IDC

Flexible Teaching and Learning Are Central to Workplace Transformation in Education

WRITTEN BY:

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KEY STATS:

65% of institutions have dedicated room in their budgets for workplace transformation initiatives.

More than **50%** of education institutions are in the early stages of, or have already made progress on, workplace transformation initiatives.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT:

With workplace transformation still underway, many education institutions have already realized significant improvements to the faculty/staff experience.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

In 2022 and beyond, IDC believes that education institutions will continue to ramp up investments in work transformation initiatives to enable true flexibility for faculty and staff and to reimagine education-service delivery.

In this Industry Spotlight

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The investments that institutions make today will have long-term impacts on the success of workplace transformation in education.

Flexible Teaching and Learning Are the Future of Work in Education

The education industry is at a critical inflection point as institutions offering schools (and higher) education determine the future role of remote and hybrid teaching and learning. As a result of the challenges of the last several years, education looks nothing like it once did. How, where, and when education institutions operate has changed drastically. How, where, and when teachers and professors deliver instruction and how, where, and when students learn continues to evolve.

Relentless change and technological evolution in the sector have had a drastic impact on the faculty and staff who keep our cherished education institutions running. As the world settles into this new learning environment, where ongoing change and disruption are the norm, faculty and staff are calling for more flexible work arrangements. In response to their demands, many institutions are working to redesign their policies, culture, technologies, and facilities for a hybrid workforce. Failure to adapt will have major implications for faculty retention.

Technology is essential in enabling the shift to flexible teaching and learning, as well as hybrid work for administrative staff. The investments that institutions make today will have long-term impacts on the success of workplace transformation in education.

Cloud-based, secure, and reliable connectivity, as well as unified communications and collaboration, are key to work transformation in education.

Key Definitions

IDC defines work transformation as a fundamental shift in the work model to one that fosters human-machine collaboration, enables new skills and worker experiences, and supports work across and within a (hybrid) spectrum of field, remote, and on-site environments. Work transformation is driven by the need for greater employee productivity and flexibility. Organizations are redesigning policies, culture, technologies, and facilities to enable hybrid work.

In education, work transformation is about more than productivity or the ability to work from anywhere. While hybrid work models help support administrative staff, work transformation in education goes a step beyond and is about enabling flexibility in teaching and learning models. For example, institutions can leverage flexible work models that allow them to hire staff from outside their geographic area, and develop shared service models with nearby schools or even other school districts or universities. Work transformation initiatives in education provide faculty, staff, and students with the tools to ensure teachers can deliver instruction and students can learn effectively, regardless of where they are, or what the world throws at them.

Redesigning Policies, Culture, Technologies, and Facilities for Flexible Teaching and Learning

Over the last few years, institutions from schools and those providing higher education have transformed how they operate to ensure continuity of service in the face of major public-health, political, and economic disruptions.

The efforts of education administrators, faculty, and staff during this time were nothing short of herculean, and their tremendous work ensured that students could continue to learn in the face of the most difficult circumstances. Throughout this time, educators also carried the weight of our global education systems on their shoulders, facing pressures from politicians and parents to risk their lives to educate our students. Fast-forward to today, and unfortunately these challenges have significantly contributed to staff burnout and shortages across the education spectrum—from the principal's office to the classroom and even the IT department. This poses a major threat to education institutions and the ability to ensure continuity of operations moving forward.

In the face of these ongoing challenges, faculty and staff from the back office to the classroom have called for greater flexibility in how, where, and when they conduct their essential work. In response to their demands, many institutions are working to redesign their policies, culture, technologies, and facilities for a hybrid workforce, with 65% of institutions setting aside funds in their budgets for workplace transformation initiatives. At this time, few have enabled what IDC calls "experience parity" at their institutions, but many are well on the way to transforming their work, teaching, and learning models for the future (see **Figure 1**). According to IDC, "experience parity" is when an institution provides a seamless faculty/staff experience to ensure all employees interact with institutional resources and colleagues consistently, regardless of their physical location.

FIGURE 1

Redesigning Policies, Culture, Technologies and Facilities for a Hybrid Workforce in Education

Q Which of the following best describes your organization's approach to redesigning policies, culture, technologies, and facilities for a hybrid workforce?

VERY LIMITED. We do not expect a significant portion of our workforce to work remotely, and this is not a formal initiative at our company.	**16%**
AD HOC. Changes are being made at the departmental or business-unit level with no clear direction, support, or policy on the part of the organization as a whole.	**11%**
EARLY STAGES. We are at the early stages of evaluating and implementing the changes required to better enable our remote workers to perform their jobs efficiently and optimally.	**16%**
IN PROGRESS. Most key resources can be accessed by remote employees with minimal impact on capability, though some access is still disjointed or hampered by a poor user experience.	**40%**
EXPERIENCE PARITY. We provide a seamless employee experience to ensure all workers interact with corporate resources and colleagues consistently across locations.	**18%**

n = 194, all education respondents.
Source: *Hybrid Work Maturity Study,* IDC, March 2022

The Benefits of Workplace Transformation in Education

Today, education leaders are exploring new methods and technological solutions that build greater institutional resilience. A core focus of these efforts will be to enable hybrid work for administrative staff and to support flexible teaching and learning models that are designed to improve job satisfaction among faculty and staff.

According to IDC's *Hybrid Work Maturity Study,* business agility/continuity/resilience, increased faculty/staff productivity, and improved faculty/staff experience were the top three drivers of work transformation. IDC believes that work transformation initiatives in education will continue to accelerate in the next year as institutions realize these benefits at greater scale, particularly around improved faculty and staff experience and retention.

While workplace transformation initiatives are still ongoing in education, institutions have already noted significant increases in improvement on all of these measures, with the greatest benefits being improved faculty/staff experience, cost savings, and improved student and stakeholder engagement (see **Figure 2**).

FIGURE 2
Benefits of Work Transformation

Q In 2021, what percent improvement did your organization experience in each of the following as a result of investments in work transformation?

Improved faculty/staff experience	**30%**
Better faculty/staff retention	**26%**
Attracting top talent	**25%**
Expanding the talent pool beyond existing geographical constraints	**26%**
Cost savings	**30%**
Increased faculty/staff productivity	**26%**
Improved regulatory compliance and work council or union requirements	**27%**
Improved engagement with students and stakeholders	**28%**
Operational agility/continuity/ resilience	**24%**

n = 194, all education respondents.
Source: *Hybrid Work Maturity Study,* IDC, March 2022

However, to experience these benefits, education leaders must overcome key institutional, technical, and operational challenges.

In IDC's *Hybrid Work Maturity Study,* education respondents noted the following as the top challenges in these areas:

Top institutional challenge: sustaining and evolving institutional culture (33%)

**Top technical challenge:** cybersecurity concerns (32%)

Top operational challenge: effectiveness of teamwork/collaboration in remote/hybrid teaching, learning, and working models (47%)

Considering Cisco

Cisco has a strong presence in education, and its core networking and server technology has long been part of the technology stack found in education datacenters. Cisco's expanded portfolio of education-focused products and services enables educators, students, and administrative staff to connect from school, on campus, at home or from other places.

Cisco has been working to support education workplace transformation via solutions that scale across mobile devices, desktop computers, home and small offices, meeting rooms, classrooms, and co-creation spaces with a single-collaboration cloud platform for video, calling, messaging and other services, as well as integrations with learning management systems, other applications, and devices. Cisco's foundational technology platforms enable workplace transformation across the education spectrum, building off of Cisco's collaboration, mobility, networking, datacenter and security technologies. Products and solutions for education institutions looking to implement hybrid and flexible work for faculty and staff must focus on the solution areas discussed in **Figure 3** and in the following sections.

FIGURE 3
Cisco's Education Portfolio
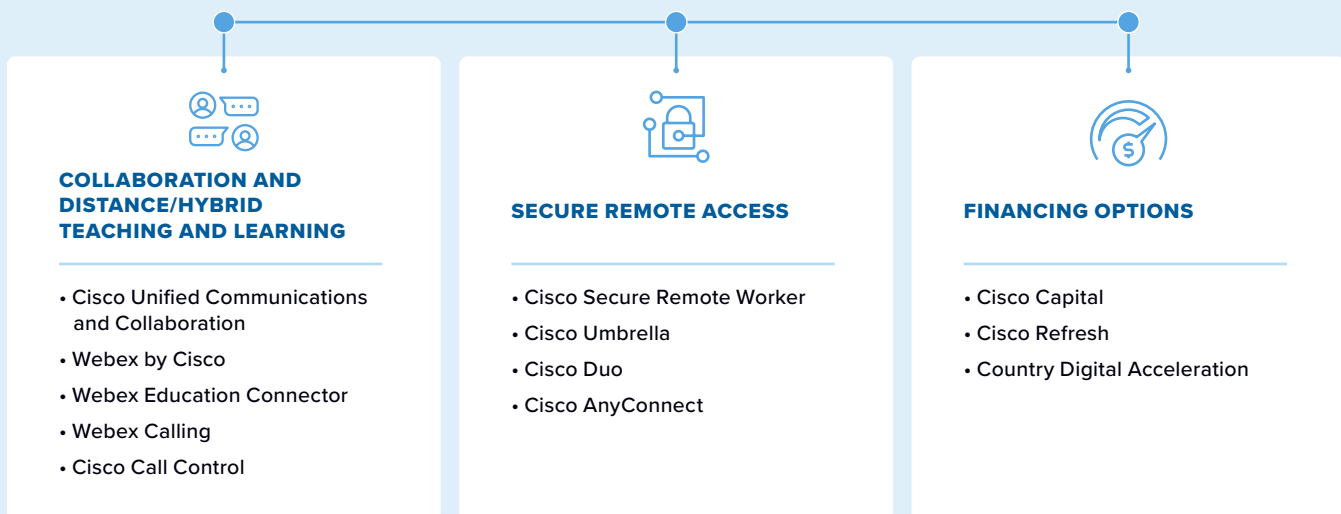
COLLABORATION AND DISTANCE/HYBRID TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Cisco Unified Communications and Collaboration
- Webex by Cisco
- Webex Education Connector
- Webex Calling
- Cisco Call Control

SECURE REMOTE ACCESS

- Cisco Secure Remote Worker
- Cisco Umbrella
- Cisco Duo
- Cisco AnyConnect

FINANCING OPTIONS

- Cisco Capital
- Cisco Refresh
- Country Digital Acceleration

COLLABORATION AND DISTANCE/HYBRID TEACHING AND LEARNING

Cisco Unified Communications and Collaboration is an IP-based communication system that integrates voice, video, data, and mobility products and applications for a secure communication and collaboration platform used by education institutions.

Webex by Cisco works to integrate meetings and team collaboration with devices, including student devices and toll audio, for interactive and remote services, such as classes. Educators can use capabilities such as polling, meeting recording, or self-paced learning options that can be integrated with learning-management systems.

Webex has a variety of offerings, including:

Webex by Cisco, which enables educators and students to teach and learn together or virtually, integrating meetings, messaging, and calling on a single integrated and trusted app. Staff and faculty can learn new systems via online training, cloud-based meetings, and video.	**Webex Education Connector**, which is designed to integrate Webex with learning management systems. The Webex Education Connector enables classroom collaboration, facilitates distance learning, and simplifies administration.	**Webex Calling** is an enterprise-grade cloud calling and team collaboration solution offered through a flexible subscription model. With centralized administration, security, and reliability, Cisco keeps the Webex cloud always on and always up to date, so schools and universities can focus on their academic and research imperatives.	**Cisco Call Control** delivers the right experience to the right user endpoint. These on-premises and integrated solutions allow customers to choose the consumption model that best fits their needs and reduces maintenance costs with infrastructure for voice, video, and messaging.

SECURE REMOTE ACCESS

Cisco understands the vulnerabilities of educators and administrators who are working from home and regularly access sensitive information. This is especially important as recent events have shown that bad actors have used remote devices for ransomware attacks and other hacking attempts. Cisco provides secure remote access via **Cisco Secure Remote Worker**, which offers an integrated set of solutions that provides secure access from any connection. **Cisco Umbrella** uses the internet's infrastructure to enforce security and block malicious activity before a connection is ever established. **Cisco Duo** uses multifactor authentication to verify user identity, and the device passes security requirements before granting access to IT systems and sensitive student, faculty, and administrative information. **Cisco AnyConnect** enables integrated virtual private network (VPN) access from any device, at any time or place, to provide secure access to critical IT resources.

FINANCING OPTIONS

Cisco has recognized the strain that education institutions are under in the current environment. The company offers tools and solutions to help organizations afford to purchase technology upgrades or new technologies. **Cisco Capital** is designed to provide education institutions with flexible financing solutions for purchasing the latest technologies with predictable payments and no upfront costs. **Cisco Refresh** offers RF Certified Remanufactured Equipment that education IT managers can use to enable new service capabilities while making the most of their limited and often uncertain budgets. **Country Digital Acceleration** is a Cisco program built to expand access with country-level academic and industry partnerships and strategic investments. Currently, Cisco Country Digital Acceleration is involved with 37 countries around the world.

Education Marketplace Opportunities and Challenges

Given the recent disruptions, the education sector faces a number of opportunities and challenges, including the following:

Serving flexible teaching and learning needs of schools and higher-education institutions. While there is widespread agreement that distance and hybrid teaching and learning modalities will have their place in the future of education, institutional requirements, maturity levels, and approaches to flexible teaching and learning vary widely between schools and higher education. As Cisco invests in products to support workplace transformation in both segments, it will need to work closely with education users to understand how it can best support faculty and staff with new advanced capabilities. Cisco must then leverage this insight and invest deeply in its suite of products to tailor the platform's capabilities to education's unique use cases. This is the challenge facing Cisco and all competitors in this space; those that dedicate significant investment to building next-generation flexible teaching and learning capabilities are poised to win in this market.

Evolving cyber threat landscape. As education institutions determine the future of flexible teaching and learning modalities, they will have to manage an increasingly complex cybersecurity threat landscape. This will be particularly challenging for institutions that embrace hybrid environments, as they will have to build cybersecurity capabilities that monitor volatile waves of network activity, on and off school grounds. While Cisco has a reputation for robust security, the company will be challenged to ensure its solutions are secure as the threat environment expands and evolves.

Long-term budgetary uncertainty and the looming "device cliff." Government stimulus and aid funding has helped education institutions weather the financial impact of COVID-19, though significant financial challenges persist. Nonetheless, most education institutions are increasing their IT budgets in the next year.

However, as government aid runs out, there is great uncertainty surrounding long-term sustainable funding for technology. Many education leaders are concerned about how they will sustain long-term funding for today's technology investments and fear they may fall off a "device cliff" in the not-too-distant future. These concerns in some ways are holding many institutions back from making big technology investments. However, new priorities will focus on core areas of strength for Cisco's broad portfolio of technologies that enable transformation in key areas, such as flexible teaching and learning, remote or distributed administration, and security and campus operations. It is also a chance for education buyers to look at new funding mechanisms offered by companies such as Cisco.

An increasingly competitive education market. Cisco faces an education market that is becoming increasingly competitive. Cisco's competition is also focused on expanding their solution portfolios in terms of breadth and depth of product capabilities. There is significant jockeying for market share around collaborative applications and video tools, both of which are essential for flexible teaching and learning. Education buyers are being inundated with competitive offerings as they look for turnkey collaboration and communications solutions to simplify remote learning and work.

Conclusion

Looking ahead to the next few years, IDC believes that education institutions will continue to ramp up investments in work transformation initiatives to enable flexibility for faculty and staff, improve productivity and faculty/staff experiences, and to ensure continuity of teaching and learning in the face of unpredictable disruptions. Cisco is well positioned to serve as a partner to education institutions globally with its suite of network technologies and collaboration tools.

To succeed in work transformation initiatives, education institutions must:

Establish and execute a long-term digital transformation strategy for work transformation initiatives. Be sure to conduct ongoing evaluations of strategic goals and progress to ensure that the strategic direction of the institution is still in line with the changing education environment.

Ensure leadership buy-in but build work transformation initiatives from the bottom up. Work with faculty and staff to co-design work transformation policies, processes, technologies, and spaces to ensure that solutions and key changes align with the needs of the institution's most critical stakeholders.

Reimagine work for administrative staff, and teaching and learning for the virtual world. The traditional workplace practices and pedagogical approaches of the past will no longer work in a world of education untethered to school grounds.

Prioritize security in vendor and technology selection to protect faculty, staff, and students in hybrid and remote teaching and learning environments.

About the Analyst

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Matthew Leger is a Research Manager on IDC's Government Insights team, responsible for the Worldwide Education Digital Transformation Strategies practice. Matthew's research focuses on key education IT and digital transformation trends, as well as emerging solutions impacting how primary, secondary, and higher education and related services are delivered. His primary focus will be on identifying best practices for implementation and use of key technologies to improve student outcomes and teacher performance, streamline operations and administration, and improve campus management. Given that his previous research has focused on the future of work and the role of education and training institutions in reskilling the modern workforce, Matthew's research includes a focus on how K-12 and higher education leaders can use technology and EdTech innovations to adapt their services to meet the rapidly changing demands of an economy that requires lifelong learning and upskilling.

More about Matthew Leger

Message from the Sponsor

Ever since Cisco was founded in 1984 by two Stanford University computer scientists who focused on campus technology, education and technology together have been in our blood. Cisco is and will continue to be your trusted technology partner in education, as we have been working with tens of thousands of schools, colleges, and universities around the world to support educators, administrators, researchers, and students inside and outside the classroom with collaboration, security, mobility, networking, and data center technologies.

With the unmatched breadth and performance of our portfolio, as well as industry-leading security embedded throughout our solutions, our customers across education can focus on what they do best, which is teaching our next generation of leaders, dreamers, scientists, engineers, and caretakers.

No matter what goals you are trying to achieve, we can help build the bridge to get you there.

Explore Cisco education solutions

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