

Future of Work Study

White Paper

Research of the employee experience through change over the last three years to inform the Future of Work

People Intelligence

October 2023

Future of Work Study

Powered by People Intelligence



Introduction

The dynamics of our current working environment have irrevocably changed over the last three years during the global pandemic. We must learn from how our people navigated these changes and shifted their behaviors to inform our decisions to drive efficient and effective enablement for the Future of Work.

Purpose of Study

This research explores the employee experience prior to the global pandemic, through the pandemic, to office re-opening and beyond. We uncover how our workforce changed, where people work, how they collaborate, how they take time off, the unique experience for leaders, and the impacts on engagement and well-being.

Data and Methodology

The research spans from September 2019 through September 2022 and focuses mostly on the pandemic period: March 2020 to March 2022. We explore how this period shifted the work landscape as we entered the new chapter of hybrid working: the Future of Work.

The study utilized a multi-source and method approach. Partnering across the Cisco ecosystem, we used three years of badge-in usage, time off records, employee location & demographic data, well-being research, ritual usage from the Team Space software, engagement results, and virtual meeting data (which at Cisco, utilizes Webex Technologies). Findings are based on global, statistically representative samples of over 10,000 employees who remained at Cisco and 3,000 employees who joined Cisco over the three years. Further research into those who left is planned to come. Nearly 130 interviews with a representative sample of employees between February and April 2023 were also conducted.

We utilized multiple supervised and unsupervised learning methodologies to analyze the quantitative data and uncover the employee experience. These techniques include k-means clustering, DBSCAN, a geospatial workflow, lasso regression, and XGBoost with cross validation and Shap values.

The K-means and the DBSCAN clustering methodologies allowed us to objectively identify definitions for work behaviors. With the K-means methodology proving best, we consumed features like number of total Webex meetings in office and out of office, number of office Badge-Ins, total amount of PTO taken, and more, to build objectively identify definitions of how people were working. Additionally, we defined these across our time period to understand how each person moved throughout each cluster over the 13-month timeframe and capture behavior shifts. These clustering methodologies allowed us to uncover working mode definitions of in-office, flexible, and virtual.

The geospatial workflow resulted in a number of findings including the location choices insights below. Within this workflow, we consumed employee demographic information to compute employee's distance from their assigned office, drawn from the driving route in which the individual could take to get to their Cisco office. Comparing this to badge-in rates we were able to understand if distance from office was preventing individuals from coming into the office both prior to the pandemic and once offices reopened.

Future of Work Study

Powered by People Intelligence



Next, we employed supervised learning modeling with lasso regression and XGBoost to understand how our hybrid features relate to engagement and well-being. The XGBoost methodology was primarily used along with Shap value charts and outputs. From this we uncovered the how people work relates to their perceptions of space to innovate, healthy collaboration practices, where our leaders are thriving and struggling.

To build the findings and recommendations below, the research team spent considerable time and iterations understanding the output from each model to understand the nuance of each relationship, the patterns seen over time, emphasize the strongest relationship, and interpret all of these in a way that are tangible for our audience. These can be found below and seen in a deeper level in the full research presentation.

Findings and Recommendations

Our people have shown they are resilient and can navigate times of change. Given their varying needs, flexibility and choice are imperative for employee engagement and company success moving forward.

Location Choices

Being more intentional and budgeting for in-person connections will be essential in planning cycles: people may choose to work from home, but occasional in-person touchpoints are valued. Our research indicates a fundamental shift in how we come together and necessitates continuing to reimagine the office space for strategic collaboration.

Innovation

Innovation requires time, not a specific location. Shifting our cultural mindset to allow space for this regular practice of innovation is necessary.

Collaboration

Give people a choice to create their own schedules to meet their needs: allowing for freedom in scheduling predicts greater company engagement items, individual engagement items, and safety & trust among team members. Autonomy and meaningful work are suggested to take precedence over a work-hour mandate.

Establishing standards that include virtual meeting punctuality and duration and the freedom to choose video usage will have the largest impact: virtual collaboration practices have superseded in-person collaboration in influencing Engagement. We also found healthy behaviors of virtual collaboration that boost engagement and well-being.

Leader Impact

Provide focused support to leaders, helping shift their mindset to adapt their work practices for a hybrid work environment: leaders are at the center of our organization and tend to struggle the most. Additionally, leaders hold the responsibility for the most important factor of engagement – providing attention to their team members.

Future of Work Study

Powered by People Intelligence



Engagement Over Time

Create a strong foundation of team building for a healthy virtual environment and acceleration of team engagement for recent hires.

Conclusion

Our people have shown they are resilient and can navigate times of change. The Future of Work requires flexibility and choice for our people to determine what works best for them. To get there, we need to find the balance between the needs of the business and the needs of the individual. We see a middle ground is needed for a new social contract of agreed-upon norms between individuals and their team leader. And, with ongoing people intelligence, we can create the best experience for our people and, in turn, drive business outcomes.

Research by People Intelligence

People Intelligence ensures that both business decisions related to our people and the work being served by P&C are shaped and informed by valid, reliable, and credible intelligence. The People Intelligence organization keeps employees at the heart of our strategy by using data science and research to understand our people: what matters to them, what's working and not working, and how we take effective action based on what we know.

FUTURE OF WORK RESEARCH TEAM

Research led by: Mary Williams, Erik Wangerin, Madi Brumbaugh, Delia Zhou, Michelle Tam, and Casey Bianco

Research Curated by: May Liew and Blake Ready

Research Supported by: Kensleigh Ables, Charlie Manning, Liz Morgan, Samantha Everett, and Grace Jain