How to give your company a modern workforce edge? Experts agree happy employees perform at a higher level, generating more satisfied customers and superior corporate performance. In fact, companies with happier employees have 81% higher customer satisfaction and half the employee turnover compared with other firms. Conversely, employee unhappiness leads to high turnover, which in turn can have a devastating impact on corporate results. When employee turnover increases from 12% to 22%, total workforce productivity plummets by 40% and financial performance drops by 26%.¹

In today’s intensely competitive global business arena, every edge is critical—and for most companies, there is no greater edge than a talented, motivated, and creative workforce.

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Companies that seek a workforce edge must take into account the reality that the workplace has changed significantly in recent years. Employees expect a high quality workplace experience—including advanced and easy-to-use technology. They also expect to be able to work, and work productively, from anywhere, at any time. Research shows that telework is no longer a rarity but a mainstream corporate practice. A recent report found 20% to 25% of the US workforce teleworks frequently.  

Even so, the workplace continues to be important. Fifty-five percent of US employees say they are still most productive at their office desks. In response, many companies are rethinking the role and structure of the workplace, creating flexible workspaces to encourage collaboration, a better exchange of ideas, and a flatter organization.  

While many organizations seek to engender employee happiness through incentives, benefits, and recognition, the thing that makes people happiest at work is simply getting things done, according to Forrester analyst David K. Johnson.  

To that end, employees at all levels welcome technology that enables them to work more effectively. “If you can help employees improve their own work performance through technology, they’ll be happier,” writes Johnson.  

Today’s workers, led by the rising generation of Millennials, believe they have a right to be happy at work. They expect technology to play an important role in their happiness, productivity, and creativity at work, whether working in a highly collaborative office environment, in a home office or on the road. And they have little patience with employers that do not strive to meet this expectation. Forty-two percent of Millennials are likely to quit a job because of substandard technology. Clearly, companies that have failed to adapt won’t attract or keep the best or the most productive employees, and they will be hard pressed to keep up with competitors that do.  

Who’s responsible for workforce creativity?  

With so much at stake, companies must address the challenge of workforce creativity with a sense of urgency as well as openness to new approaches. Everyone who has a stake in employee performance and corporate performance should be involved in this effort, but most important, a company’s hiring managers and human resources leaders must play a central role.  

“HR and IT can learn from each other and become allies for both investing in modernizing tech and in acquiring new talent. CIOs and HR are both strategic stakeholders in the company,” writes Bob Egan, founder and chief research officer of Seraphim Research Group.  

If an employee’s entire spectrum of needs is considered, no longer will it be enough to hand out standard equipment and applications, betraying the attitude that the corporate IT department knows best. Instead, it’s important to begin
when high performers achieve cognitive flow, they are at least 127% and as much as 47X more productive than their peers.

with the question: How can this company enable its employees to reach their full potential? Answering that question will inevitably lead to new conclusions, new practices, and ultimately, a more creative and innovative workforce.

As HR managers become involved in this process, Egan says there are several IT issues they must address:

- How does a solution help make our employees more productive?
- How will a particular solution grow as the demands of our employees grow?
- How will a particular solution help us to attract and retain great talent?
- Will a particular solution engender trust or alienate employees in the workplace?

Listening to employees with an open mind might cause corporate leaders to hear some challenging answers. For example, most employees complain the technology they have at home is more modern and more valuable than the technology they have at work. What’s more, employee trust in their employers is waning. Together, those two facts demonstrate that many companies are skating on thin ice as far as employee empowerment and workforce creativity is concerned. Many employees are taking matters into their own hands, acquiring their own IT hardware and applications to simply get things done—the number one thing, after all, that makes them happy in their work. “It’s easier and faster than trying to convince someone who lacks empathy and isn’t listening to them when they say the need something different.”

How to foster creativity and productivity

Although productivity is intrinsically hard to measure, research points the way to a more thorough understanding of effective employee work practices and how companies can enable employees to do their best work. An essential concept in this research is “cognitive flow.”

Forrester’s Johnson says that corporate managers should understand these key points about cognitive flow:

- Flow is the highest state of human performance, especially in knowledge work. High performers self-regulate their attention and stay in a state of flow in their work. In doing so, they are at least 127% and as much as 47 times more productive than their peers. To
enable maximum performance, it’s important that corporate leaders eliminate interruptions to this focus.

- Flow is fragile and requires intrinsic motivation, information resources, and support. Corporate culture, each individual’s experience, motivation, and commitment, as well as incentive plans and the work itself are important factors. Infrastructure and operations leaders (including IT) should work with human resources and executive leaders to understand and foster cognitive flow.

- Flexibility and unfettered access to information resources are vital. Knowledge workers need nearly instant access to critical information as they work. In doing so, they need to use the full capabilities of their technology equipment and applications, and they must be comfortable with the equipment they use. In addition, their IT systems must perform at a high level so that workers’ attention spans are not interrupted.

In the quest to enable a high degree of cognitive flow, it’s important to understand that IT plays a key role—and that even small IT investments can pay big dividends. For example, some employees are more comfortable, focused, and productive when they work standing up. To that end, a tablet computer with a touch screen can be a far better choice than a conventional desktop system with a keyboard with mouse or trackpad. If the standup work configuration saves only ten minutes per day by eliminating unnecessary movements and increasing employee comfort, the increased productivity would add up to one work week per year—a significant gain.

In another example, giving an

81% higher customer satisfaction and 50% lower turnover for companies with happier employees.
A lot has been written about the Millennial generation, much of which paints its members as demanding and pampered—and highly digital. While in a broad sense true, those perceptions demand a closer look.

Millennials, the generation born between 1982 and 2002, are now the largest segment of the workforce, according to the Pew Research Center. Unlike preceding generations, they have not known a world without pervasive technology, including the Internet and sophisticated personal devices. Millennials are accustomed to advanced technology and are not satisfied by a second-rate experience. This demanding nature carries over into the workplace.

In a recent Gartner report, 44% of Millennials say they have the “latest and greatest” personal devices, compared with 33% of their elders. And Millennials say their personal technology is more effective than the technology they use at work to a greater degree than their elders.

Further, the report found, Millennials are heavy users of either unapproved or personally obtained technologies. They also are more frequent users of social media, enterprise file synch-and-share, and unauthorized collaboration technologies for use on social media or social networks at least once a day, compared with about 18% of workers older than Millennials, the survey found. And Millennials in IT are even heavier users: 41% of Millennials in IT departments use social media at least once a day for work.

Rather than repress these tendencies, the report suggests that corporate leaders, “Consult Millennials inside and outside IT for perspectives on applications for interpersonal collaboration; they are the group most likely to have significant experience in employing this technology, inside and outside the guidelines set by the organization.”

By embracing Millennials and their demanding approach to technology, companies will give them a sense of being valued. More important, companies will get the most out of this important segment of the workforce. Failure to satisfy the needs of Millennials is likely to drive them away from a company—and into the arms of more engaging competitors.

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**Millennials Expect More**

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**Give workers a voice**

Because the maintenance of an employee’s cognitive flow, and hence productivity, is closely tied to the technology used by that worker, it is extremely important that each employee have the IT tools suited to the work they are doing. And since employees know best what they need, they should have a say in what they use, for the sake of both productivity and job satisfaction.

The traditional approach of IT to provide standard-issue gear runs counter to the more effective employee-centric approach. Having listened to employees’ expressed preferences and knowing in advance that one size does not fit all, IT and related corporate managers, HR especially, should

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**Employee a second monitor at a cost of $300 can increase productivity by 18% by enabling faster access to more documents, real-time data windows, live streams, etc. That productivity increase means achieving ROI in less than two months.**

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**20% to 25% of the US workforce frequently works remotely.**
meet employees’ expectations for tools that employees say will empower them.

Millennials are the most demanding in terms of technology. Further, they are arguably the most important employees to the future of any company because of their youth, talent—and the simple fact that they will be the next generation of corporate leaders. More than others, they want to choose their own high-caliber tools. [See Millennials sidebar.]

**Building the innovating workforce**

In order to give all employees the tools they need to unleash their creativity, corporate leaders should deploy a broad portfolio of technologies. Writes Forrester’s Johnson, “Cloud-based applications, digital workspace delivery systems, and modern applications that handle their own security, updates, and alerts are just a few of the technologies that I&O pros will need to master to deliver services to today’s workforce. These technologies will help provide the necessary isolation of personal data from corporate data and abstract underlying devices so you can more broadly deliver corporate applications and more efficiently serve a greater variety of the workforce segments you identified.”

Since listening to and empowering employees with technology choice may lead to greater variety in end-user devices, IT will find life

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**Checklist for Innovation**

Listening to your employee’s needs is the essential first step down the path of enabling the innovating workforce. To assist you on your journey, a partner that can map those needs to a broad technology portfolio is essential. Dell and Intel have developed a comprehensive checklist that will help evaluate your needs and prescribe the technology to meet them, guiding you through these steps:

- **Set your goals.** Identify what your company needs to achieve, whether improving productivity, acquiring and retaining talent, or enabling collaboration among remote staff.
- **Identify your workforce.** Specify the categories into which your workers fall, whether desk-based workers, on-the-go professionals, creative professionals, engineers, or more.
- **Define your needs.** Specify the requirements for each worker category, including data-intensive work, specialized software, dual monitors, or more.
- **Build your core team.** Identify IT and other stakeholders to provide input, for planning, design, deployment, training, management, and support.
- **Results.** Review and act on product recommendations, including desktops, laptops, monitors, docking stations, and more.

For the full checklist, please see: DellEMC.com/workforce

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55% of US employees say they are still most productive at their office desks.
simpler and its own endeavors more productive if the number of suppliers can be reduced. Therefore, a single provider that can provide a wide array of choices poses distinct advantages. Workers can have the technology they need to do their jobs, while IT can successfully secure and manage a variety of devices without being hampered by a complex web of vendor relationships.

It helps even more if the chosen IT provider can assume the role of partner — with an understanding of the needs of tomorrow’s innovating workforce. Such a partner can assist a company in assessing needs and developing a deployment plan. [See Checklist sidebar page6]

Empowering a Modern Workforce
A company that has an innovating workforce will find itself at a distinct competitive advantage as it generates new products, services, and above all, more satisfied customers. To build that innovating workforce, corporate officers, led by hiring managers, HR and IT, must listen to their employees to understand what will make them happy and productive. Then they must act with the help of the right partner to enable employees, especially Millennials, to choose the technology that makes them happiest and most productive.

Technology that delivers even modest gains to a single worker can deliver a crucial competitive edge when multiplied across an entire workforce: Productivity and hours worked will rise; turnover will drop; customer satisfaction will increase; and corporate performance will reach its full potential.

Learn more at: DellEMC.com/workforce

2) Global Workforce Analytics report, GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com
4) “Elevate Human Performance,” Johnson, Forrester.
5) Idem.
8) “Global Generations 3.0 survey, EY.
10) “Improving Employee Productivity with Dual Monitors,” IDC InfoBrief, December 2015.

Giving an employee a second monitor can increase productivity 18% and pay back in less than two months.