A Workplace Strategy for the Digital Age

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How should our internal IT look in order to be a driving force for a company's success in the digital age? This proposal is based on all my learnings from the previous 15 years and especially the Agile and DevOps revolution in IT. It takes the concept of a Product Development Organization to apply everywhere and provides a sure path to increase productivity and improve culture through technology. Transforming Corporate IT into a Workplace product takes internal IT out of the proverbial basement and puts it in the front of the internal value chain. Most of the standard tooling for product development also fits the Workplace product. This proposal is written for a typical company that employs both modern web technologies like G Suite and cloud services as well as traditional technologies like Microsoft Office and data centers.

Vision and Purpose - Truly Customer Centric
The vision of the Workplace Product is to build the best employee experience in the world. We derive most of our competitive edge from the people working here. Improving the way we work will increase general productivity and enable us to attract the best talent.

The primary purpose is to provide a simple, efficient and stress-free work environment for all our employees, by enabling efficient communication and collaboration, removing productivity obstacles and automating manual processes. In choosing the right tools to support our company culture we shape a better work environment for everybody.

In general, we achieve the "best employee experience" by continuously optimizing for the user rather than the company. By applying the same design approach to our internal technical environment, as employed within our commercial technical products, we expect similar successful results. Being truly customer centric is our guiding principle.

Product Scope - Workplace
The scope of the Workplace product are all the devices and standard tools that our employees use for their daily work, e.g. Mac, Windows and Linux, office suites, chat and video conferencing software as well as other standard software. Specialized tools that are used by single or few departments and home-grown tools for business processes are out of scope and the responsibility of their respective departments. Central solutions for information storage, sharing and finding are a also core component of our Workplace landscape. A company-wide search is the main starting point of any information journey.

Workplace Culture
Workplace is all about people and technology. People are the most important part which is why we should first look at the culture and how our culture influences our work.

Being considerate and tolerant
extends from personal interaction into our work life. The way in which we work is the biggest catalyst for success or failure, and goes beyond the actual tool in use. For example,

in a mixed German/English company the German employees are very sensitive towards non-German speakers, writing initial emails in English if there is any doubt. However, with electronic communication and sharing data or work items, we see more of a "works for me" approach - regardless of the work environment of the recipient. A major focus of the Workplace product is to influence and develop a Workplace culture that supports the diversity of our employees and establish a Workplace toolset that fosters a more synergetic environment for everyone. Focusing on web applications as a common standard for collaborative tooling will address most of these problems.

Favoring company collaboration over personal productivity
does not come naturally to users, who tend to optimize for themselves. As most of our content is the result of extensive team work, the effect of choosing the right tool is significant. As long as the content is not finalized, it should be worked upon in tools that explicitly optimize for the team effort and collaboration, even at the cost of a limited feature set. The benefit of quickly aligning with stakeholders and contributors by far outweighs potential limitations. We will fulfill the product purpose of efficient communication and collaboration by motivating users to prefer suitable tools, prioritizing collaboration aspects in tool evaluation and development and ensure that all employees can participate in collaborative work without discrimination.

Communication habits and tools
have a big impact on our work climate. Users are at times overwhelmed by the amount of communication they receive. Returning after any absence typically starts with wading through emails, chat logs and social media updates - many not relevant any more. The combination of communication habits and tools can be blamed for that. As we organize our communication around topics and not around people we will be able to organize ourselves around tasks instead of discussions. Tools like Google Apps, Jira, GitHub and others that focus on collaborative work already support this mode, for example with @-mentions and assigning comments or tasks to others. Actively choosing chat, email and social media postings for the appropriate content will reduce the amount of interruptions users experience and increase the relevance of the messages. We will coach users towards adopting topic-centric forms of communication and choosing the right tools to have more relevant information and less irrelevant interruptions during their work.

Everybody is an IT specialist,
regardless of their job. No IT department could possibly automate all manual processes in all the company - there are simply too many. The only solution that scales with the company is users automating their own work however they can. We will invest into coaching and education to unlock the potential of citizen developers who enable their departments to work efficiently. The cloud solutions already available to us provide a sufficiently reliable and secure framework. To efficiently raise the IT knowledge of all colleagues we recommend to add basic coding and computer thinking skills to the general requirements for every job position. Let's go beyond manual labor on top of digital systems to truly use the information technology available to us to do our jobs in a smarter way.

Corner Stones
The second part of Workplace is the technology that we use. There are often many ways how to achieve an objective. The following product decisions shape the company Workplace with the goal to provide a simple, efficient and stress-free work environment for

all employees. They take existing standards and tradition into account and provide guidance to shape the future of work.

Primary work applications in the browser

solve many problems at once: The choice of the client Operating System is a matter of personal taste and part of the freedoms we give our users. We reduce client management efforts and increase operational efficiency. Users don't need to worry about their data any more. With web applications we can easily scale out with our workforce and provide solutions that are bigger than any single PC.

Focus on seamless integration and automation

is key for carving out a competitive edge, creating integrated data-driven workflows and automated processes spanning multiple tools. Mandatory pass-through authentication gives users convenience and the company access protection. With all new tools we put focus on APIs, access to all data, process automation and seamless integration.

Security and data protection

is the responsibility of every product. With Workplace this covers protecting against identity theft, common threats and data loss. We maintain employee devices according to security best practices. We aim to enable our users' work and maintain a healthy balance between user convenience and company protection.

Chromebooks

as fourth fully supported employee client OS further underline our strategy of web applications for work. They also provide lowest cost managed desktops for specialized workplaces. Voluntary adoption serves as a measure for the cloud migration of our work environment.

Google Apps and Microsoft Office

have both their place at work and do not represent a major conflict. We support both for our users and ensure that they get the best user experience possible. Users are free in their choice for personal work. Departments can choose their tools for their teamwork. From a company perspective Google Apps offers more data control, better collaboration and are cloud based web applications. We therefore recommend Google Apps as the "standard" office suite for general purpose work, collaborating with others and creating automation in the context of office documents. We will invest into coaching and education to enable users to solve complex problems and to automate their work with both tools.

Measure Success

The primary measurement instrument will be user surveys to provide quantitative data for the main points of the Workplace culture. Additionally we measure the amount of copy-paste transfers (manual labour instead of technical integration), the amount of internal email attachments (duplicating documents instead of collaborating centrally) and the amount of logins per day (weakly or not integrated systems). Expect to see significant positive results with the cultural change within 6-12 months and immediate increase in user satisfaction with solving specific problems like seamless integration.