

Elevate Human Performance With Workforce Enablement

Executive Overview: The Workforce Enablement Playbook

by David K. Johnson

May 2, 2016

Why Read This Report

What's missing from most workforce technology strategies is an understanding of what makes people truly engaged and productive employees and how this relates to customer experience and financial performance for the company. To gain that understanding and put it into practice, infrastructure and operations (I&O) professionals should use an approach Forrester calls "customer-obsessed workforce enablement" to rethink how to deliver technology to the people who drive the business. This executive overview explains the factors forcing this reassessment and how Forrester's workforce enablement playbook helps you ensure that your company's employees have the technology they need to do their best work with Forrester's "discover, plan, act, and optimize" approach.

Forrester reviews and revises this report periodically for continued relevance and accuracy; we are updating this edition to factor in new ideas on workforce enablement.

Key Takeaways

I&O Leaders Must Get To Know Flow

As the pioneering psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi showed, workers who achieve a state of cognitive flow can be more than twice as productive. To achieve high productivity in their work, people need autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

I&O Leaders Must Make Employee Productivity Their Top Priority

The challenge for I&O leaders in a world of empowered workers is to inject flexibility back into the efficiency they've been driving toward and shift from a model of delivery to one of enablement. Doing so requires a new approach to how companies provide technology for employees, which Forrester calls agile workforce enablement.

Use This Playbook To Empower Workers With The Tools To Drive Your Business

Forrester's workforce enablement playbook provides you with all the tools you'll need to realize your vision for empowering your workforce and guides you through the discover, plan, act, and optimize phases.

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by [David K. Johnson](#)

with [Christopher Voce](#), [Christian Kane](#), [J.P. Gownder](#), [Michele Pelino](#), [Laura Koetzle](#),
[Michelle Mai](#), and [Diane Lynch](#)

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Workforce Enablement Is About Improving Human Performance At Work

When I&O professionals seek guidance from Forrester on their workforce enablement strategy, their questions typically range from asking about specific technologies like virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) to tactical questions about how to implement a bring-your-own-device (BYOD) program, improve support for remote workers, and save money. Only a handful stop to consider how their decisions and investments will affect the performance and productivity of their company's workforce. Seeking those answers is critical for your business, as:

- › **When you have happy employees, you get higher customer satisfaction and profits.** While many have written about the virtues of having happier employees, only recently has research been able to accurately quantify the impact in business terms. In a multiyear study with 300,000 data points, published in 2013, Dr. Tae-Youn Park and Dr. Jason D. Shaw showed that an increase in employee turnover from 12% to 22% reduces total workforce productivity by 40% and reduces the organization's financial performance by 26%.¹ Another related study showed that companies with happier employees enjoy 81% higher customer satisfaction and half the employee turnover. The reason is simple: A passion for serving customers is a choice that employees make, often several times a day. When they're happier, they're more likely to make the right choices, even if it's harder, and they're more likely to stay with the company.
- › **When you help employees improve their performance, you get happier employees.** In 2010, Dr. Teresa Amabile and Dr. Stephen J. Kramer of the Harvard Business School made a groundbreaking discovery in their organizational psychology research. For decades, organizations have been using methods such as pay-for-performance, recognition, good benefits, and social programs to keep employees happy, believing that happy employees would perform better. While it's true that happy employees do perform better, this research proves that these methods aren't always effective and, worse, are often counterproductive. What makes people happiest at work, they found, is getting things done — making progress every day toward work they know is important. If you can help employees improve their own work performance through technology, they'll be happier.

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Forrester Research, Inc., 60 Acorn Park Drive, Cambridge, MA 02140 USA
+1 617-613-6000 | Fax: +1 617-613-5000 | [forrester.com](#)

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Elevate Human Performance With Workforce Enablement

Executive Overview: The Workforce Enablement Playbook

Your Workforce Technology Strategy Should Elevate Employee Productivity

There are no universal methods for measuring knowledge worker productivity because unlike production work, it's complex, nonsequential, and self-paced.² As a result, organizations can't evaluate productivity in monetary terms or balance it with other more tangible concerns, such as security, so they set the wrong priorities and waste money.³ Until the means to measure knowledge worker productivity reliably emerges, you can still do much to foster it by thinking about workforce technology differently. It's within your reach to understand what top employee productivity looks like and what it requires so you can design an optimal technology working environment. To create such environments, I&O leaders need to know that:

- › **Flow is the highest state of human performance, especially in knowledge work.** Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has studied cognitive flow for four decades, and the key insight from his work, for our purposes, is that what sets high performers apart from average performers is their ability to self-regulate their attention and stay in a state of flow in their work.⁴ When they can do this, they will be at least 127% and as much as 47 times more productive than their peers will be.⁵ Because so much of the technology environment that employees now depend on is outside their control, competent people in I&O roles must make sure that nothing gets in the way of employees' ability to focus and get their work done.⁶
- › **Flow is fragile and requires intrinsic motivation, information resources, and support.** While I&O plays a vital role in employees' ability to sustain flow, there are myriad other factors outside of I&O's control, such as company culture; each individual's experience, motivation, and commitment to their work; incentive plans; and the work itself.⁷ This presents an opportunity for I&O leaders to work hand-in-hand with human resources and executive leaders to learn about flow and find new ways to work together toward a common goal of elevating productivity for the organization.
- › **Flexibility and unfettered access to information resources are vital.** Knowledge work requires employees to adapt quickly to new information, rapidly locate information they need, and engage deeply with their technology environments to complete their work.⁸ The ideal work environment will be different for each person, so the more time employees spend with their devices every day, the more flexibility they'll need to tailor their digital work environments to the ways they work best.⁹ They also need to have nearly instant access to task-critical information as they work, so organizations must give much more thought to the design and accessibility of information systems in the context of how employees actually work with them. Finally, performance of the systems they interact with is paramount, or unwanted distractions will derail their attention.

Elevating Productivity Reintroduces I&O To The Business

It's not enough to want to help; it's time for concrete action to make things better. The I&O leader's challenge is to inject flexibility back into the environment and shift from a delivery model (I give you what I think you need) to an enablement model (I enable you to choose what works best for you). Yesterday's model advanced only an IT agenda — it emphasized efficiency over business value.¹⁰

Elevate Human Performance With Workforce Enablement

Executive Overview: The Workforce Enablement Playbook

Today, the goal is simple: Create an environment where employees can access and use the technology they need to do their best work. The future of how companies provide technology for employees is what Forrester calls customer-obsessed workforce enablement:

Employee experiences derived from a customer-obsessed culture, with leadership, technology, and resources all aligned to help employees be as motivated and productive as they can be in their work to win, serve, and retain customers.

The customer-obsessed workforce enablement approach requires fundamental changes to:

- › **The people who make up your workforce and I&O staff.** To truly understand what employees need to do their jobs requires empathy, curiosity, and listening skills. Yet we've conditioned I&O pros to have all of the answers when employees need them, and we measure their performance on how quickly they can deliver those answers. It's no wonder that employees are choosing to enable themselves — it's easier and faster than trying to convince someone who lacks empathy and isn't listening to them when they say they need something different.¹¹ I&O mindsets and behaviors will need to change, and that will require learning, personal development, and new methods for injecting awareness of what drives employee happiness and productivity into I&O's operating model, just as companies do for their end customer experience.¹²
- › **The processes that shape your workforce technology operational model.** Process change will require a rebalancing of responsibility. Self-service is no longer a question of how you can cut down on help desk traffic but rather how you can give employees the ability to take care of their own technology. It doesn't stop at the individual level. In I&O, we can teach people how to use a tool, but their coworkers will help them learn how to use that tool for their jobs; thus, companies are using social tools to allow employees to share ideas to expand the notion of self-service. Managing this complex new technology reality is daunting. In fact, you'll depend on people outside your organization to help fix problems. You'll need to virtualize these processes so you can take advantage of the Genius Bar and the Geek Squad when technology breaks.
- › **The technology that lays the foundation for enablement.** 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.

How Forrester Can Help You Empower Your Workforce

In the workforce enablement playbook, we show that improving human performance at work is the most important objective for workforce technology strategy and that employee motivation, customer experience, and financial performance depend on it. We also provide the tools you need to shift priorities and reshape your I&O organization to focus on enabling performance. The workforce enablement

Elevate Human Performance With Workforce Enablement

Executive Overview: The Workforce Enablement Playbook

playbook builds on a solid foundation of research into customer-obsessed employee cultures and decades of research into human performance and productivity at work.¹³ It delivers pragmatic, actionable advice for all aspects of workforce enablement, from assessing your workforce's needs to enterprise mobility management best practices to cloud workspace technologies to step-by-step guides for BYOD success, including soft benefits in your business case (see Figure 1). This playbook helps I&O leaders reshape the way they enable their companies' employees in a four-step process:

- 1. Discover: Identify the trends, examine the landscape, and justify the business case.** Before starting on this journey, look at the long-term vision for workforce enablement, understand the broader industry landscape, and assess the business case for change. The discover phase of this playbook answers the following questions: Do I have the right long-term vision for workforce enablement? What's happening in the technology industry that will influence this vision? What is the business case for enabling (instead of provisioning) my workforce? Can I apply customer experience improvement methods like journey mapping to more clearly understand the technology needs of employees? The discover phase usually includes fielding surveys, conducting interviews and workshops, and developing personas that accurately reflect the needs of your organization's employees.
- 2. Plan: Assess your maturity; develop your strategic plan and technology road maps.** After you've gotten buy-in for your vision of the future of workforce enablement, you'll need to assess your level of maturity and identify the gaps between your current state and your goal. The results of that assessment will allow you to formulate a strategy that outlines the mission, scope, goals, and objectives of your workforce enablement program. Once you've defined your strategy, create a five-year road map for capital investment in workforce technologies like client virtualization, services, and staffing to achieve your desired state.
- 3. Act: Invest in your organization, processes, technologies, and services.** Strategy in hand, you can execute on your workforce enablement plans with confidence. The act phase of the playbook answers the following people, process, and technology questions: What specific skills and staff will I need, and when? What processes do I need to develop and enforce? Should I build and manage my own technology capabilities or use external service providers? Which specific vendors and service providers should I consider?
- 4. Optimize: Manage your performance, develop metrics, and manage change.** In a rush to move on to the next critical project, I&O organizations too often skimp on user experience, continuous improvement, and change management efforts. That's a mistake, especially with workforce enablement, which touches every employee at your company. I&O leaders must carve out the time for their teams to create metrics to measure their performance, benchmark against best practices, and manage change and incorporate employees' feedback on ways to improve.

FIGURE 1 The Workforce Enablement Playbook

DISCOVER	PLAN	ACT	OPTIMIZE
Vision	Assessment	Organization	Performance Management
Predictions	Strategic Plan	Processes	Benchmarks
Business Case	Experience	Tools And Technology	Continuous Improvement

What It Means

Flow Redefines The Role Of I&O In Fostering An Engaged Workforce

Workforce technology is personal. For knowledge workers, it’s the most important tool they use, other than their brains. Thus, if employees feel empowered to apply technologies to the way their minds function, technologies tailored to the task at hand, they’ll be able to satisfy some of their fundamental human needs and can become engaged employees. According to Csikszentmihalyi, three conditions must be present for this to happen: autonomy, mastery, and purpose.¹⁴ For future success, I&O leaders must understand and apply the psychology and neuroscience of motivation and flow so they can actually fulfill the very purpose for technology in the workplace to begin with — employee effectiveness. Thus, to help employees, you’ll need to ground your policies and investments in a thorough understanding of how they work, the technologies available, and the capabilities of the I&O organization. And those happy employees will put all their knowledge and technology-enhanced capabilities at the service of your customers.

Elevate Human Performance With Workforce Enablement

Executive Overview: The Workforce Enablement Playbook

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Analyst Inquiry

Ask a question related to our research; a Forrester analyst will help you put it into practice and take the next step. Schedule a 30-minute phone session with the analyst or opt for a response via email.

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Analyst Advisory

Put research into practice with in-depth analysis of your specific business and technology challenges. Engagements include custom advisory calls, strategy days, workshops, speeches, and webinars.

Learn about interactive advisory sessions and how we can support your initiatives.

Endnotes

- ¹ Source: Tae-Youn Park and Jason D. Shaw, "Turnover Rates and Organizational Performance: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2013.
- ² Source: Yuri W Ramirez and David A Nembhard, "Measuring knowledge worker productivity: A taxonomy," *Journal of Intellectual Capital*; 2004.
- ³ Source: Johannes Ritter and Frank Roettgers, *The Definitive Guide to Getting Your Budget Approved! - Measure Intangibles to Calculate Your ROI Business Case*, Solution Matrix, 2008.
- ⁴ Source: David Rock, *Your Brain at Work: Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long*, Harper Business, 2009.
- ⁵ Source: John E. Hunter, Frank L. Schmidt, and Michael K. Judiesch, "Individual differences in output variability as a function of job complexity," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, February 1990.
- ⁶ Technology management leaders understand the psychology and neuroscience of motivation and flow, and as a result, they can actually undermine the very purpose for technology in the workplace to begin with — employee effectiveness. One key component is autonomy; successful employees feel as if they have control over what they work on and how they do it. They need access to the methods and tools that work best for them and a voice in the decision-making process. See the "[Workforce Enablement Defined: Elevate Productivity And Engagement](#)" Forrester report.

Source: John E. Hunter, Frank L. Schmidt, and Michael K. Judiesch, "Individual differences in output variability as a function of job complexity," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, February 1990.
- ⁷ Source: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.

Elevate Human Performance With Workforce Enablement

Executive Overview: The Workforce Enablement Playbook

- ⁸ Source: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.
- ⁹ Each digital workspace delivery technology category and vendor has unique strengths and weaknesses; you must understand these nuances and choose the right tools for the job. Force-fitting the wrong technology can have disastrous results for productivity and engagement. See the [“Build Digital Workspace Delivery Systems To Give Employees The Right Tools For Their Job”](#) Forrester report.
- ¹⁰ Today’s customers don’t have to do business with you — they have to want to do business with you. This dynamic forces your firm to understand and respond to their individual needs and expectations. To deliver on those end customer expectations, I&O leaders and their teams must adopt a dual agenda, consisting of business technology (BT) — the technology, systems, and processes to win, serve, and retain customers — and information technology (IT) — the technology, systems, and processes to support and transform an organization’s internal operations. See the [“Establish The Business Case For I&O Transformation”](#) Forrester report.
- ¹¹ A growing mosaic of technologies we call digital workspace delivery systems is evolving to offer optimal user experiences for Microsoft Windows-based desktops and applications across devices, locations, and work styles, which help employees work more effectively. See the [“Build Digital Workspace Delivery Systems To Give Employees The Right Tools For Their Job”](#) Forrester report.
- ¹² Journey maps are a powerful tool for getting stakeholders on the same page about what matters most and give I&O pros and architects a clear vision to rally around for aligning technology architecture with the employee experience. See the [“Use Employee Journey Mapping To Improve Workforce Productivity”](#) Forrester report.
- ¹³ Once employees have bought into the transformation, organizations must change supporting policies and processes to reinforce the new behaviors. This means updating, training, hiring, and compensation practices to support customer centricity. See the [“Seven Steps To Create And Sustain A Customer-Centric Culture”](#) Forrester report.
- ¹⁴ According to Csikszentmihalyi, these conditions spring from three qualities of the workplace culture. Autonomy: Successful employees feel as if they have control over what they work on and how they do it. They need access to the methods and tools that work best for them and a voice in the decision-making process. Mastery: The work environment, including their managers and the tools they use, should encourage people to continue to improve their skills toward mastery instead of hindering them. Purpose: Organizations should also work hard to infuse the work — even mundane work — with meaning by connecting it frequently to higher purposes such as improving the lives of customers, serving their communities, and making life better for others in important ways. Source: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.

We work with business and technology leaders to develop customer-obsessed strategies that drive growth.

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