ICXI-POST newsbriefing

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Introduction From The President

Back to Work...or not? The Potential Impact of a Hybrid World of Work on the Customer Experience.

As the so called new normality evolves to become normality what is driving organisations to sustain and improve their customers experiences in the world of working from home(WFH).

A recent BBC survey by "YouGov" identified that 22% of organisational leaders agree that home working is here to stay all of the time and 33% agree that it is here to stay some of the time while 79% say it is unlikely ever to return to the way it was. Interviews identified that many employees say they prefer to work from home as it gives them an improved work life balance and also has many other advantages and that they do not wish to return to the pre-covid situation. But is it their choice to make? Should the employer have the right to make that decision for is it not a case of "*He who pays the piper calls the tune*"? Or is the shortage of skilled talent in many sectors moving the pendulum in the favour of the employee?

One truth is that the resolution of the equation will be different for every organisation depending upon their customer proposition and their competition in their sector. A trucking company or a
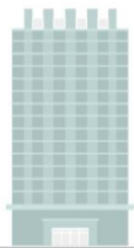
79% of senior business leaders and
70% of general public surveyed
said it's likely that people will never return to offices at the same rate as before the pandemic

Source: YouGov for BBC   BBC

window cleaner clearly, no pun intended, cannot work from home whereas many, particularly in the service economy sectors, are able to almost fully function without a central hub or office. However so far it appears that the customer's needs are not the primary consideration in coming to the right solution. The debate appears to centre around the perceived benefits to the employee and the logistical challenges faced by an employer who decides to move to a fully or partial working from home (WFH) operational platform. The impact on the customer experience appears to be at best implied and at worst completely unconsidered in the decision making process

The Threats and Opportunities

Customers are still customers and their expectations are just as high and their impatience with poor service becoming greater as the acceptance of Covid 19 as an excuse for poor service has moved from understandable to intolerable. Those organisations recognising this are already on the move with their hybrid world of work strategies however a report by *survicate.com* points out

Any company not doing so will be left in the dust. Companies with a stellar digital customer experience can command premiums of up to 25% on their products.

On the other hand, a poor CX can lose company customers; over 33% of customers would consider switching to the competition after just one incident.

CX has become so important that researchers predict it will overtake price and product as the top competitive differentiator. With the stakes higher than ever.

https://survicate.com/customer-experience/customer-experience-trends/

Nothing new in those facts but the fact that so many organisations still appear not yet to have responded is both sad news for their customers and consequently for the future of their organisations.

The Good, The Bad and the Marginally Less Handsome

Experience is showing that there are basically three main categories of hybrid service providers with varying potential on the customer experience delivered
1.   Those who have effective systems and engaged staff,
2.   Tthose who have good systems but un-engaged staff and
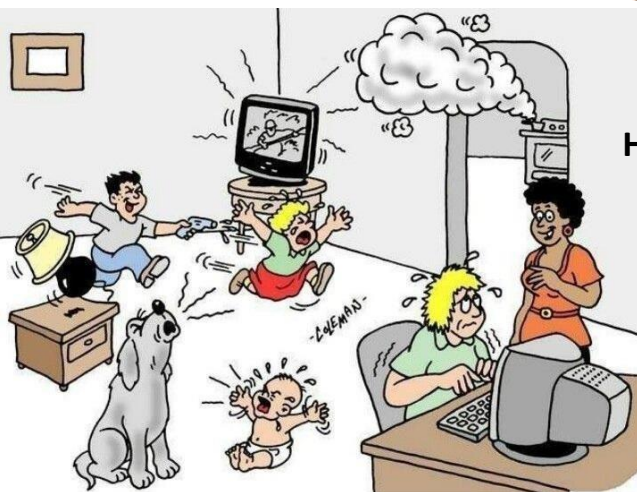3.   Those who have neither with the consequent impact on how customers are treated.

High Customer Experience Potential = 100%

High Customer Experience Potential = 0%

I won't be logging in today…. the dog ate my password

High Customer Experience Potential = ???%

The Situation is Not Straightforward – Messy!

There are a range of viewpoints from all sides of the issue with one observer describing the present situation as "Messy" but increasingly a part of operational reality - According to the latest official figures, the proportion of workers who did at least some work from home in 2021 increased to 37%, up from 27% the previous year. However there appears to be no consensus on the right way forward either between or within any of the key groups

Management
Managers raised concerns that creativity in the workplace would be affected.
Half of 530 senior leaders also surveyed by polling organisation YouGov for the BBC said that workers staying at home would adversely affect both creativity and collaboration - against just 38% of the general public.
Bosses at big firms such as investment bank Goldman Sachs and tech giant Apple have rejected calls for more flexibility, with the former even calling working from home an "aberration".
Managers and members of the public surveyed for the BBC agreed, however, that neither productivity nor the economy would be harmed by continuing work-from-home policies.

Some organisations face the issue of too much office space due to WFH while one major research company enjoying major growth in the pandemic now has staff numbers at levels which mean that their offices under guideline rules are not big enough for all staff to be in the office at the same time, so 100% return to work not possible so they are having to schedule meetings when key teams need to be together in the office.

Employees
One respondent joined TalkTalk July. She said*: "I'm more productive when I am in the office because it's more of a professional environment and you get to see people."*
Though she says she will still take the opportunity to work from home some days.
Another respondent found big benefits to logging on for the last 16 months, so avoiding expensive coffee shops to cutting down on travel time.
"*My health and carbon footprint have never been better. I'm no longer commuting 92 miles a day and I'm more productive."*
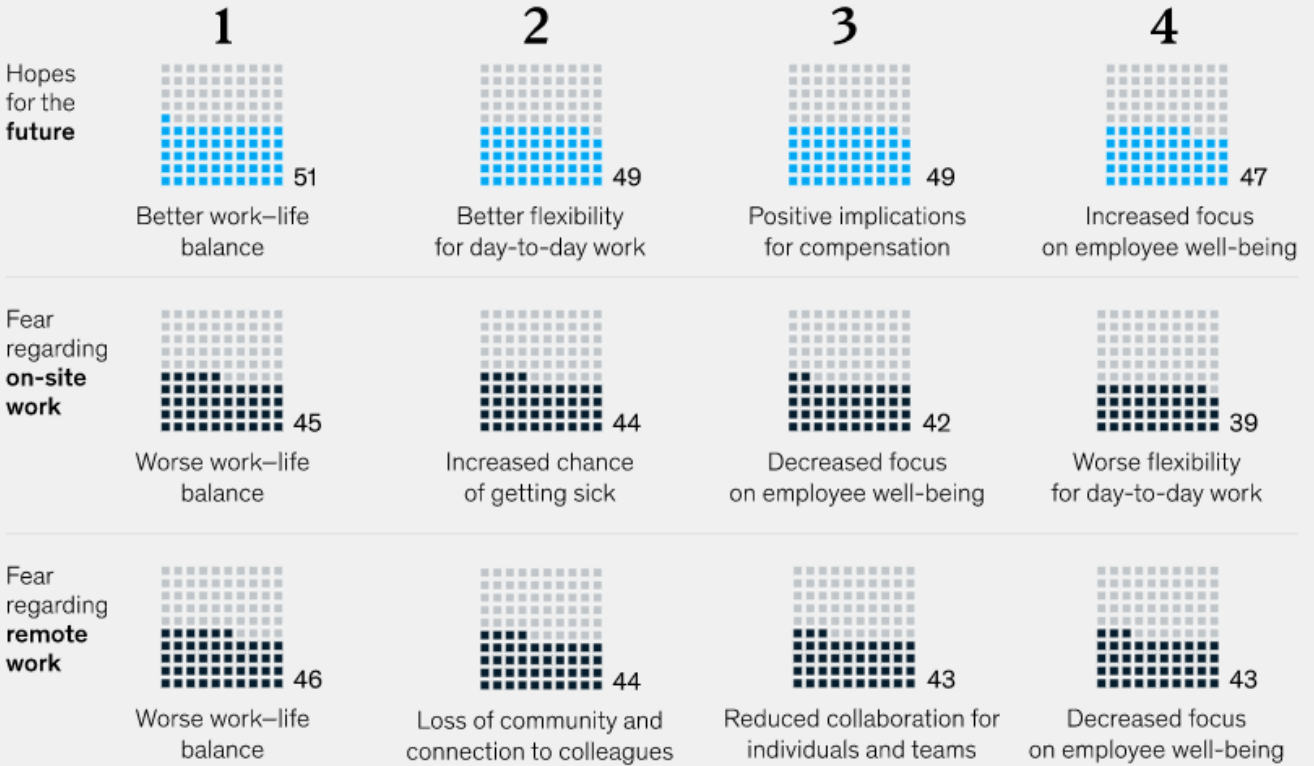For another *"It used to be that people would fit their lives around their work. Covid is teaching people that it doesn't work that way any more", people are turning down opportunities because they don't offer remote working."*
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-58559179
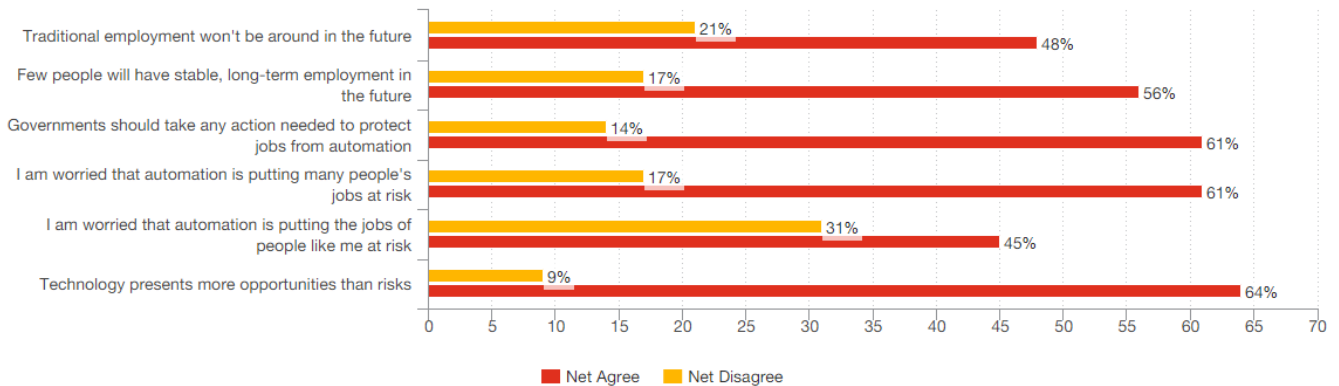
What are the Employee Priorities?

Employee hopes and fears for the future reflect a focus on flexibility, well-being, and compensation

Employees' top 4 hopes and fears, % survey participants

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Hopes for the future	51 Better work–life balance	49 Better flexibility for day-to-day work	49 Positive implications for compensation	47 Increased focus on employee well-being
Fear regarding on-site work	45 Worse work–life balance	44 Increased chance of getting sick	42 Decreased focus on employee well-being	39 Worse flexibility for day-to-day work
Fear regarding remote work	46 Worse work–life balance	44 Loss of community and connection to colleagues	43 Reduced collaboration for individuals and teams	43 Decreased focus on employee well-being

Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Net Disagree	Net Agree
Traditional employment won't be around in the future	21%	48%
Few people will have stable, long-term employment in the future	17%	56%
Governments should take any action needed to protect jobs from automation	14%	61%
I am worried that automation is putting many people's jobs at risk	17%	61%
I am worried that automation is putting the jobs of people like me at risk	31%	45%
Technology presents more opportunities than risks	9%	64%

■ Net Agree   ■ Net Disagree

Base: 32,517 respondents

https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/upskilling/hopes-and-fears.html

Customers

Customer expectations are soaring during Covid-19, and this indicates the need for companies to make customer interactions more human and relatable.
Customers want

  Attention To Detail
  Simpler and faster service.
  To share more and have a lower tolerance to ineffective service delivery
Customer needs and expectations are always on the rise, and during a pandemic, the bar has only gone up. Experience shows just how important customer support is in winning over the trust and loyalty of customers. It's not enough if you have a great product or offer discounts. The way you interact with customers and fix their issues will determine whether they stay with your brand or jump ship.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/02/04/how-the-pandemic-has-impacted-customer-expectations/
See ICXI Newsletter Issue 3 for More customer views on this subject

Even Government Guidance is Unclear

In England, Prime Minister Boris Johnson recommended a "gradual return to work" over the summer as coronavirus restrictions eased.
 Across the rest of the UK, people are still being advised to keep clocking on remotely where possible.

So the right way ahead is far from clear. Consensus on what is needed is unavailable and a one-size-fits-all solution is unlikely to be available. The only immutable truth is that customers are the only source of revenue for all organisations and it may be extremely unwise to create the design of any new remote world of working strategy without taking their needs into consideration. The way ahead clearly requires to meet the needs of three primary stakeholders.

Moving Forward

The importance of the customer to the organisation raises the question as to whether a hybrid home working approach is something that should be left to chance or made up on the fly or should there be a serious policy and strategic review of the organisation's future proposition to its customers which aims to create a hybrid world of work platform which seeks to provide the optimum solution to the **three** key stakeholder groups?
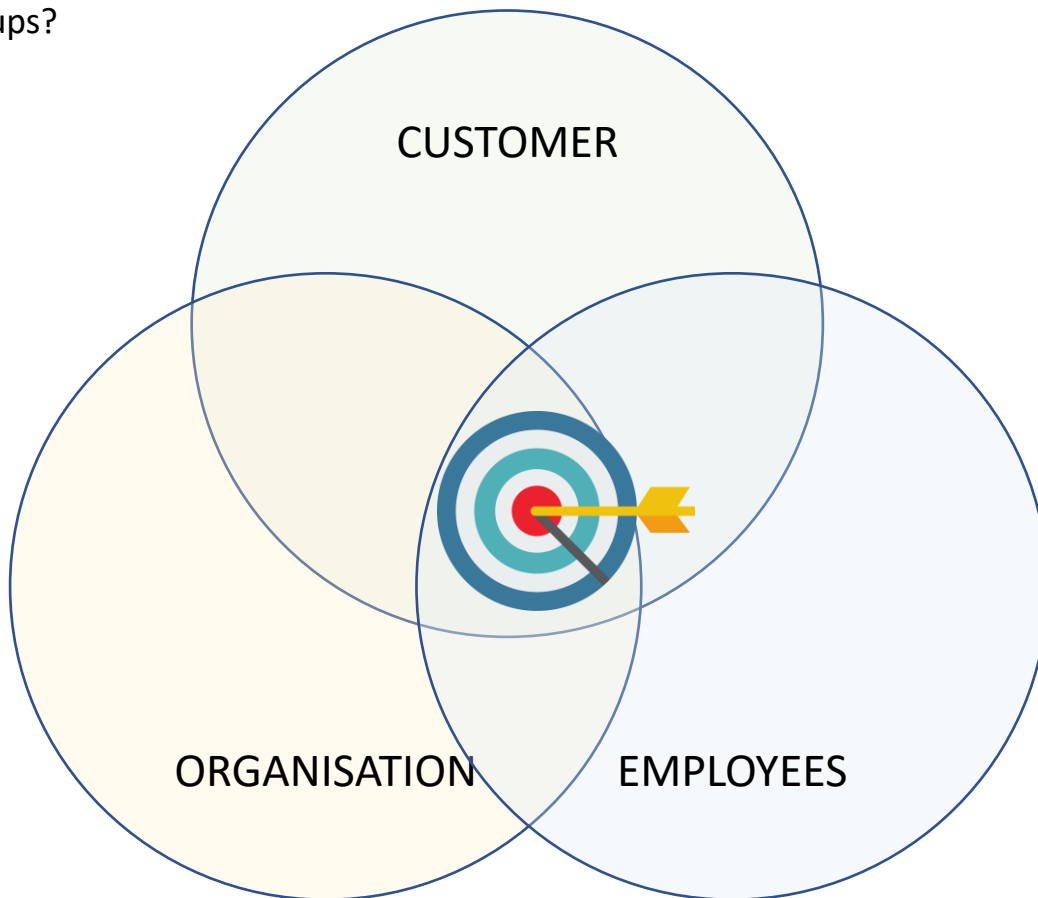
Is Technology the Answer?

It is undoubtedly true that the advance of technology in every aspect of customer experience management has played, and will continue to play an important role. However some sectors more readily adapt to technological support than others and some customer segments are more easily serviced through technology than others. Remote working from home in almost every case does require the use of some form of technology which in some cases may require a substantial commitment to redesign and cost if it is to truly develop and retain a competitive edge for the organisation and satisfaction for its customers. See a case study on redesign from Avon
https://vimeopro.com/egain/video-bites/video/180193127

Some Considerations In Scoping the Issue

The International Customer Experience Institute's 5 P's Model can provide a useful template for developing the scope of a WFH strategy.

	Now
Policies	Is a WFH approach suitable in your sector in both the short and long term?
	Are you customers supportive of the idea or not and to what degree and on what terms?
	How will you customer proposition be affected?
	What will be the effect on the organisational culture?
	What will be the strengths and weaknesses of the approach?
	Will it retain/create competitive advantage?
Products /Services	What percentage of your products and service are able to be delivered and managed by WFH employees?
	What will be the impact on prices/costs/revenue and profits?
Places	What will be the effect and/or changes on the current real estate/property/facilities of the organisation?
	What are the cost/revenue implications?
Processes	To what extent are the legacy systems capable of maintaining current operations and developing future growth?
	What is the ROI on any investment in process and technology innovation?
	Is on going customer journey mapping and other emotional and physical customer satisfaction research integrated into the strategy?
	Will omni –channel technology be a part of the strategic future?
People	Are the WHF/options/needs of all employees understood?
	How will future performance effectiveness/skill development and career progression be monitored/measured an implemented?

Some Key Pointers
It is important to try to sustain a single culture in the organisation and to prevent the "working from home" part of the organisation from developing into yet another organisational us-and-them silo which thinks/acts and behaves almost as a separate organisation. This is particularly important in organisations whose customers have and frequently use multi channel access.

More generally in *"A Leader's Guide to Developing a Work-From-Home Strategy"* by Gallup the following key points are identified

The Organisation
Examine the organization's business needs, consider the culture and determine the potential impact on customers when making remote work decisions. Leadership decisions during a crisis leave a lasting impression.
Along with financial risks and opportunities, leaders need to consider the following culture-related questions:
> *1   Consistency: Does our decision convey our culture?*
> *2   Clarity: Is there a hidden or unclear agenda behind the decision?*
> *3   Authenticity: Is our rationale credible?*

The Role
An optimal remote work role meets three criteria:
> *1   Employees can perform their duties outside of an on-site workplace.*
> *2   Most of the role's tasks and processes are well-defined.*
> *3   The role does not require highly interdependent work for success*

To evaluate which teams are best suited for consistent remote work, consider the following:

The Team
Many employees are feeling more team-oriented now. Employees have performed heroically to adapt to a new, challenging work environment. But not every team will thrive long term in a virtual work environment. When managed poorly, remote work can dramatically erode productivity.
> *1   Interdependency of team members: Do team members frequently work on detailed, complex projects that require intense partnership? Interdependent work requires more than simple communication. To complete the work, multiple team members must provide direct input in a coordinated way.*
> *2   Dynamics of team member contributions: Which roles may cause bottlenecks that could affect downstream work?*
> *3   Team engagement: Is the manager equipped to manage well through remote work challenges?*
> *4   Trust: Has the team achieved past accomplishments in the face of challenges and proven the team members' ability to depend on each other?*

The Individual

More than half of WFH workers say they would prefer to continue working remotely as much as possible once restrictions on businesses and school closures are lifted. Millions of U.S. workers are reporting high levels of emotional distress during the pandemic.

Among U.S. full-time and part-time workers, daily worry increased from 37% before the crisis to 47% in late April to mid-May 2020. Reported stress also increased, from 48% to 58% in the same time period.

Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday?

%Yes   ■ Before the crisis   ■ Late April to mid-May 2020

WORRY
37%
47%
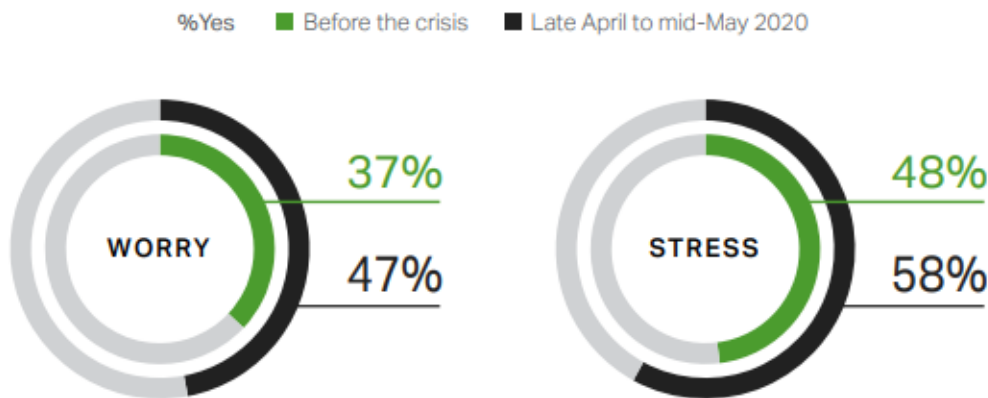
STRESS
48%
58%

Other research reports on stress creating a higher risk of "Burn Out" among WHF employees and to mitigate this Gallup goes on to suggest the following management approach.

Managers who want to create successful work-from-home plans for their team members need to evaluate the following criteria for each person :

1   Readiness and comfort: Is this person comfortable with the protocols and precautions that the organization is implementing? What are the individual's health and safety concerns — for themselves and their family?

2   Life circumstances: What personal demands is this person experiencing regarding childcare, elder care or for tending to sick family members? What type of transportation is required for the person to return to the work site, and is it available? Does the person have a well-defined space at home that is suitable for productive, engaging long-term remote work?

3   Performance: How has this individual performed before and after shifting to at-homework? Tracking and supporting low performers may be more difficult from a distance.

4   Strengths: Even if a role aligns well with remote work, it is important to consider that people have different talents and, therefore, different ways of achieving the same outcome. Some people work remotely with a high degree of success despite minimal interventions. Others may be in the same role, but they perform better with the interactions and structure of on-site work.

https://www.gallup.com/workplace/310988/covid-19-working-from-home-guide.aspx?thank-you-report-form=1

Final Word

WFH is a reality that to some degree will impact, either directly or indirectly through their supply chain almost every organisation and its ability to deliver an upper quartile customer experience. The solution will be unique to every organisation but getting it right creates the opportunity of greater revenue and growth and getting it wrong creates an even greater risk of organisational decline where both customers and employees potentially on the same side of the resolution equation.

Recommended Reading

https://www.gallup.com/workplace/310988/covid-19-working-from-home-guide.aspx?thank-you-report-form=1

https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/what-employees-are-saying-about-the-future-of-remote-work

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-58559179

https://survicate.com/customer-experience/customer-experience-trends/

https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/future-of-work-from-home-for-service-and-support-employees

https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/02/04/how-the-pandemic-has-impacted-customer-expectations/

https://innovature.ai/how-we-keep-our-customers-happy-during-covid-19/

https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/upskilling/hopes-and-fears.html

Recommended Watching

https://vimeopro.com/egain/video-bites/video/180193127

The ICXI One Question Quiz

Does your organisation have a WFH team(s) and have you developed a full strategic review to address the needs of next three years? ☐ YES

If " No" are you comfortable that now is not a good time to start? ☐ NO

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