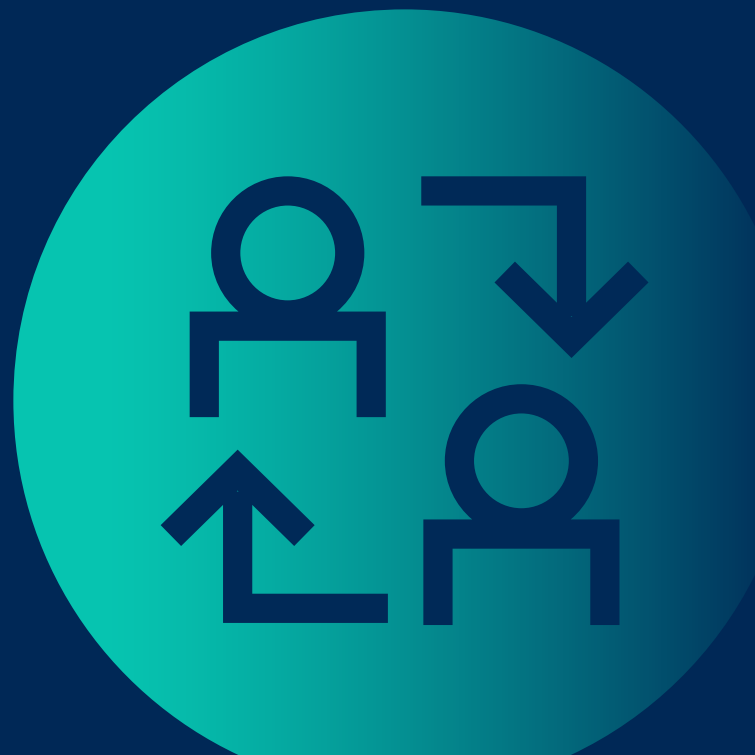Gartner

Gartner Insights

2026 Planning Guide for the Digital Workplace

Larry Cannell, Darin Stewart, Timon Watson, Sebastian Kempf, Olga Martí, Taylor Satterfield, Craig Fisler, Melinda Morales

2026 Planning Guide for the Digital Workplace

13 October2025 - ID G00838179 - 25 min read

By: Larry Cannell, Darin Stewart, Timon Watson, Sebastian Kempf, Olga Martí, Taylor Satterfield, Craig Fisler, Melinda Morales

Initiatives: Digital Workplace for Technical Professionals

> Generative AI is reshaping the digital workplace. Interest is now moving beyond harnessing simple AI assistants to unlocking new opportunities. Challenges like budget constraints and aging technologies remain though, requiring application architects to optimize existing tools while exploring GenAI.

Overview

Key Findings

- Organizations are shifting from their initial interest in basic generative AI (GenAI) tools to targeted AI agents grounded in proprietary data, seeking benefits beyond office productivity tasks.

- Advanced organizations are starting to use emerging GenAI techniques, such as improved retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) architectures, to draw deeper insights from a wider range of enterprise knowledge sources.

- New digital workplace governance challenges are forcing organizations to reconsider their risk mitigation and change management approaches.

- IT organizations are using the increasing interest in digital employee experience (DEX) as a catalyst to modernize and automate endpoint management.

Recommendations

When planning for 2026, application architects responsible for the digital workplace should:

- Empower citizen developers by encouraging, but governing, the creation of domain-specific AI agents. In addition, experiment with emerging GenAI collaboration workspaces across the business.

- Explore options for advanced GenAI RAG solutions by leveraging more sophisticated architectures that use complex, multimodal data. Also, look for opportunities to experiment with techniques such as knowledge graphs and agentic retrieval.

- Prioritize improving life cycle management processes to ensure oversight of both workspaces and AI agents. Consider augmenting native Microsoft 365 controls with third-party governance tools.

- Reframe endpoint modernization around improving measurable DEX outcomes rather than just IT efficiency. Position the organization for success with a DEX approach by auditing existing tools to uncover consolidation and data centralization opportunities.

Digital Workplace Trends

GenAI fundamentally alters the nature of the digital workplace. Organizations have moved past the initial hype and have learned that a valuable application of GenAI involves more than adding a superficial chatbot to a product. Nevertheless, novel GenAI opportunities and techniques continue to emerge, signaling an innovative future.
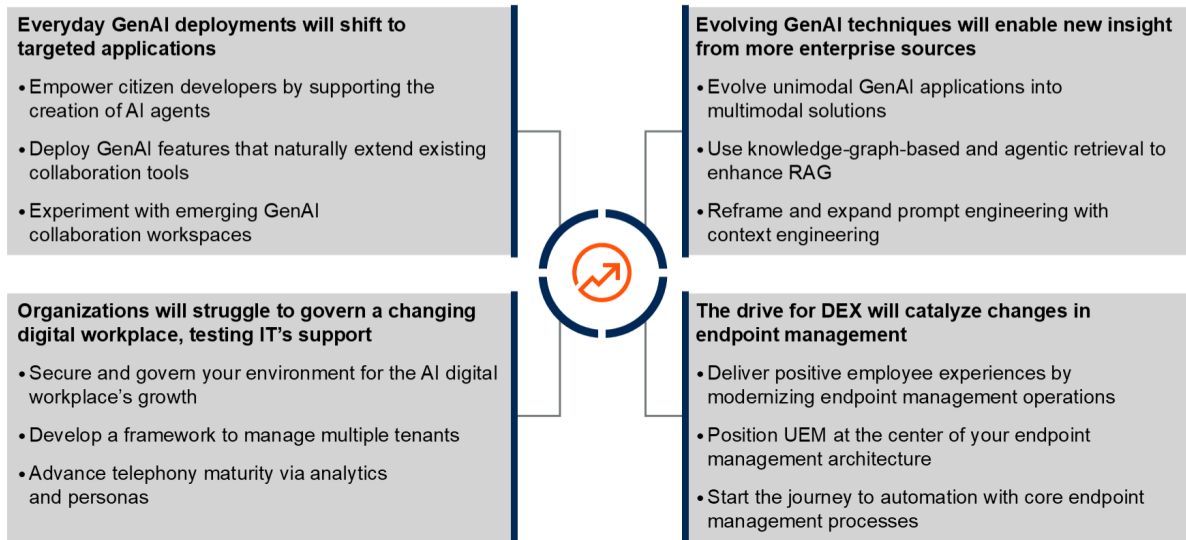
IT organizations are challenged by the constantly changing nature of business itself, the age of their digital workplaces, and the long-standing constraints of headcount and budget. These challenges are compelling IT organizations to maximize the value of existing tools, while still exploring the potential of GenAI in their digital workplaces.

As shown in Figure 1, Gartner's four key trends for the digital workplace in 2026 are (click links to jump to sections):

- Everyday GenAI deployments will shift to targeted applications.

- Evolving GenAI techniques will enable new insight from more enterprise sources.

- Organizations will struggle to govern a changing digital workplace, testing IT's support.

- The drive for digital employee experience (DEX) will catalyze changes in endpoint management.

Figure 1: 2026 Key Trends in the Digital Workplace

2026 Key Trends in the Digital Workplace

Everyday GenAI deployments will shift to targeted applications

- Empower citizen developers by supporting the creation of AI agents
- Deploy GenAI features that naturally extend existing collaboration tools
- Experiment with emerging GenAI collaboration workspaces

Evolving GenAI techniques will enable new insight from more enterprise sources

- Evolve unimodal GenAI applications into multimodal solutions
- Use knowledge-graph-based and agentic retrieval to enhance RAG
- Reframe and expand prompt engineering with context engineering

Organizations will struggle to govern a changing digital workplace, testing IT's support

- Secure and govern your environment for the AI digital workplace's growth
- Develop a framework to manage multiple tenants
- Advance telephony maturity via analytics and personas

The drive for DEX will catalyze changes in endpoint management

- Deliver positive employee experiences by modernizing endpoint management operations
- Position UEM at the center of your endpoint management architecture
- Start the journey to automation with core endpoint management processes

Source: Gartner
838179

Gartner

Everyday GenAI Deployments Will Shift to Targeted Applications

Back to top

Having progressed beyond initial exploration by piloting basic AI assistants, companies are now focused on practical applications of GenAI to improve everyday employee productivity and group collaboration. Specifically, leading organizations are pursuing AI agents that deliver tangible role-directed benefits by securely grounding those agents in a curated set of their proprietary information. In addition, new GenAI-based products are emerging to offer value beyond the simple chat stream or meeting and email summaries.

To focus their digital workplace GenAI efforts in 2026, organizations should (click links to jump to sections):

- Empower citizen developers by supporting the creation of AI agents.

- Deploy GenAI features that naturally extend existing collaboration tools.

- Experiment with emerging GenAI collaboration workspaces.

Planning Considerations

Empower Citizen Developers by Supporting the Creation of AI Agents

Organizations are evolving their GenAI implementations from general-purpose and simple AI assistants to domain-specific AI agents tailored to specific business needs. These agents, such as agents in Microsoft 365 Copilot or GPTs in ChatGPT Enterprise, address role-based use cases and vary in capability, autonomy, and complexity.

In addition, Microsoft has released first-party agents for Microsoft 365 Copilot (e.g., Analyst and Researcher) and Microsoft SharePoint agents for each site to search its content. Integrations with external applications, such as Asana, Atlassian (Jira), and monday.com, are also evolving to enable agent users to interact with those applications through natural language.

However, the scenario that offers greater value is users creating their own agents, customized to their business needs and integrated with business data. To democratize agent creation, organizations need to:

- Enable and manage low-code platforms, such as Microsoft Copilot Studio

- Support citizen developers by defining best practices, training, and design patterns

- Apply guardrails to ensure secure implementation

Governing these new artifacts in the digital workplace ecosystem demands agent life cycle management that includes controlled creation, archival, and decommissioning processes, as well as periodic reviews of risks and costs.

Deploy GenAI Features That Naturally Extend Existing Collaboration Tools

Many enterprise collaboration tools now have GenAI features. Summaries or notes generated from meeting transcripts (sometimes produced in real time during a meeting) are increasingly common features used by organizations. Outside of meetings, chat messages from Slack or Microsoft Teams, along with an organization's documents and email, have become source content for AI assistants to ground large language model (LLM) responses.

Intranet offerings (such as Simpplr or Unily) and collaborative content workspaces (such as Notion or Microsoft's Loop) have likewise added GenAI writing and summarization assistance. These GenAI advances blend well with existing collaboration workflows, allowing users familiar with these tools to more easily take advantage of the new features.

Digital workplace GenAI assistants are changing the presumptive meaning of the word "chat." "Chat" can now refer to users interacting with AI agents instead of people conversing with other people in Teams or Slack. For example, when someone says "chat," they could be referring to a Copilot chat or a Teams chat.

To make this semantic ambiguity even more confusing, Slack and Teams are blending these two types of chat streams by adding access to AI agents from within their chats and channels. This integration enables multiple participants to "chat" or interact with an agent together. One user addresses a prompt to an agent, while everyone sees the agent's responses in the chat stream. For example, participants in a Slack channel can interact with a Salesforce Agentforce agent added to the channel.

An earlier style of workstream app — called a "bot user" — provides a similar chat interface into external applications. Over time, we expect these two bot interaction styles — the old bot user and the new AI agent shared in a chat — to become indistinguishable as AI agents improve how users can interact with and manipulate applications. However, bot-user apps have always been best employed for advanced use cases, often involving IT (e.g., developers using Slack in a ChatOps scenario). Gartner expects this dynamic to persist initially as AI agents overtake bot users. Thus, organizations should pilot AI agents within chats judiciously and with technical teams until those agents prove usable by a larger population of users.

Experiment With Emerging GenAI Collaboration Workspaces

Back to top | Back to planning considerations list

Through 2026, Gartner expects to see other new styles of collaboration workspaces emerging based on GenAI. One clear example already available is the Google NotebookLM notebook. These notebooks are similar in concept to ChatGPT projects and Microsoft 365 Copilot Notebooks. In each case, a user uploads various pieces of content that become the workspace's corpus, which the user can then analyze.

From the users' perspective, the workspace becomes a GenAI expert on their content. Users chat with the content to answer questions and can then save the responses as new content, which is then added to the workspace. Foundationally, GenAI workspaces are like AI agents — grounded on a set of content and given instructions to respond in a particular manner — except that workspaces offer the potential for more expansive experiences beyond simple chatbots. For example, NotebookLM has a feature to create a mind map from a notebook's content.

In addition, users can share NotebookLM notebooks with other users, effectively turning them into a new type of collaboration workspace. Invited users with "view" permissions can read and query the workspace's content. Users with "edit" permissions can add content to the workspace corpus as well as create new content based on GenAI responses.

For example, a market research team creates a notebook to gather specifications of competitor products and uploads product data sheets and marketing content. A user with "edit" permissions creates a new page (shared in the notebook) that lists common features and other attributes after querying the notebook. Users collaboratively add to and build the workspace's content base and share insights they've discovered.

Gartner expects Microsoft and OpenAI to improve their products (Copilot notebooks and ChatGPT projects) by adding collaboration capabilities.

We recommend monitoring the evolving capabilities and piloting these emerging collaboration workspaces with selected advanced users and groups.

Evolving GenAI Techniques Will Enable New Insight From More Enterprise Sources

Back to top

Industry and enterprises have moved past the novelty of generative AI. Emails drafted and meetings summarized via generic reasoning abilities and foundation model content no longer impress. Businesses need to draw insight from all their sources and forms of information and automate tasks specific to their needs. Retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) emerged as a viable approach to incorporating enterprise information sources and proprietary reasoning, but quickly showed its limitations. 2026 will see many of these limitations reduced and even resolved through multimodal content handling, advanced RAG architectures, and agentic assistants.

To prepare to enable new GenAI-derived insights from a broader set of sources, organizations should (click links to jump to sections):

- Evolve unimodal GenAI applications into multimodal solutions.

- Use knowledge-graph-based and agentic retrieval to enhance RAG.

- Reframe and expand prompt engineering with context engineering.

Planning Considerations

Evolve Unimodal GenAI Applications Into Multimodal Solutions

Back to top | Back to planning considerations list

As enterprise information and data continue to grow in volume, complexity and sophistication, multimodal GenAI will become an essential mechanism in managing and exploiting those resources. Multimodal GenAI will have a transformational impact on enterprise applications by enabling new features and functionality that were previously impossible. Leading LLMs support unified processing and reasoning over multiple information types (see Table 1).

🔒

Actionable, objective insights

Position your IT organization for success. Explore these additional, complementary resources and tools for security leaders and their teams:

Guide
Deliver on Strategic IT Priorities With These Essential Skills

Equip your team with skills to execute your digital strategy and drive enterprise outcomes.

Download Now

Insights
Infrastructure and Operations Solutions for Technical Professionals

Access action plans for the key trends for cloud, data center and edge infrastructure.

Learn More

Webinar
Technical Professionals, Use Reference Architecture to Drive Innovation and Modernization

Get unbiased vendor-neutral reference architectures, giving organizations the confidence to make informed decisions.

Watch Now

How We Help
How Gartner Works With Technical Teams

Get expert guidance and tools for teams to execute efficiently and drive business results.

Learn More

Already a client?
Get access to even more resources in your client portal. Log In

Connect with us

Get actionable, objective business and technology insights that drive smarter decisions and stronger performance on your mission-critical priorities. Contact us to become a client:

U.S.: 1 855 811 7593

International: +44 (0) 3330 607 044

Become a Client

Learn more about Gartner for Technical Professionals
gartner.com/en/information-technology

Stay connected to the latest insights (in) (X) (▶)

Attend a Gartner conference
View Conference

Gartner