Transformation of Work: The fine balance between risk & rewards.

Following a recent webinar, read this Q&A with guest speaker Andre Kindness, Principal Analyst at Forrester to unppeg trends, considerations and best practice approaches to transforming the workplace.
Transformation of Work:
The fine balance between freedom and risk

Whether through hybrid or remote working, businesses are providing employees with more choices on how and where they work. But does this new-found freedom come with new risks?

Vodafone Business asks guest speaker Andre Kindness, Principal Analyst at Forrester, to unpick trends, considerations and best-practice approaches to transforming the workplace, and the role that network transformation plays.

Forrester®
How are businesses around the world transforming their workplace?

Andre Kindness:

Forrester believes that 60% of offices will move to an office + anywhere hybrid environment — also known as flexible workforce — where fewer employees work in the office and many more work remotely on any given day. With this transition, technology organisations started to focus more on employee experience as a way to ensure that anywhere work is seamless. This means employees can access the resources and tools at home or while traveling as easily as they do in the office.

Security and connectivity have to be seamlessly blended together so they work invisibly to the employee.
How does it differ from industry to industry?

Not every industry has the same number or percentage of employees working remotely. The number of anywhere employees can vary from industry to industry or among verticals. Typically, more in-person industries, such as healthcare or the government’s department of motor vehicles, have fewer anywhere employees because they offer services or products that demand higher levels of customised interactions. These interactions require solving complex situations with the following requirements: clear communication in a dynamic environment; empathy towards the customer; business acumen; navigating one-off situations or experiences; and in some cases, the ability to support sight, touch and hearing to gather information. In contrast, financial services and the manufacturing industry don’t have the same demands as they have very repetitive, standardised processes that can easily gather information through electronic means and often deliver a fixed set of products and services.

Vodafone Business:

Andre Kindness:
What are the risks and rewards of a flexible workforce – and how can businesses strike a balance?

Andre Kindness:

The risks typically fall into two groups: teamwork and tools. Folk wisdom often associates distance and virtual work as corrosive elements to teamwork and collaboration with some CEOs and business managers claiming that remote work stifles creativity and eliminates serendipitous hallway encounters. With tools, the risks are more tangible.

Businesses struggle to ensure employees can connect to the right resources securely and without application experience degradation. Forrester’s Q3 2022 Future of Work Survey found that only 24% of employees strongly agree that their company has the technology resources to allow people to work from home as necessary. This means almost three-quarters of employees feel like they don’t have all the tools they need to get their jobs done.

Businesses and tech professionals can shake the pre-conceived notions about working from home and provide a seamless anywhere work experience with rewards. A recent Harvard Business School study showed that working from anywhere increases productivity by 4.4%. And even another academic study found an increase of 7% among those who migrated from the office to remote work. People earning over $150,000 a year exceed their own productivity expectations by 11.5% when working remotely. It’s clear that anywhere work offers direct, observable improvements in productivity. In addition, other data shows that companies have higher retention levels when they support a flexible workforce compared to those forcing employees back to the office.
When it comes to technology enabling workplace transformation, what are the must-haves and pitfalls to avoid, in particular to network transformation?

Andre Kindness:

Collaboration technologies, access to the right resources, personal devices and a responsive IT help desk can play a powerful role in ensuring anywhere work. At the start of the pandemic, many technology organisations assumed that giving employees a laptop with a virtual desktop interface (VDI) or a virtual private network (VPN) application, work applications – such as email and collaboration tools – and Wi-Fi was good enough. Security teams just mirrored a lot of the data-centric draconian security practices used on traditional remote employees to all of them during the pandemic. Help desk calls skyrocketed and employees became frustrated with working at home. Business and employees needed higher levels connectivity reliability, better throughput, faster responses and better security approaches.

With the use of cloud and anywhere work, devices and data dispersed to many new areas — and this increased security and network complexity. To address security challenges and improve access to resources, technology teams rolled out modern endpoint management, improved encryption practices, and enacted zero-trust endpoint segmentation policies. Connectivity challenges require network transformations which include the adoption of software-defined wide area network (SD-WAN) to improve application experiences, monitoring tools to find issues quicker, and implementing artificial intelligence (AI) solutions to solve problems before employees see them.
In enabling businesses on various transformation paths, what are the challenges you see cross-functional teams face? What are some of the best practices of network transformation to enable this?

Andre Kindness:

Successful cross-functional teams start with solid foundations of collaboration and open communication. This doesn’t have to be in person, but can also materialise across long distances with the right strategy and tactics. Forrester’s “How To Make Hybrid Work” report highlights types of collaboration to create a seamless world of collaboration within a business:

- **Offering always-on collaboration spaces.** As a method of serendipitously bumping into random colleagues that many executives believe to be important and foster innovation, some aspects of in-person collaboration can be simulated digitally. 3DICC, AltspaceVR, Sophya and other vendors tailor these environments to create virtual workspaces that enable the “bumping” into each other.

- **Synchronous and asynchronous communication.** Most businesses understand the value that synchronous videoconferences bring to cross-functional teams. Asynchronous collaboration enables flexibility across both time and space, which often occurs among cross-functional teams. Software solutions like Slack and Teams help people track and execute shared work while also driving rich, topic-based conversations for ideation and decision-making.

- **Redesigning in-office technology to foster remote inclusivity.** For any meeting of five or more participants, someone is likely to be remote, and this should require conference room design changes. Top areas of investment include better cameras, digital whiteboards, improved speakers – or devices that can do all these things, such as Microsoft Surface Hub. This way, meetings will become seamless across distances.
These tactics require, for most organisations, some type of network transformation.

**Forrester recommends:**

- **Making sure your house is in order.** Automating and virtualising the network has been—and continues to be—a long journey. Unlike in the past, a networking organisation can’t just go out and buy products and technologies to make the network run better. It’s becoming software-driven. Documentation, goals, metrics, processes and skills must be in place first to avoid incurring technical debt. Applying automation to an organisation unprepared for it will be a disastrous waste of money. You need to build a relatively high robotics quotient (RQ) to properly leverage the automation that many networking transformational initiatives require.

- **Assessing your resources and accepting the limitations.** Network transformation can be a long road that many companies can’t wait to happen. Assess if it makes economic sense for the internal team to design, deploy and manage a network transformation, or if it should leverage services from the provider market. If the entire network isn’t a business competitive differentiator, then consider leveraging the expertise of a partner to help with certain areas, like SD-WAN or security services. Not only can this speed up the network transformation, but it will also allow networking professionals to focus on the competitive differentiators of the network, such as LAN inside a plant, a retail store or a hospital.

- **Creating a cross-functional team with security, networking and business professionals.** Network transformation strategy can’t exist without a full security strategy or business input. Historically, security has been the biggest hurdle to digital initiatives and networking transformations. To mitigate issues, networking and security teams should come together and use Forrester’s Zero Trust Edge model to help build out the strategy in conjunction with a business-wide networking fabric strategy. The teams might realise that a single provider can check networking and security requirements and help pave the way for a quicker and more successful deployment.
Check out our on-demand webinar

featuring Andy Linham, Senior Strategy Manager for Fixed Connectivity at Vodafone Business, and his guest speaker Andre Kindness, Principal Analyst at Forrester to learn how technology has adapted and innovated to support our new working lives.