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How to Build and Manage a Digital Workplace Influencers Network

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Digital workplace influencers, an evolution of champions, are integral in increasing workforce digital dexterity and technology adoption. This research helps IT leaders responsible for the digital workplace build and maintain an influencers network to scale employee enablement.

Quick Answer

How do I build a digital workplace Influencers network?

- **Recruit influencers.** influencers must be willing participants recruited or chosen based on availability, desire and ability to make an impact. Promote and build demand for the opportunity through competitions and/or rewards programs.
- **Empower influencers.** Coach and enable influencers to promote and support the use of technology within their line of business (LOB). Cultivate collaboration and knowledge sharing among influencers and ensure that influencers receive enthusiastic two-way support from IT.
- **Evaluate influencers.** Engage influencers, gamify efforts, and embed participation in performance management using technology adoption and usage reports, stakeholder sentiment collection and other performance measures.

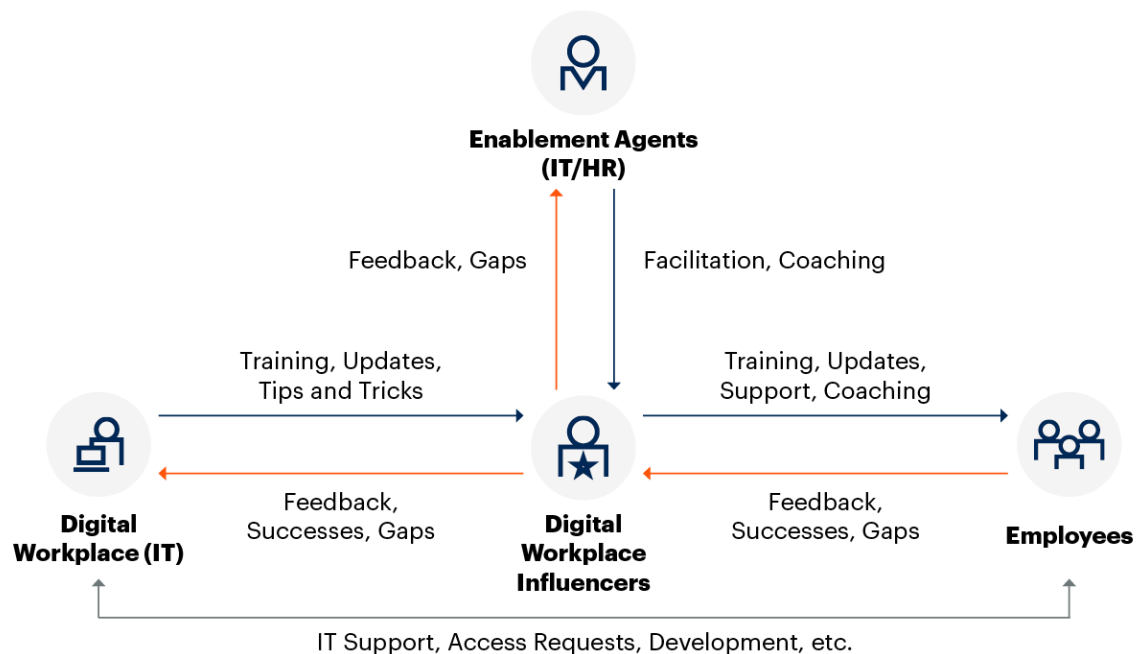
More Detail

Clients often ask for guidance on how to get more value from their digital workplace technology investments. The greatest opportunity to improve ROI is by increasing adoption and enabling employees to fully exploit technology to meet business goals. In the era of rapid and continuous change within digital workplace technology, dynamic learning is imperative. This requires flexible, experiential and ongoing enablement practices to develop digital dexterity, contextualize technology change within departments and direct organizational change.

A common way to meet these challenges and scale the digital workplace is through the creation of an influencers network. Also commonly referred to as a champions or ambassadors network, this collection of volunteer employees help drive organizational change management (OCM) and increased adoption of new approaches, skills and technologies within their department (see Figure 1). Leveraging this peer support model helps employees learn from trusted colleagues, in the course of work, where they see how the benefits apply to themselves. As the network grows, enablement agents are added to mentor influencers and ensure that collected feedback is included in process improvements.

Figure 1: Digital Workplace Enablement Agents and Influencers

Digital Workplace Enablement Agents and Influencers



Source: Gartner
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Influencers are a type of digital side hustle where employees serve as information conduits between IT and the business that promote and support digital workplace technology adoption by their peers and stakeholders. These tech-savvy employees partner with IT and receive special training, engagement and support to build their own digital dexterity so they can do the same within their business unit. influencers explain to their colleagues the rationale behind technology decisions, contextualize and localize ways to improve work and drive OCM activities. Their peers recognize them as experts and look to them to provide resources, answer questions and explain how technology can improve work.

Influencers can help bridge the gap for employees who prefer not to contact IT — the 2022 Gartner Digital Worker Survey confirms that a sizable amount (27%) of digital workers prefer (as their first option) to seek help outside of IT. ¹ They communicate best practices, successes and challenges with other influencers and provide feedback to IT on what is and is not working at the employee level.

Influencers are also integral in fostering team microcultures and supporting emotional proximity and team unity (see [How to Harness Peer Learning Technology to Improve Organizational Culture](#)). As the program scales, a community of practice (CoP) can be used to enhance peer networking and development of skills on a specific technology or capability. An example of how a CoP is used to boost collaboration equity is included in [Collaboration Equity Helps Build Team Unity and Improve Performance](#).

Recruit Influencers

The best candidates are highly engaged and motivated employees who want to learn new technology and see it more broadly used. The 2022 Gartner Digital Worker Survey also found that 54% of digital workers consider themselves technically proficient and another 20% as technical experts in using the digital technology required for work purposes. Seek volunteers from your technically skilled workforce with the following attributes:

- Availability and willingness to go beyond the standard job duties
- Ability to learn, coach, identify resources and communicate
- A connector mentality, connecting employees to resources and other people
- Problem-solving skills to promote technology solutions to business challenges
- Trusted by peers and able to influence change
- A natural curiosity toward technology

- Desire to make an impact

To recruit and inspire volunteers, many organizations make earning the role a competition. Conduct interviews and require interested candidates to articulate their desire and ability to help. To generate interest, explain that the role is a visible way for an employee to help colleagues, learn new things and expand their collaboration network. As such, it could present new opportunities for transfer or promotion and can also be personally rewarding.

Empower Influencers

Influencers can be asked to promote multiple technologies or focus on a single application or service. On average, 65% of digital workers are frequently asked for advice when colleagues have questions or issues with using digital technology. ¹ Influencers are most valuable when the digital workplace team deploys new or significantly changed technology that employees may not understand how to use to the fullest.

It must be made clear to influencers and their managers that this additional responsibility may compete with time spent on primary work tasks, however the two should be linked. During ramp-up phases, for example, special training and recurring meetings with IT and other influencers are likely to consume more time than steady-state support. To minimize conflicting priorities, seek manager endorsement and work with HR to include the additional responsibilities in job descriptions and performance reviews. influencers must be recognized and rewarded for their participation in the extended community and impact on workforce digital dexterity.

Enablement agents coach influencers to be more effective in their role. Enablement agents often come from IT and HR and provide training and resources to help influencers apply technology in their own roles and among peers. Enablement agents establish rapport with influencers and promote awareness and knowledge of technology capabilities and organizational change management practices through recurring engagement and frequent check-ins. Their most important role is listening and responding to feedback that influencers collect from peers and stakeholders.

There are many ways to ensure that employees can identify influencers within their group such as:

- Adding a digital badge to profile pictures that are visible in office productivity apps ²
- Promoting the network in digital workplace communications, websites or collaboration channels

- Asking LOB leaders to promote their department's influencers

Evaluate Influencers

When evaluating performance, you should:

- Solicit feedback from managers, peers, stakeholders and other influencers about their effectiveness Ask about the frequency of engagement and the value of their assistance
- Capture all measurable improvements resulting from improved technology adoption, including the time employees save from improved technology proficiency
- Include gamification and measurement via a tool like Microsoft's champion management platform ²
- Ask managers about increased team digital dexterity or productivity, or other business benefits that the influencers network has contributed to
- Track references to and celebrate influencer impact on driving adoption, which may be most visible using technology usage or adoption reporting, digital adoption platforms (DAP), workstyle analytics (WSA) or digital employee experience (DEX) tools

Influencer Disengagement and Under Performance

If underperformance is an issue, care must be taken to avoid punishing influencers for volunteering. Any negative impact on overall performance could dissuade participation. To avoid gaps in coverage, while recruiting influencers, consider establishing backups within various business units. All else fails, ask the network to help support that business unit and recruit another peer.

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Evidence

¹ 2022 Gartner Digital Worker Survey sought to understand workers' technological and workplace experience and sentiments. The research was conducted online from September through November 2022 among 4,861 respondents from the U.S. (n = 1,564), China (n = 1,167), the U.K. (n = 1,072) and India (n = 1,058). Participants were screened for full-time employment in organizations with 100 or more employees and were required to use digital technology for work purposes. Ages ranged from 18 to 74 years old, with quotas and weighting applied for age, gender, region and income, so that results are representative of working country populations. We defined "digital technology" as including any combination of technological devices (such as laptops, smartphones and tablets), applications and web services that people use for communication, information or productivity.

Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

² Champion Management Platform, Microsoft

Document Revision History

Quick Answer: How to Build a Champions Network to Scale the Digital Workplace - 9
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