

Strategic commentary

Why the urgency of digital transformation is hurting the digital workplace

Mike Hicks



Mike Hicks is VP of Strategy at VP of Strategy at Igloo Software, Kitchener, Canada.

Digital transformation started out as big talk and media buzz, but now nearly every company has either started or is looking to replace outdated IT infrastructure with shiny new tech toys. In hopes of achieving higher efficiency, increased productivity and better communication, business leaders have embraced the changing workplace with open arms. They have sparked a wave of momentum in what used to be a stagnant economy, but their giddiness and “let’s-run-before-we-walk” mentality has dangerous effects on their company’s bottom line.

New technologies are worthless if not implemented correctly, and in some cases, they can counteract what they originally set out to do. Most businesses lean on their IT departments to manage digital transformation, but they are missing the most crucial factor to successful implementation – how employees fit in to a workplace makeover. To maximize the benefits of new solutions, HR professionals need to guide the transition process for employees.

The pitfalls of a poorly implemented digital workplace

One area of digital transformation that businesses have struggled to master is replacing their outdated intranets with a next-gen intranet, also known as a digital workplace. The new digital

workplace has the potential to solve cross-company communication and collaboration problems, increase workflow speed and improve knowledge sharing. However, when companies fail at finding the right solution to fit their company’s needs, they put the business at risk. These risks are described below.

Productivity loss

When employees do not have a corporate digital destination for all information, collaboration and engagement, information becomes dispersed across several digital applications and it becomes challenging to keep track of files and communication streams. According to Igloo Software’s State of the Digital Workplace report, the average knowledge worker spends nearly 20 per cent of the workweek looking for internal information or tracking down colleagues to help with specific tasks. Additionally, 23 per cent of respondents said it would take five to ten minutes just to access the latest version of a standard template or document. Although siloed apps for communication and file sharing can seem productive, collaboration across teams can quickly break down and knowledge management strategies become severely threatened.

This proves to be even more difficult for the increasing number of remote workers. Employees who work outside

of office have to rely on digital communication to stay connected with their colleagues, which means information spread through in-person conversations or distributed through unorganized channels gets lost, creating productivity drains, information silos and duplicated work.

Security breaches

As more conversations and documents become digitized, companies are more at risk of having their data hacked or accidentally leaked. Having a secure digital workplace is essential to surviving the increasing number of cybersecurity threats, yet less than 50 per cent of employees from the survey said they are “very confident” that information stored on their company’s intranet is safe.

To avoid the legal and reputational damages that security breaches can cause, companies should set up the proper protocols to protect themselves from internal breaches. However, 27 per cent of employees said they know their business has security protocols in place for sharing information from the intranet, but they are not familiar with those guidelines. HR departments need to become key stewards of data security and ensure training is provided to all levels of employees on how to access, label and share data from the corporate intranet.

The consequences of an ineffective digital workplace can be easily avoided with the right strategy, technology and governance plan. Although business leaders might be inclined to fully rely on their IT department, a next-gen intranet that has design to drive employee engagement and improve communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing, needs heavy representation from HR at the decision table.

The steps to a successfully implemented digital workplace

HR managers need to consider the end goal when thinking about their company’s digital workplace. It should provide a space for employees to engage, access information and work together to accomplish tasks, which can be achieved by:

Centralizing all communication and knowledge sharing

Creating a single, shared space for employees to house all of their conversations, documents and project details prevents information from getting lost or being overlooked. It allows multi-department teams to communicate effectively by keeping up a workflow consistent with their normal operations. Instead of wasting time sifting through various apps to

track down messages, employees can search in one centralized hub for any piece of information they need, freeing up time and energy to put into other tasks.

Identifying employee preferences

In diverse workplaces, employees do not necessarily agree on their preferred work style. Where one worker might prefer to communicate through instant messaging, like group chat, another might like a more organized messaging stream, like email. A successful digital workplace has the ability to accommodate all work styles, while preserving the concept of a single corporate destination and source of truth for all company information, collaboration, knowledge management and employee engagement.

Businesses are undergoing digital transformation for obvious reasons, but their urgency to stay on top of leading industry trends and remain competitive in the market is preventing them from seeing successful change. By inviting HR managers to be active participants in the search to replace outdated intranets with more effective digital workplace solutions, organizations can see a smoother transition that achieves the long-term results they set out to accomplish.