

TJ: Hi, I'm TJ. And in this episode, we're going to talk about how enterprises all around the world are preparing to enable flexible workspaces to overcome the challenges of the next normal, while retaining employee productivity. To help us identify and understand how enterprises can benefit from this and at the same time, ensure the health and safety of their employees. Our guest is Nishant Sharma, Product Manager for intelligent automation and smart spaces. A part of the digital workplace services here at HCL Technologies. With more than five years of experience in the workplace domain, he is responsible for defining, incubating and creating the product roadmap strategy and offerings around the digital workplace solutions. He has also worked in multiple workplace client engagements, helped them plan their digital journey, and frequently works very closely with industry-leading analysts.

Welcome, Nishant.

Nishant Sharma: Hi TJ.

TJ: Thank you for joining us again.

Nishant Sharma: Thank you very much for having me here today. I hope all our listeners are healthy and safe.

TJ: I remember the last time when we met face to face, it was in March and here we are today. Six months of remote working and the recording of the first episode with you. What do you think about the preparedness of enterprises and how has been your work from home experience so far?

Nishant Sharma: Yes. Well, no one stipulated this situation, no employee, no enterprise. We are all, you know, very much into our routine life of going to work, daily mostly, and then suddenly six months of work from home and still continuing. Most of the organizations, enterprises were not habitual to this kind of setup and hence, faced a lot of trouble in adjusting initially. They were not prepared for such scenarios, data recovery sites were there, but only for cloud and data centres. There is no data recovery site for the workplace. And hence many customers came to us with the same query on how their employees can be enabled for work from home scenario. But I feel now both people and organizations have settled for this new arrangement and have as well-realized the productivity of their employees. But for reopening the workplace, enterprises are still working on their strategies and willingness of employees to come back. For me too, it took some time initially to get adapt to this new normal, but most of the interactions have started happening online. Travel was especially reduced for me and now this has become the normal. All the calls happen over Teams, Zoom. Do I miss interacting with the team members and going to the office? I am sure, you know, everyone is missing that.

TJ: Agreed. We have seen many changes in the way we work now and most of them are here to stay. You work very closely with many customers in devising their digital workplace for the future of work initiatives. According to you, how are the enterprises doing as on date and are they ready to reopen the workplace? And what are they looking at from workplace strategy standpoint?

Nishant Sharma: See many businesses throughout the world were required to shut down their operations due to COVID-19 pandemic. At this point in time, these mandatory shutdowns and restrictions are lifted, and businesses can reopen for essential employees. Now, I feel is the best time for CXOs to adopt a fluid roadmap towards building a safe and productive work environment for their employees. These enterprises are looking at multiple solutions to bring employees back to work, but flexible desk booking is one solution where we have seen good traction in the market. There are certain trends highlighted even by Gartner, which States that 74% organizations intend to shift some employees to remote work permanently, which I also feel strongly based on the recent customer interactions, which I had. Enterprises are right now looking at various solutions, which can enable a flexible workforce. They do have clarity on calling a limited workforce back to the office but do not have a firm plan as of now. They are also bringing their real estate facility and admin teams on call for an evaluation of solutions like desk booking, where their primary intention is to build a remote working environment. And when required employees can visit the office, but also keep control on how employees utilize the physical workspace. And also for some customers, they want to relook at their real estate footprint and reduce it.

TJ: As you mentioned that desk booking is a common requirement for many customers. Would you like to share some more thoughts on this?

Nishant Sharma: Sure. desk booking solution is not any new concept in the workplace domain. This has remained into existence from many years with very few enterprises leveraging it. It primarily enables the flexibility for employees who do not visit office daily. It can be a sales profile who are on the move most of the time or profiles, which demand travel and makes no sense to keep a dedicated seat. Because of COVID-19, the concept has been very well related with the current situation where employees are working from home, and there is no need to go to the office. Even after reopening, enterprises are not planning to call the full workforce back to the office for such scenarios, desk booking solution fits the best. There are many enterprises where they chargeback employees' team for the seat cost, which now need not be paid. Enterprises do not require the same physical workspace as they used to do earlier. And this is the best way to enable it. This will not only enable the next normal but also allow organizations to digitize their roadmap. CXOs need to focus on modernizing the core to enable remote working while ensuring employees have the right tools for enablement.

TJ: Interestingly, this can become a very common way for how employees will consume physical workspaces in the future. Could you kindly elaborate on this? What challenges will this eliminate?

Nishant Sharma: Yes. Sure. The first and foremost challenge, which enterprises look forward to solving that comes to my mind is around limiting the density and workflow of people coming to the office. An organization's business outcome will be directly proportional to its ability to design and deliver targeted continuous reskilling programs to empower the workforce with the new ways of working. With remote working here to stay for the foreseeable future, employers need to equip their workforce with the skills and tools necessary to stay productive and drive

significant business outcomes. There must be a solution powered by technology which can allow and let enterprises manage employees coming to the office. Additionally, it is important for them to identify profiles of employees which can fit into this because not all user profiles can work remotely. There are employees who need to visit office daily and need to have fixed desks to sit. It is important to identify employees who need a fixed desk and employees who need to come to the office on a requirement basis.

TJ: Moving towards business continuity plans and physical workspaces. Do you believe that organizations are going to reduce their real estate footprint with limited workforce coming to offices?

Nishant Sharma: As enterprises are already planning to reduce the workforce, coming to the office, there will be an obvious impact on the physical workspaces as well. This has also created an opportunity for enterprises to at least think about how they can reduce the office spaces, move away from the rented workspaces and create a more flexible working environment. But it would still be too early to comment on that. Most of the enterprises would go for a pilot approach. First, they want to test the solution for a limited set of employees on desk booking. And hence when the state comes, it will provide more clarity, but surely it seems to be the most probable scenario. The impact on operational costs are clear for any enterprise. Interestingly, there is another way to see this. There are enterprises which feel collaboration is done effectively in person only, and hence they do not want to proceed on this path and want to bring all the employees back to the office. This is going to be a collaborative decision of CTO, the Workplace Lead, HR team, as well as the Facility team on how this should be aligned with their enterprise roadmap.

TJ: Everyone has a different perspective on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected their businesses. For the ones who see this as an opportunity to revamp structures and capitalize on this opportunity, what would be your advice to them?

Nishant Sharma: Some of us were prepared and some of us were not, but all of us were caught off-guard by the magnitude and the suddenness of the recent challenges. That is why it is important to be adaptive in terms of how you deliver productivity enabling solutions to your resources is of utmost importance. Adaptability and action create opportunity. The opportunity here is to be fluid, to transform and build not only the functional environment, but intuitive, adaptive, and humanized ecosystem. Digital transformation strategies must go beyond technology and focus on human insights to make sure we are not just busy integrating services or technologies but integrating experiences. We help our customers in achieving considerable success in their efforts to migrate business disruption, the HCL Fluid Workplace solution pack and the SafeSense Contactless Workplace solutions bring these ideas to life.

TJ: Absolutely, we will make sure we put the links in the description where our audience can go and get more information on the solution packs. When we come back after a very short break Nishant will face the rapid-fire round.

TJ: Welcome back everyone! Nishant Sharma, you are familiar with the rapid-fire round. Yes. Here we go. When offices open up, given a choice out of 10 working days. How many days would you prefer to work from home?

Nishant Sharma: I think 2-3 days working from home would be sufficient.

TJ: What is your fitness regimen of choice?

Nishant Sharma: Cycling.

TJ: Are you looking forward to the Apple iPhone 12 launch?

Nishant Sharma: Definitely. Yes. I'm still on iPhone 6s. So, it becomes a mandate for me to upgrade now.

TJ: Video conferencing - a tool of choice, Zoom or MS Teams?

Nishant Sharma: MS Teams.

TJ: Do you miss travelling?

Nishant Sharma: For sure.

TJ: A place where you would like to travel to with your family when it is safe to do so?

Nishant Sharma: Either Andaman or Goa.

TJ: Thank you very much, Nishant. A wisdom packed session. As the current situation evolves, we hope to get to talk to you again very soon for more knowledge.

Nishant Sharma: Thanks again for having me. Looking forward to your next invite. Stay safe everyone!

TJ: I thank our listeners for joining in. We want to hear from you, we need your feedback and suggestions for future topics. The contact information is available in the description. Comment, share, recommend, and subscribe. See you all in the next one.