As the business world emerges from a period of economic uncertainty, business leaders are setting positive growth expectations. After years of cost cutting, they are viewing investment in talent as fundamental to meeting their growth objectives and increasing their competitiveness. In a study of executives that spans 20 countries and 12 industries, over 75 percent of those surveyed plan to scale up their investments in human capital, with 65 percent planning to expand their workforce in the coming year. In every sector, digital technologies are changing the rules of business by enabling new business models and leveling the playing field. In the past, technology has been fundamental in helping organizations reduce costs and increase productivity. While this is still the case, digitization is dramatically changing our business landscape with the promise of increased opportunity and innovation.¹

Forces Shaping the Digital Workplace

Digital Technology

Digital technologies are creating a work environment that is increasingly interconnected and interdependent. As we approach the year 2020, advances in open communication platforms, video conferencing, and even holographic technology will bring instant, “zero-distance” communications to the workplace. Smart products, smart machines, and artificial intelligence will enhance our processes and make us more productive. Consumer technologies like social media, mobile connectivity, gesture-based interfaces, and wearable devices will find their way into the workplace providing better, faster access to information. As the lines continue to blur between professional and private lives, the workplace will need to embrace digital technologies to improve the way employees engage, communicate, and collaborate.

Globalization
Globalization and the growth of emerging markets will also impact the workplace, introducing new levels of cultural diversity. The flow of wealth into BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, China and India) has produced robust economies bolstered by a growing middle-class. Companies are rapidly expanding their operations and recruiting from outside their local ecosystems. Workplaces span continents and time zones.

The workplace of the future will be more diverse and sophisticated, bringing together different languages, cultures, and ways of working. Business leaders will need to create and nurture a work environment that embraces diversity and is multi-cultural and cosmopolitan. New policies and rules of engagement will be needed to accommodate a complex set of employee needs and expectations for the workplace.

Changing Demographics
We also expect global changes in demographics to impact work expectations. In 2020, for the first time in history, organizations will be tasked with managing the needs and expectations of five very different generations, each with unique learning styles, values, and expectations for work (see illustration below).

A Multi-Generational Workforce
With reciprocal mentoring, each generation can help the others master new skills and drive the business forward. The younger generations, for example, understand digital disruption and can help older generations learn new tools for increased efficiency and productivity. The older generations have deep knowledge and about the business, how it operates, and how decisions are made. They can help younger generations understand rules of engagement that are critical for business and career success.

Generation Z
Of the five demographics, Generation Z is expected to have the greatest impact shaping and defining the 2020 workforce. By 2020, Generation Z will make up almost 50 percent of the global workforce.7 Their influence comes not only from their size, but from their understanding of digital technology and their ability to guide the organization through digital transformation. Generation Z is the first “digital” generation to enter the workforce, having grown up with easy access to the Internet and persistent connectivity. They function on the immediacy of real-time insight and action and like to work in ways that are open and flexible. Constant connectedness is a fact of life for this group, with 75

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percent connecting within one hour of waking and nearly half remain connected for ten or more hours a day. As they enter the workplace, they will expect to continue using familiar technologies and operating in ways they prefer.

Accommodating the Expectations of Generation Z

Members of Generation Z will play an important role in the 2020 workplace and businesses are taking steps to attract them. They are modernizing their work processes and updating their policies to accommodate the expectations of this important demographic.

So what do they expect? They expect flexible, open, and collaborative work environments where they can use the same tools in the office as they do in their leisure time—tools for instant connection and immediate response, fast and easy collaboration, and unrestricted access to information. And these expectations are somewhat non-negotiable. A recent report, for example, found two thirds of current college students plan to ask about social media policies during job interviews, and 56 percent say they will not accept a job from a company that bans social media or, if they do, they will find ways to circumvent policies.

A variety of emerging digital technologies will empower Generation Z and shape the digital workplace. In the digital workplace, open information platforms and integrated applications will eliminate information silos and give employees better access to information from across the enterprise. Social networking, instant messaging, video-on-demand, blogs, and wikis will facilitate increased collaboration and knowledge sharing. Mobile devices and applications will empower a geographically dispersed, virtual workforce, connecting employees with content, processes and resources in their preferred environment for access anytime.

In addition, holographic technology will enable users to invoke workspaces anywhere by using interactive surfaces. By adopting these and other technologies, the digital workplace will cater to and empower a new generation of employees.

Other aspects of the Generation Z work ethic include transparency, self-reliance, flexibility, and personal freedom. When interviewed, 65 percent of younger generations felt that rigid hierarchies and outdated management styles failed to get the most out of younger recruits. They prefer working in an organization with a flat, decentralized organizational structure. They value open and transparent communication about the business and desire opportunities to share opinions and impact decisions. They also want flexibility in work hours and work location.

To accommodate the Generation Z work ethic, we will see a flattening of hierarchies and decentralization of control in the 2020 workplace. A flexible, collaborative model will revolutionize job functions, management methods, lines of authority, and employee expectations. Policies changes—ranging from a Bring-Your-Own-Device (BYOD) policy for mobile access, to policies for flexible work hours or working remotely—will cater to the desires of new generations for mobility and flexibility. Without a doubt, the 2020 workplace and the attitudes of employees toward work will be markedly different from today.

Preparing Today for the Workplace of Tomorrow

Globalization, digital technology, demographic changes, and the changing expectations of new generations are converging to produce the digital workplace. They are putting pressure on the organization to adapt and evolve. Leading organizations are already preparing their digital strategies to win the quest for top talent. They are embracing disruptive technologies and modernizing their HR practices. They are consolidating the technologies that promote an open, flexible, mobile, social, and innovative workplace on a proven Enterprise Information Management (EIM) platform.

When creating a digital workplace, organizations must implement an infrastructure that supports connectivity and collaboration while enabling compliance. Information governance will be a key requirement in 2020 and will be explored further in the next article in this series.

To learn more, you can visit our website and download the book, Digital Disrupt or Die: http://www.opentext.com/campaigns/digital-disrupt-or-die