Condeco Conversations

Enhancing experience and collaboration.

Routes to revival in returning to the office.

CONDECO

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Contents.

Introduction.

After 18 months of remote work and successive lockdowns during the COVID-19 crisis, the future looks flexible – a mix of working in the office, from home and in a variety of 'third' spaces is on the near horizon. But what does this mean for the Corporate Real Estate (CRE) leaders who are looking to forge new pathways out of the pandemic by understanding the new purpose of the office, and by tailoring space and experiences to the changing needs of employees? What challenges do they face, and how can digital solutions and technology help to address them?

As companies shape up for a new era of work, Condeco has teamed up with WORKTECH Academy on a rolling research program, Condeco Conversations, to share ideas and support new developments. The research involves engaging with CRE leaders from global organizations and other experts in the field through a series of workshops, webinars, interviews and reviews of academic research and publicly available literature. The purpose of the research is to understand the new landscape of work, explore its cultural, technological and spatial characteristics, and identify opportunities. Our main question is a simple one: what are the strategic routes to revival for organizations returning to the workplace?

In our first Condeco Conversations ebook, 'Supporting Learning and Innovation', we focused on the need to rebuild formal training, mentoring, brainstorming and ideation activities in the office – this is what we term higher-value interpersonal work and it inevitably suffered during the pandemic. In this second report in the series, we look at more informal face-to-face activities such as unplanned collaboration, serendipitous social encounters and the value of workplace experience – this is what we term higher-value social experience.

This paper explores why workplace experience and continuous collaboration are so important to business, and highlights shifts that have occurred since the pandemic on the journey to a more fleixble working model. Companies are now having to rethink how they curate their office space to create a seamless experience, address the social needs of all employees, and bridge the gap between physical and remote employees. In this context, technology will play a vital role in any corporate strategy to create sustainable and equitable social experiences for all employees, irrespective of physical location.

Essence of experience.

Every aspect of the organization contributes to workplace experience. The design of space has an experiential dimension, influencing our sense of belonging and our ability to collaborate and get work done.

Technology gives us the tools to connect, and HR policies help to build culture and shape our relationship with the employer – from recruitment and on-boarding to career training and development.

The creation of a great workplace experience requires cross-functional collaboration between the HR, real estate and IT teams – people, place and technology should be viewed holistically. But, for a long time, that way of thinking proved difficult for many organizations to achieve. Departments stayed in their silos, nobody wanted to pick up and run with the ball marked 'experience'. It was not really a priority for CRE professionals, until a body of evidence emerged that a great experience can positively influence wellbeing and productivity.

Senior leaders became attracted to the over-arching idea of workplace experience and it quickly gained momentum until the pandemic stopped it in its tracks. Now, as employees prepare to return to the office, experience has returned to the top of the business agenda. A recent survey conducted by isolved, a human capital management platform, found that of the 500 HR leaders interviewed, 92 percent confirmed employee experience as a top priority for 2021[1]. The pandemic has raised the stakes in workplace experience as companies seek a new approach as part of enticing people back to the office.

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Why is experience important?

Historically, the baseline experience in offices was about combining clarity with optimization. The principle was the make processes and facilities easy and clear to understand and use, while optimizing resources. This served organizational efficiency well for a long time. However, workplace strategists started to recognize that experiences should sit along a spectrum and have levels of intrigue, delight and curiosity– not just clarity, which can be dull and routine. They also recognized that experience needed to become more human-centric and empathic – simply optimizing resources is off-putting for employees who feel like cogs in a machine.

According to experience masterplanner Adam Scott of Freestate design studio, part of Hassell, people want live, stimulating, engaging and meaningful experiences because these elements create a sense of belonging[2]. The physical workspace provides a stage for these experiences, influencing how we move, behave and interact. With the absence of the physical office during the pandemic, and the likelihood that any return to the workplace will part of a flexible approach, how can corporate real estate leaders build a workplace experience that transcends physical space?
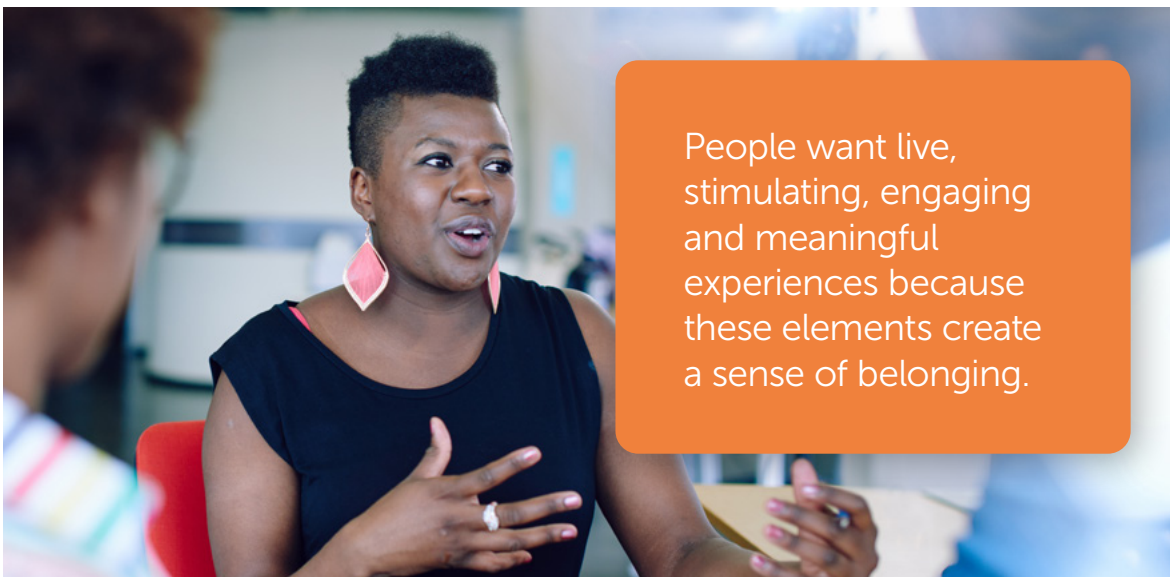
People want live, stimulating, engaging and meaningful experiences because these elements create a sense of belonging.

The physical workspace provides a stage for these experiences, influencing how we move, behave and interact.

With the absence of the physical office during the pandemic, how can corporate real estate leaders build a workplace experience that transcends physical space?

What's happened since the pandemic?

Since the pandemic hit, access to the office has been limited. Gartner estimates that 88 percent of organizations have encouraged or mandated employees to work from home due to COVID-19[3]. This means that employees have been cut off from the workplace experience – an element of work that touches every aspect of how the employee engages with an organization. This shift in work pattern has allowed people to realign their expectations and priorities when it comes to what they want from their work environment.

Software company Density posed the question, 'how do you compel employees to come to the office, even when they don't have to?' to a series of workplace managers over the past year. Most interviewees concluded that there are two factors that create an environment employees want to be a part of – incredible experiences and employee choice[4]. An absence from the office has shifted the importance of curated workplace experiences to the top of employees' priorities as they crave social connection and interaction with their colleagues.

A recent survey by Gartner supports the idea that employees expect superior workplace experiences. It found that of 5,000 employees, 56 percent agree with the statement 'I expect to have the same quality experience at work as I do as a customer'[5]. This calls for a different and more dynamic approach to workplace experience as CRE leaders aim to create a workplace that employees gravitate to out of choice.

Great workplace experience has traditionally been rooted in the assumption that the office headquarters (HQ) is critical, but flexible models now challenge that way of thinking. Flexible workspace is set to take its cue from retail and hospitality – experience will happen everywhere and be carefully choreographed across every touchpoint.

According to the CRE leaders surveyed for this report, the conversation around experience has already moved on substantially since the onset of the pandemic. There is an agreement that workplace strategy needs to be radically reimagined as we move to a more holistic interpretation of experience. We no longer have to justify why we need to curate great experience – it has become inherently clear. Employees do not miss the office or the buildings they work in, they miss the experiences they had within them.

Leading academics in the field agree. According to Rachel Cooper, professor of design management and policy at Lancaster University, people attend the office for reasons beyond just working – they go to build a social network and meet people with similar interests. Cooper believes that informal, unstructured conversations with like-minded colleagues in social settings – without the time pressures of a scheduled meeting – are a vital part of workplace experience[6]. Michael Przytula, managing director of intelligent and digital workplaces at Accenture, told us this was especially true of early-career workers: 'Young people want to establish a social network. Older people already have a network'[7].

> **"**
>
> **Socializing is an important dimension of work. It's why people go to work. We're likely to see more space given over to collaboration zones and cafés...**
>
> Professor Rachel Cooper, Lancaster University

How do you compel employees to come to the office, even when they don't have to?
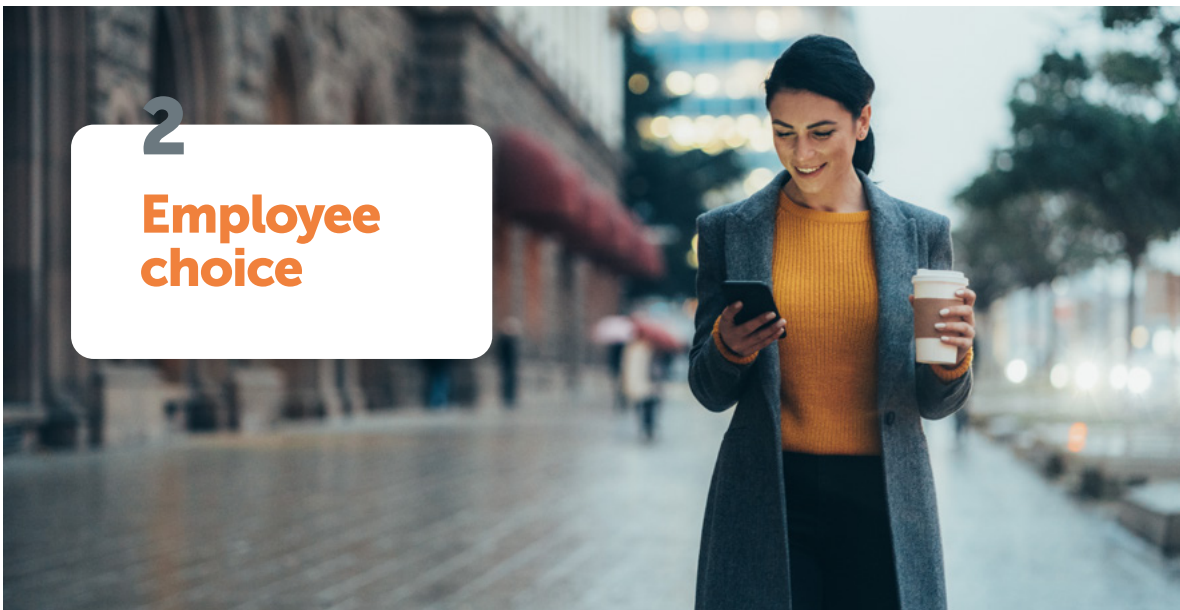
1

Incredible experiences

2

Employee choice

What are the current challenges?

The next hurdle for CRE leaders in curating the best possible workplace experience is navigating between the physical and digital realm. As more and more organizations adopt flexible working, there is a greater need to create a rich and well-thought-out program of experience which enables individual autonomy and choice but also inspires collaboration and serendipitous interactions.

The program of experience needs to start with purpose, then bring in identity and values, and then bring in the enablers. In this equation, space is an enabler. In the next era of work, we can no longer make the assumption that everyone will be in the office at the same time, which means that organizations need to make a conscious effort to bring the right people together at the right time. Experience now needs to transcend the office and be equal across all work channels whether an individual is at home, in the office, or working in a third space. The challenge is to shift the mindset from experience as a place, to experience as a moment in time.

> "
>
> **There is now a wider ecosystem of work environments... the journey of employee experience is far more variegated than it ever was.**
>
> "
>
> Adam Scott, Freestate

The curation of experience across different channels of work presents its own set of challenges. At the moment, CRE leaders are curating functional experiences for employees which address the basic needs such as safety, stability and security. The remote workplace experience focuses on making sure that everyone has the right tools to do their work properly, including ergonomic and digital equipment. However, those needs are evolving and as CRE leaders forecast further into the future, the curation of experience will need to be more sophisticated and dynamic to respond to employee desires wherever they are working.

As CRE leaders plan their program of employee experience, the workplace will present itself as a critical – but not the only – enabler of bringing people together. The office will only be a success if leadership understands why people want to come back and what their needs are. Once the 'why' is understood, then CRE teams can work on curating the right experience. As noted by Dr Steve Hunt, who leads technology and work at software company SAP, 'Employee experience management tells us the "why" behind the perceptions employees have about the moments that matter to them and allows employers to get inside the heads of employees, turn on the sound, and understand what is working and not working for them'[8].

The return to the office presents an opportunity for companies to rethink the employee experience in ways that respect individual differences while also adapting to rapidly changing circumstances. If companies believe that higher-value social interaction is essential to business productivity, then their leaders should now address employee experience in a more targeted, dynamic and inclusive way by consulting the wealth of workplace data that now exists. From listening techniques to behavioral science, advanced analytics, and two-way communication channels, leaders can zone in on specific employee needs and offer more tailored workplace experiences which promote collaboration and feelings of well-being and cohesion across the workforce[9].

Who's doing it best?

While creating compelling employee experiences in the absence of the office has been a challenge, there are a few organizations who have pioneered new approaches.

The multinational beauty brand L'Oréal implemented a number of initiatives to support its employees and create a more compelling experience for its workers. Of its 88,000 employees, 55,000 have been working remotely since the beginning of the pandemic[10]. L'Oréal recognized the gaps in remote working, particularly when it comes to learning and mentoring, and developed a branded learning initiative called 'Learning Never Stops' which encourages and promotes all types of learning from webinars to online classes. The topics created address the distinct needs of L'Oréal employees and include content on successful strategies for remote working, team management and employee well-being.

At the same time, L'Oréal is leveraging artificial intelligence for recruiting in-demand workers. Before the pandemic, L'Oréal was receiving more than one million applications for new positions and the goal of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) was to speed up the process while improving the candidate experience. While the application of AI in the recruiting process does not replace human judgement, the results so far have been notable: the Net Promoter Score for candidate experience has gone from 5 percent to 79 percent with a 95 percent satisfaction rate among candidates.

> L'Oréal recognized the gaps in remote working, particularly when it comes to learning and mentoring, and developed a branded learning initiative called 'Learning Never Stops' which encourages and promotes all types of learning from webinars to online classes.

Global bank ING is another example of how organizations have prioritized employee experience during the pandemic. In recognizing that more of its employees wanted to be treated like the bank's customers, ING Bank has aligned its employee experience with its investment in customer experience. With this in mind, the head of employee experience at ING, Sander de Bruin, set out to understand the key experiences that affect employee engagement, collect data to measure this and redesign the touchpoints and key moments that are broken for employees[11].

The bank used design thinking and agile work principles to reframe and shape the future of banking. An inter-disciplinary team made up of designers, human resources (HR), real estate, facility, corporate communications and Information Technology (IT) worked together to create an improved on-boarding experience for new hires and their managers. The result has been to create a more personalized, intuitive and seamless experience. Employee satisfaction has improved by 20 percent, while manager satisfaction has increased by 30 percent. ING Bank has created a continuous listening program to identify moments of truth and typical pain points that can be fixed to improve the overall employee experience.

ING bank used design thinking and agile work principles to reframe and shape the future of banking.

An inter-disciplinary team worked together to create an **improved on-boarding experience for new hires and their managers.**

The result has been to create a more personalized, intuitive and seamless experience.

Employee satisfaction has improved by **20%.**

Manager satisfaction has increased by **30%.**

The chemistry of collaboration.

While formal meetings and workshops are an enduring aspect of the workplace, the more informal social connections and chance encounters that occur between colleagues and peers are equally significant in making the organization more effective.

Higher value social interactions are not only critical for business performance, but also for building social capital and gaining a sense of belonging at work. However, this more informal chemistry of collaboration is fluid, unstable and, not surprisingly, difficult to manage. Professor Rachel Cooper of Lancaster University says that if people go to the office and find nobody to talk to because everyone else occupied on a Zoom call, they will feel it's not worth going in.

According to a McKinsey Global Institute study, knowledge workers spend an average of 14 percent of their work week communicating and collaborating with colleagues[12]. The study found that non-verbal cues have a greater impact on creating a positive impression – these cues a more easily picked up through in-person interaction as opposed to over a digital medium.

While most organizations migrated smoothly to digital platforms to maintain a stable if somewhat ponderous level of formal collaboration during the pandemic, replicating the serendipitous chance encounters proved to be challenging within a remote workforce. As organizations return to a more flexible model of work, implementing the right strategy to ensure the right people are together at the right time will be critical to future business success.

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14%

of their work week communicating and collaborating with colleagues.

Non-verbal cues have a greater impact on creating a positive impression.

Why is collaboration important?

Research by the Institute for Corporate Productivity and Massachusetts-based entrepreneurship school Babson College found that companies that promote collaborative working are five times more likely to be high performing[13]. This is supported by a Harvard Business Review analysis of a decade's worth of data on collaboration and financial performance across dozens of organizations which found that collaboration not only has a huge impact on whether employees and companies thrive, but also the correlation is even greater during a crisis[14].

Research has also been done into the impact of serendipitous encounters. A study by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health found that experiences of serendipity are commonplace in expert work. Over half of the respondents to the study's survey stated that they felt that they frequently stumbled upon useful information, ideas or other unexpected things in their work[15]. While collaboration across digital channels has boomed during the course of the pandemic, face to face interactions and chance encounters have suffered to the detriment of the business and of the social needs of employees.

Higher value social interaction can lead to improved problem-solving, productivity and creativity, according to Anita Williams Woolley, an associate professor of organizational behavior and theory at Carnegie Mellon's Tepper School of Business[16]. She states that spontaneous run-ins help dictate 'the cadence at which you take breaks, so if you're working in an office environment, you need to get up and walk around to do things more than when you are at home.'

According to Professor Kerstin Sailer of the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, the all-important 'opportunity network' of the workplace has been diminished by the pandemic and needs to attention[17]. 'Weak ties' with reception employees, fellow commuters and so on are critical to a flourishing workplace even if they don't contribute directly to an individual's workflow. Sailer advocates rethinking office design with different spatial layouts to create more opportunities to 'celebrate the unplanned'. Speaking at a WORKTECH conference, she explained that a 'linear' configuration of desks provides less opportunity for chance encounters than a 'tree', 'loop' or 'grid' layout.

> **It's important to see office space as an "opportunity structure". If designed well, it can support identity, trust, community and belonging…**
>
> Kestin Sailer, professor of the sociology of architecture, UCL

What's happened since the pandemic?

Research over the past year has unequivocally found that there is a strong desire to return to the office for social reasons. The pandemic has forced organizations to ask their employees what they need from their offices and why they want to be there. In the US, real estate firm JLL conducted a workplace experience survey and found that the top three activities employees miss doing most in the office are: collaborating informally with other people, socializing with colleagues, and supporting the work of others[18]. This research is supported by a global survey conducted by real estate company CBRE which found that the primary reasons for wanting to return to the office post COVID-19 are for team connections and community engagement, to collaborate face to face, and for access to tools, technologies and space that facilitates their work[19].

Global design firm Gensler further backed up this research with its US Work From Home survey which found that what employees miss the most when kept away from the office is interacting with other people[20]. When asked to rank the most important factors for wanting to come into the office, meetings with colleagues, socializing with people, and impromptu face-to-face interaction were the top three answers.

Top 3 activities employees miss doing most in the office are

1. Collaborating informally with other people

2. Socializing with colleagues

3. Supporting the work of others

This recognition of the social purpose of the office has sparked new challenges for workplace designers. Academics Colenberg and Keyson conducted research in 2021 on the role of the post-pandemic office in a bid to define future office design projects. The duo learned through data collected from November 2020 to February 2021 via an online survey of Dutch employees that the main reason to want to work at the office has shifted from meeting expectations to the need for informal social interaction[21].

On the other hand, many still need the office to carry out concentration tasks. Although the home workplace feels more comfortable, ultimately it is not rated better than the office workplace. Colenberg and Keyson found that COVID-19 has increased the need for in-person interaction at the office without decreasing the need for silence to get work done. Although the home workplace in general is rated as more comfortable in their research, the fact that it ultimately is not rated better than the office workplace may confirm the office's importance in supporting in-person interaction.

Primary reasons for wanting to return to the office post COVID-19 are

For team connections and community engagement

To collaborate face to face

For access to tools, technologies and space

What are the current challenges?

The pandemic has proved to us that the office is not the only portal to conduct effective collaboration. However, research conducted by software company Density found that 87 percent of employees say the office still plays a critical role in collaborating and relationship building. This means that there are a host of new challenges and considerations for CRE leaders in plotting their strategies to return to the office.

The first hurdle for CRE leaders to overcome in a more flexible work model is the need to replicate or curate those 'watercooler' moments for face-to-face interaction. Research from Harvard Business Review found that face-to-face requests are 34 times more effective than emailed ones[22]. In a second study it was revealed that non-verbal cues conveyed during a face-to-face interaction made all the difference in how people viewed the legitimacy of their requests. The challenge for CRE leaders is to develop environments which spark trust and integrity among peers to conduct effective collaboration.

According to research by George Washington University and Cushman & Wakefield[23] the chance of encountering a specific colleague in the workplace is around 88 percent when there are no days of remote working, but this number sharply falls to 12 per cent when the number of days working remotely rises to just three days.

This research underscores the point that, without active management, remote work can decimate face-to-face interactions. It means that employees cannot work remotely on a random basis and have expectations of seeing critical team members very often. Instead, leadership will need to plan for in-person interaction and managers may have to actively dictate in-office team meetings. This can come in many forms, from using software

face-to-face requests are

34

times more effective than emailed ones.

to manage and reserve office space, to team managers mandating in-office attendance on certain days of the week or month, or corporate executives having greater socialization events, retreats and conference-like 'all hands' sessions.

Despite the clear benefits of face-to-face interaction, the migration to digital communication has helped some types of collaboration. According to our survey of CRE leaders, digital tools can enable colleagues to meet on a less hierarchical basis - the window into home offices of company leaders creates a more authentic and less formal environment for collaboration which can be beneficial for sharing ideas. The challenge for CRE leaders now is to marry the benefits of face-to-face interaction with new digital methods of collaboration in a way that consistently benefits the company and those who work for it.

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The challenge is to map our social needs against our real estate needs... If you're doing hybrid working you need to think about the full journey across all workplace channels.

Beverley Hampshire, EMEIA Real estate Leader, EY

Who's doing it best?

For the past 18 months, organizations have strategically been collecting data from employees on what they want from a post-pandemic workplace. This data is helping to shape design and real estate decisions for the future workplace – from managing when employees come to the office to what the office might look like.

Large organizations such as Lloyds plan to increase the amount of allocated collaboration space in the office and set up apps to manage and book them. The bank will also look at using surplus space in branches so that workers can go to local meeting rooms, collaboration zones and hot-desking facilities as well as travelling to central headquarters.

Other companies such as cloud software companies WeTransfer and Dropbox are following suit by increasing the amount of dedicated collaboration space. WeTransfer has removed half of the desks in its offices and in their place it has built meeting spaces, workshop rooms and recording studios. Dropbox has opted to become a 'remote-first' company and mandated that employees should only use the office for collaboration, not solo work. Whereas Swedish audio streaming company Spotify has landed on a more holistic approach to office design where it will create more collaboration areas as well as more focus areas where distraction-free work can be conducted.

> Dropbox has opted to become a 'remote-first' company and mandated that employees should only use the office for collaboration, not solo work.

> Spotify has landed on a more holistic approach to office design where it will create more collaboration areas as well as more focus areas where distraction-free work can be conducted.

While many large organizations have chosen to tackle the issue of higher value social interaction with more collaboration spaces, some are trying to strategically manage communication flow and serendipitous encounters digitally. Belgium-based Vlerick Business School planned 'informal interaction time' during formal online employees meetings. After meetings, the School's 200 employees were randomly assigned to breakout rooms of up to five people for informal chats[24]. Institutionalizing informal interactions in this way helped employees to create new connections across functional and hierarchical boundaries and discuss random topics with colleagues with whom they would otherwise not interact. The university is one of many institutions that value the importance of random encounters and they have worked within the digital limitations to continue this type of collaboration throughout the pandemic.

Technology.

The key role technology is playing in enabling higher social itneraction.

While the research during the course of the pandemic clearly demonstrates that digital replication of informal collaborations and serendipitous social exchanges has been difficult to achieve, technology nevertheless has a key to role to play in enabling higher-value social interaction.

A survey of spending intentions from 2020 to 2021 by research firm Nemertes found that 52 percent of company respondents planned to increase budgets for their technology spending, including video applications and collaboration apps[25]. Effective technology can help bridge the gaps between the physical workplace and the detrimental impact its absence has had on social interaction. Below we look at the three key areas where technology can help most.

1

Digital equality

2

App-centric working

3

Room booking and scheduling
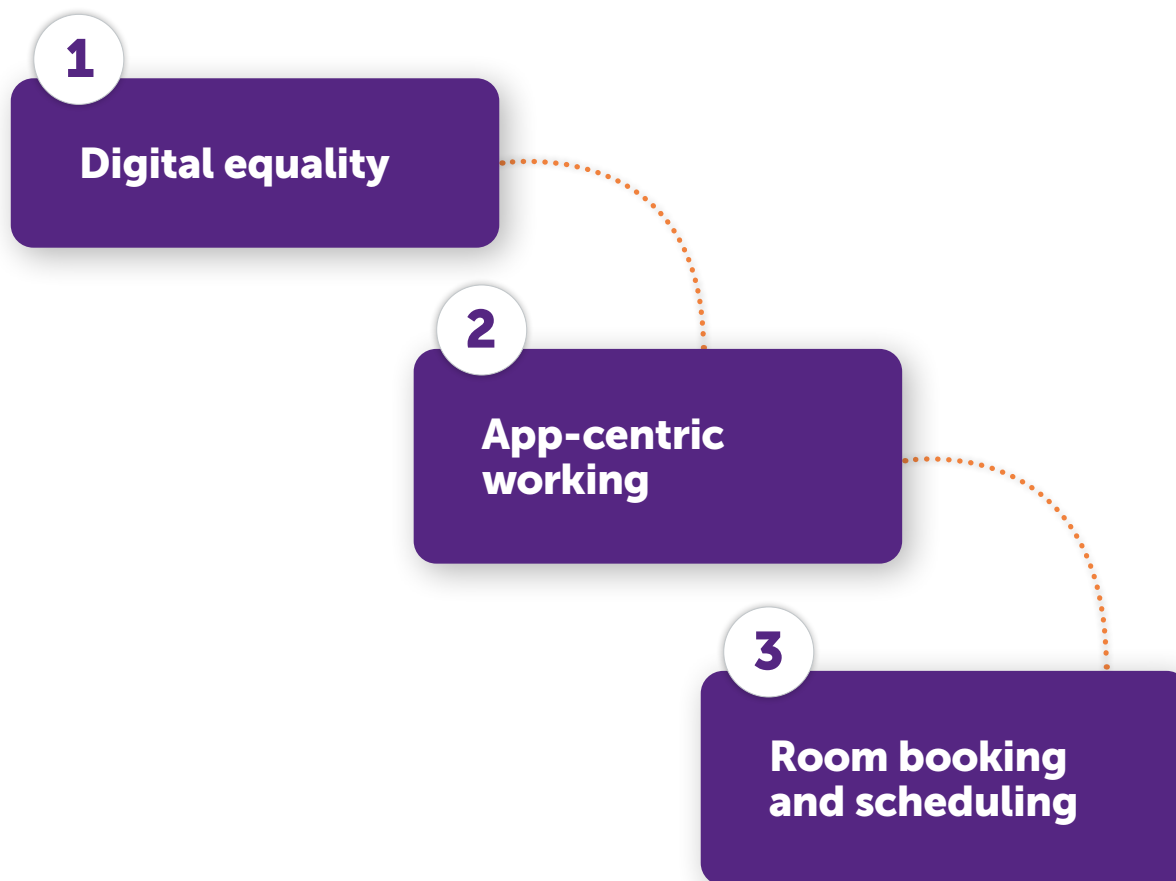
① Digital equality.

One of the biggest challenges for CRE leaders is bridging the gap between the digital and physical experience. There has always been a bias towards people physically present in the office in terms of their experience and their ability to interact and collaborate. Now, organizations are thinking about how to make a seamless connection between those who are remote and those who are physically in the office.

Many organizations have coped well with collaboration between all-virtual teams during the pandemic. Tools such as digital whiteboards have allowed people to collaborate in real time virtually, but the experience becomes fractured when some colleagues are together and others are remote. Solutions such as Google Campfire aim to bring the virtual participants into the heart of the physical conversation through large virtual screens for each individual remote participant. Other technologies such as targeted audio pick-up and video zooming place the focus on the induvial speaker so virtual participants can see and hear the person talking clearly.

Some organizations are focusing on replicating chance encounters remotely. These companies acknowledge the barriers in getting the right people physically together in the office and recognize that the future of work will be much more flexible and dependent on digital tools to create consistent workplace experiences across all work channels. Pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca has built an online community that has allowed scientists across the globe to see into each other's worlds for the first time, and hit upon new research and drug production ideas through open discussion on the platform.

Another way to simulate chance conversations when working remotely is to facilitate random coffee meetings between individuals who would not bump into each other in their normal day-to-day work. The idea is to connect people randomly via short scheduled video meetings, chat about their challenges and different points of view and just maybe hit upon new and interesting ideas. Software such as Microsoft's Icebreaker app can facilitate this, but it can also be manually coordinated by leadership.

Another way to simulate chance conversations when working remotely is to facilitate random coffee meetings between individuals who would not bump into each other in their normal day-to-day work.

2 App-centric working.

Employee behavior and expectation has evolved dramatically over the past decade. It is now following the path we have seen with consumer behavior. Consumers have become so dependent on mobile devices to the point where they have become the dashboard of our lives. This is now transferring over to the employee experience.

According to the New York Times, people spend an estimated four hours a day on their phones[26]. Mobile apps have become a critical part of our everyday lives. The global workplace experience apps market alone is estimated at US $406 million in 2020. This is predicted to rise to US $988 million by 2025, according to a report by smart building experts Memoori[27].

Employers are increasingly recognizing mobile devices as a way to channel workplace experience and enhance communication channels between employees. Organizations are now exploring how their mobile presence can be leveraged to reimagine the future workplace. For example, how they can make it effortless for employees to not just reserve a conference room but to simultaneously book a room and seamlessly schedule a meeting, in-person and virutal, regardless of where people are.

The global workplace experience apps market alone is estimated at

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The question many CRE leaders are now asking themselves is, how can apps help them shift the idea from work being a place to work being an experience that is immersive, engaging, productive, efficient and accessible, anywhere and anytime?

App developers are constantly bringing new apps to the market claiming to enhance communication and experience across the organization. One such app called Donut aims to replicate the chance encounters usually found in offices by creating random virtual meetings between colleagues to foster connection and community. The app plugs into collaboration platform Slack and it randomly pairs co-workers through Slack and encourages them to have a coffee together over a video call.

There is an increasing appetite among CRE professionals for apps like this as they serve as smart and fast connectors in a complex working environment. But the fundamental question that underpins these types of apps is: can you turn serendipity into an effective algorithm? Serendipitous encounters at work are enforced by a degree of choice and autonomy by individuals, they choose to get up and wander from their desk or they make a conscious effort to seek out conversation, whereas these digital connections are engineered by leadership or by an app. This method takes out the autonomy and authenticity from the process and, if not done correctly, it can feel that employees are being manipulated into bumping into each other.

> **It's important to avoid being over-prescriptive, so don't program everyone. There's got to be some real serendipity…**
>
> Peter Smit, Collabogence /University of Toronto

(3) Room booking and scheduling.

As we move to a flexible work model where employees can work from many locations, teams must now find and schedule time that is available across multiple different calendars that are filling up faster than ever before with virtual meetings.

Strategy sessions require more delicate coordination and are more easily hampered by things like faulty internet connections. Constant instant messaging over communication channels such as Slack and Microsoft Teams inevitably results in chat fatigue, which makes it less likely that important messages or updates are heard and internalized. And brainstorming happens less. Without planning, opportunities for spontaneous conversation simply don't arise.

In the move to flexible working across organizations, workspace is being redesigned to boost collaboration and improve experience. People are going to the office to socialize with other colleagues, but they will want to ensure that the people they want to socialize with are also in the office at the same time. This will require a degree of planning and scheduling.

As space moves from permanent usage to fractional usage, it becomes increasingly important that the space can be bookable in advance to avoid conflicts and to ensure effective use for the desired purpose. Employees can check when the space they need is available, who else they want to collaborate with is in the office on that day, and find and schedule the right space.

> As space moves from permanent usage to fractional usage, it becomes increasingly important that the space can be bookable in advance to avoid conflicts and to ensure effective use for the desired purpose.

Routes to revival.

Research has found that the office is a critical enabler in bringing people together for informal connection and face-to-face collaboration. In turn, this impacts business effectiveness.

In restricting higher value social interaction at work, the pandemic has ironically highlighted its fundamental importance.

The challenge now is to curate and manage the workplace experience to ensure the office meets the new social needs of employees. Collecting and analyzing data on patterns of collaboration will provide a good foundation to ensure dynamic and responsive spaces and experiences are created for employees. University of Toronto's Peter Smit, founder of the Canadian analytics company Collabogence, believes data is vital to create the right team dynamics and avoid 'people coming into the office at the wrong time with the wrong people[28].'

In the absence of face-to-face collaboration, many organizations have experimented with new technologies and apps to replicate social interaction in a virtual setting. Although technology is a powerful enabler of collaboration and experience, without the tandem of physical space it can fall flat as a substitute for unplanned social encounters.

As CRE leaders plan for the future, it is clear that a combination of technology tools and physical space will need careful calibration. For the most part, the office will become a hub of interaction and social activity, while technology will level out the digital-physical divide. The big opportunity is in enhancing employee experience and social interaction across a multi-channel workforce. CRE leaders can now pave the way for new types of social interaction that will help drive the new world of work.

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Acknowledgements

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