

Future Proofing for a World of Uncertainty

2020 is shaping up to be a year to remember...or potentially forget depending on how you look at it. Either way, 2021 is right around the corner and business leaders across the globe are entering a critical planning period where navigating future uncertainty will be essential for ensuring both short-term and long-term success.

While every planning period should take into account future unknowns, questions about how our teams will work and where they will work will dominate the conversation as we think about constructing a successful plan for 2021. We have identified three focal points where organizations must overinvest time and resources to ensure that teams stay engaged and feel empowered to succeed amidst this unprecedented uncertainty: Resilient innovation, sticky engagement and an adaptable workplace.

Resilient Innovation

If 2020 taught us anything, it is that nearly all organizations have the ability to adapt — quickly. Innovation is often a necessity brought forth by shifting market dynamics, but the pandemic has accelerated transformation efforts around how we work on a global scale. This type of innovation is fundamentally different than what we've experienced in the past and more difficult to manufacture organically. Ultimately, this mighty work-from-home experiment has proven that remote collaboration can yield productivity

gains. In fact, the [BlueJeans 2020 Remote Work Survey](#) identified that nearly 75% of remote workers felt equally or more productive while working from home. Great...so what do we need to do differently next year?

While we may have changed the way our internal teams collaborate and meet remotely, the same cannot be said for how we engage with external stakeholders, such as existing customers or prospective partners. The reality is that these are fragile relationships and they must be tended to as such.



Whereas in the pre-pandemic period, you may have invited prospects, customers, industry analysts, etc. to on-site meetings for briefings and presentations to demonstrate your products and services, today's workplace environment requires you to reimagine how you can deliver a similar experience virtually...and at scale. Joining a video conference call and walking meeting participants through a slide deck will quickly become insufficient in 2021. It is imperative that we enable our teams to unlock the power of the tools at their disposal to deliver more compelling and interactive experiences that leave lasting impressions. Now that most people have adopted a video-first mentality, we need to start thinking about how that medium can radically help us deliver our message.

Additionally, in the "new normal," where video communication has become central to the human experience, every organization must evaluate how it can do a better job of bringing this component into their products and services. Most video conferencing vendors offer SDKs and APIs to integrate rich video experiences into nearly any product, and this type of innovation will be critical going forward both from a customer support standpoint, as well as a way to forge loyalty and build community for advocates. Beyond 2021, it is clear that video will be pervasive — the question is how far your organization wants to take this principle over the next 12 months to boost your differentiation.



Sticky Engagement

With uncertainty looming, little to nothing is more destructive to an organization than the deterioration of culture and employee engagement. While employees are now able to join a meeting, from wherever, easier than ever, it does not necessarily equate to the same emotional experience as meeting together in person.

[Slack found](#) that while remote workers overwhelmingly love the work-life benefits of working from home, they are suffering from a dangerous lack of "sense of belonging." When looking forward to 2021, it's imperative that leaders put the employee experience at the forefront of their planning and ensure they develop a framework to keep their teams aligned and focused on the task at hand.

Largely remote teams have a tendency to become siloed. While functional teams stay connected through their day-to-day responsibilities, visibility into cross-functional progress can quickly dissolve. Leadership must make a concerted effort to connect the dots for the organization through a systematic cadence of varying communication methods that provide transparency into corporate objectives, while cementing alignment and establishing confidence in the operating model. The key to effective communication is ensuring that leaders are both visible and open to dialogue and feedback. We see leading companies adopting a fluid approach to company-wide and departmental meetings that provide an open forum to share news and actively respond to inquiries from the greater organization. To create confidence in your 2021 plan, we encourage all leaders, C-suite or otherwise, to hold interactive town halls, as this can help to reinforce consistent message delivery, while keeping a finger on the pulse of morale.

While promoting both a top-down and bottoms-up approach to corporate communication, it's also necessary for leaders to enable a work culture that promotes the right types of productivity. With so many people working remotely, meetings have become the de facto way for employees to stay in touch with their managers and peers. That being said, meeting overload is real and it's impacting employee engagement levels.

In a recent [Microsoft survey](#), remote workers acknowledged that they have experienced a 55% increase in number of meetings and calls per week. This over-scheduling is having some serious negative consequences, with 30% of survey respondents feeling burnout from work. Leaders must pursue a different strategy where the 'fear of missing' out on a meeting is eliminated and workers are encouraged to decline any meeting where they are not a critical participant. By trimming out unnecessary meetings, employees can become more engaged in the parts of their job they love most, and the organization will reap the benefit of having a more enthusiastic workforce — something that should be a strategic priority in 2021.



Adaptable Workplace

While the pandemic has taken away some of our most cherished social practices, the reality is that working from home has presented workers with some very valuable experiences. It should come as no surprise that employees actually don't like commuting that much or having to make difficult tradeoffs between family time and work. Therefore, whenever the next phase of the pandemic arrives, many employees will want to continue working from home — at least partially. This next stage is what we are loosely calling the Hybrid Workforce, and we expect this sometimes on-site and sometimes at-home reality to become the status quo going forward. As we march toward this future state, it's important that leaders take into account best practices for improving the work-from-home experience, while also ensuring the office is a safe place to visit.

In the blink of an eye, employees were asked to shelter in place and establish home offices where they could effectively perform their job, participate in video conferences, and presumably replicate an environment that approximated a workplace setting. All of these expectations in and of themselves have resulted in tremendous innovation throughout 2020. Whether vendors raced to deliver virtual backgrounds or enhance their background noise cancellation technology, it's fair to say that the pace of feature delivery has been accelerated to meet the needs of the newly remote workforce. That said, there is still room for growth in making the at-home experience more productive. We are seeing an entirely new category of purpose-built video devices being provided to at-home workers to free up the desktop and deliver a higher quality video experience. These devices have the power to provide a digital canvas for whiteboarding, annotation, and vast array of collaborative features that

will push the at-home experience forward. Organizations should not assume that just because employees have been working from home for months that they have the tooling they need going forward.

Similarly, as the Hybrid Workforce begins to think about returning to the office, leaders should not assume that their existing physical and technological infrastructure will support the safety requirements necessary for this next stage of the pandemic. Conference room technology is a great example of an area where recent investments in video teleconferencing equipment will bear fruit. While in-person meetings are desirable in some instances, most of today's technology requires touch-based interactions — something that is less desirable in the current environment. Facilities teams need to evaluate how they can adapt their current

setups to ensure safe workspaces that will make employees feel comfortable in their old and new office settings.

Unfortunately, there is no crystal ball that can help us accurately peer through the future uncertainty of 2021. That being said, we do know that video experiences have been instrumental in maintaining productivity throughout 2020 and will be equally important for sustaining growth going forward. Business leaders must build a playbook for developing resilient innovation that incorporates video into their core workflows. Only in doing so will you be able to approach employees with sticky engagement practices to drive retention and productivity, and adopt an adaptable workplace view that ensures workers have the tools they need, whether at-home or in-the-office. Best of luck in the new year!

