

# Humanizing the Workforce with Technology



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## Intro

Today, a new type of organization is emerging, one that is moving away from investing in short term engagement “adrenaline shot” type of efforts to focus on changing the core workplace practices of an organization - employee experience. These Experiential Organizations realize that the best way to prepare for whatever the future of work will bring, is to invest in people. To try to understand what this means and what it looks like I interviewed over 150 senior executives at global organizations, went through just as many case studies, articles, and reports, and analyzed 252 organizations around the world.

It turns out, employee experience is a combination of three distinct environments that all organizations can shape. These are culture - how you feel, physical space - the actual space in which you work, and technology - the tools you use to get your job done. As proven in my research, all three of these things shape every employee experience for every employee at every company around the world. In this white paper our focus is going to be on the technological environment.

There are a few crucial technology trends which organizations must pay attention to in order to make sure they are truly delivering the best employee experiences which in turn unlock business value in the form of innovation, improved customer satisfaction, and higher revenue and profitability.

- Cloud - enabling the future workforce means allowing them to work anytime, anywhere, and on any device, this is not possible without cloud-based technology.
- Security - the growing number and variety of devices means greater potential vulnerabilities. While security has always been important, it’s now clearly become a top priority.
- Big data/analytics - more connected devices means more data, organizations

need to understand how to analyze and make sense of it.

- User experience - the employee is your internal consumer, this means deploying technology and apps that they truly want to use.
- Automation - exploring how robots and software will impact jobs and work is a crucial component for technology strategy.

Technology acts as the central nervous system of the organization. It is what allows many of the other concepts around the “future of work” to actually come to fruition with cloud computing largely acting as the backbone. For example, communication and collaboration at scale, flexible work, and real-time feedback are all great ideas to implement but they cannot exist without having the right tools in places to enable them. Of course this also means placing a strong emphasis on security and privacy since today’s workforce is more distributed, both in terms of location and in terms of devices and ways of working, we all live and work in a more dynamic world.

When most of us think about technology we think about something “non-human,” in other words it’s not about people it’s about IT. However, what we see inside of organizations today is that when the technology breaks down inside of an organization, so do the human aspects around that technology. In 2016, after delivering a keynote to a large financial institution, I had the opportunity to meet one-on-one with employees. All of them told me the same thing, “I love the culture, I love the physical space...I’m looking for a new job!” These employees were becoming increasingly frustrated with the tools they were given to do their jobs. This means that when left unchecked, technology very much becomes a human problem, not just an IT problem.

When it comes to technology at work, there are three things that employees care about most, these three things create the acronym

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ACE technology and are:

1. Availability to everyone
2. Consumer-grade technology
3. Employee needs vs business requirements

### Availability to everyone

Imagine for a moment that you have a workforce of 100 homebuilders. You give 25 of these builders all of the best tools, tractors, and devices and the other 75 workers get hammers, nails, and shovels. Which group do you think is going to create the superior homes? When it comes to technology, organizations have been notorious for long phased rollouts or pilot projects where a small subset of the workforce gets access to something, despite the whole workforce knowing about the “new thing.” Again, this is why we see the strong need for technologies that prioritize security.

With today’s exponential pace of technological change, this method of introducing technology is doomed to fail. Employees want technology that is available to everyone inside of the organization, not just a few of the senior leaders. Empowering a few people inside of your organization is not nearly as effective as empowering all of them. This doesn’t mean that testing and experimentation can never occur, but instead of making it a secretive project it’s far more effective to test with an open-door policy. In other words, test out the technology but if other employees find out about it and want it, let them in. Out of the 252 organizations I analyzed, some of the highest scoring for ones with this attribute were: Apple, Facebook, Google, Riot Games, and Accenture.

### Consumer grade technology

For decades organizations have been obsessed with enterprise grade technology which basically means something that is rugged, durable, secure, and is something that can be rolled out to a lot of people. In today’s terms this would be the equivalent of buying an armored tank to use for your daily commute. Sure, it will get you where you need to go and nobody will mess with you, but it’s just not necessary or efficient. This

is why we are seeing a massive shift in this trend towards consumer-grade technology, that is, technologies that are so beautiful, useful, and valuable, that you would consider using something similar in your personal life if it existed. It’s no wonder why many of today’s popular “enterprise” technologies are modeled after things such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and the like. This is the equivalent of the stylish roadster that has all the features you want and looks great! Out of the 252 organizations I analyzed, some of the highest scoring for ones with this attribute were: Microsoft, LinkedIn, Facebook, Airbnb, and Google.

### Employee needs vs business requirements

Let’s say you walked into a car dealership and the salesman said “what do you want in a car?” and you replied with, “it needs to have great horsepower, fit 5 people, and be painted blue,” the salesman then brings around a car that has the engine on the roof, the 5 seats all on the left, and a steering wheel installed on the passenger side. You look at it and say, “what the heck is this? I can’t drive this?” The salesman responds with “what do you mean? This is exactly what you asked for!” This is the challenge we see in the world of IT. We are very much obsessed with the requirements of the tools as opposed to truly understanding how the tools will be used. This is what it means to understand the needs of the employees. HR and IT teams have a very unique opportunity to join forces to truly deliver experiences that employees need and want. Out of the 252 organizations I analyzed, some of the highest scoring for ones this attribute were: Southwest Airlines, Google, Apple, Facebook, and Ultimate Software.

### What should organizations do?

Now that we are familiar with the trends shaping technology and the three technology factors that employees care about most (ACE) at work, what’s the next step? There are a few things organizations should begin doing immediately.

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### Partner: HR + IT

I always say that HR and IT are the two coolest job functions inside of organizations today and they are really the key drivers when we think about the future of work. Unfortunately, these two functions rarely speak, let alone partner with each other to empower employees. This absolutely has to change. When it comes to technology HR teams should have a solid understanding how employees work and the IT teams should have a solid understanding of which tools meet the security, infrastructure, and compatibility requirements of the business. Make sure your HR and IT teams are working closely together on a regular basis for any people facing technology decisions.

### Know your people (data, conversations, employee observations)

It's very tempting for us to look at what an organization like Facebook or Google is doing and then copy it. This is the wrong strategy. What few realize is that the decisions these companies make about technology (or anything else for that matter) are based on actual data that they have collected about their employees. There's no sense in guessing what your employees want, ask them, and

involve them in the technology decision making process. As mentioned above, IT should have any technical data and HR should have any people related data which should give your organization a very clear understanding of how employees work, why they work, and what technologies they want access to.

### Think like a laboratory vs a factory

One of the common threads I see across all successful organization is their ability to test and experiment. Factories are very linear and process-centric. They are amazing at maintaining the status quo and resisting change. Laboratories on the other hand are great at experimenting, embracing failure, using data, and constantly evolving. In order to succeed in this rapidly changing world, organizations must think more like laboratories and less like factories.

The next battleground for organizations around the world is employee experience, creating organizations where employees truly want, not need, to show up to work. When "the future of work" is discussed, most of the conversations tend to revolve around technology, and for good reason. There is no future of work without technology.

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### Helpful Links:

Learn more about the future of work and the Citrix Workspace:  
[www.citrix.com/about/future-of-work](http://www.citrix.com/about/future-of-work)

See how Citrix technologies transformed Tiger Resort Okada Manila:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqiM46fr2LY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqiM46fr2LY)

### About the Author:

Jacob Morgan is a best-selling author, keynote speaker, and futurist who explores the future of work and employee experience. To learn more, visit his website:  
<https://thefutureorganization.com/about-jacob-morgan>



### Enterprise Sales

North America | 800-424-8749  
Worldwide | +1 408-790-8000

### Locations

Corporate Headquarters | 851 Cypress Creek Road Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309, United States  
Silicon Valley | 4988 Great America Parkway Santa Clara, CA 95054, United States

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