVE AT WORK,
BUT ONLY 12 PERCENT OF
LEADERS AGREE.**

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OVER WORK

Could you elaborate on the new work metric – the “worth it” equation – i.e., what people want from work and what they are willing to give in return? Is it similar to the concept of quiet quitting?

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People's perceptions of the role of work in their lives have changed.”

— Yes, they're related. People's perceptions of the role of work in their lives have changed. Fifty-three percent of employees are more likely

to prioritize health and well-being over work than before the pandemic. And 47 percent are more likely to put family and personal life over work than before. This isn't surprising; following a global health crisis, it's natural to reflect on what's really important.

When office-based workers were suddenly required to work from home, people started to experiment with different work environments that would allow them more family time, and this led them to question the value of some work-related obligations.

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70% AND 67%

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How is Microsoft mitigating the impact of the “Great Reshuffle”?

— We found that 41 percent of the global workforce have considered leaving their current employer. Learning and developmental support are regarded as more important now and can make a job offer much more attractive.

In a volatile economic environment, learning and reskilling can help employees to continue to feel valuable and relevant to their organizations, as well as to the job market in general. Definitely, organizations should be helping employees learn and grow as a part of their jobs. Yet 56 percent of employees report a lack of growth opportunities; many organizations have yet to discover what their employees really want in this respect.

How would you characterize the Generation Z attitude to work?

— The top five elements Gen Z expect from their employers are: a positive culture, mental health/well-being support, a sense of purpose, positive feedback/recognition, and a manager who will help advance their career. Many Gen Z also have side hustles. Our spring research showed that 70 percent of Gen Z and 67 percent of Millennials are looking for additional income through a side project or business, versus 59 percent overall.

We are yet to explore fully the different attitudes that Gen Z have towards work, but it's clear that they have a number of serious concerns related to the work environment.

ENRICHING WORK THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Which new technologies do you see as being key to the hybrid environment?

— Automation and AI are the next big things, freeing people from mundane, repetitive tasks to engage with more interesting, strategic areas. How people get work done through these technologies will be at the heart of the future of work.

If approached correctly, the metaverse could also offer a new dimension in collaborative work environments. It is a shared digital space that brings people and places together. We try to create deeper connections between humans through the metaverse, giving a feeling of immersion and shared context.



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