

Is Your Organization Prepared for the Future of Work?

**A GUIDE FOR NAVIGATING THE RETURN
TO WORK & BEYOND**



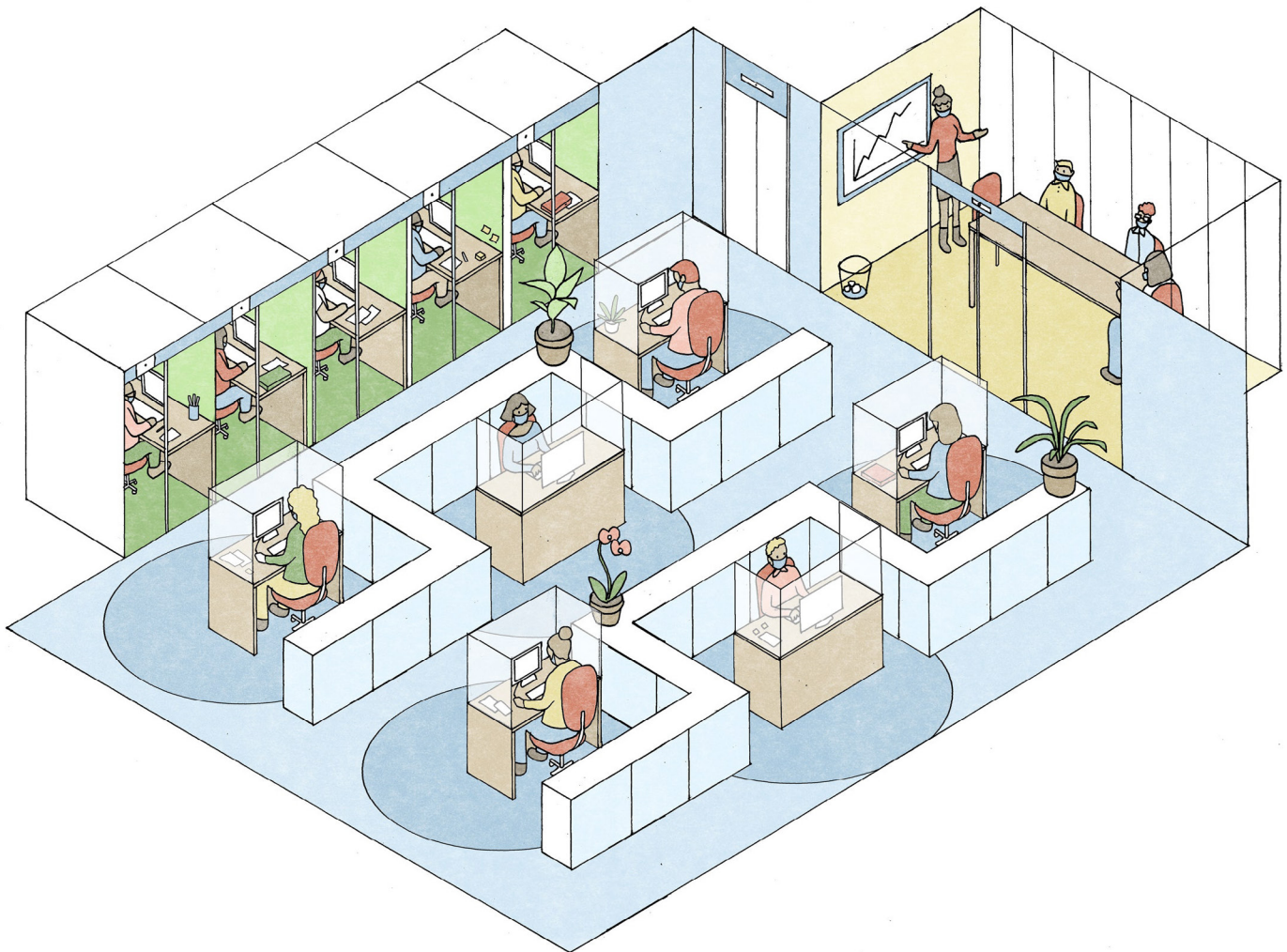
The nature of work will never be the same

The concept of returning to work is one we've heard a lot about recently – the complex process of bringing employees back into a physical workplace after a virtually overnight transition to remote work earlier in the year as a result of a worldwide pandemic.

The phrase “return to work” that we're seeing in all the headlines is a little misleading, however. The “work” never actually left. If anything, most

employees have been working harder than ever as they try to navigate all the challenges this global crisis has wrought. It's just that the nature of how and where that work gets done has fundamentally changed – and it's changing yet again.

For one thing, the physical workplace will be forever altered as offices undergo a structural facelift to accommodate social distancing and other safety protocols.



(“How the Coronavirus Will Reshape Architecture,” The New Yorker, June 2020)



No more impromptu planning sessions in common areas or idle chats around the break room. Seating plans will once again become structured and inflexible, a move away from the hot desking arrangements that had been growing in popularity. Unnecessary movement throughout the office will be discouraged. Even meeting rooms, the last bastion of the traditional office experience, will go away, possibly to never return. These changes – perfectly understandable ways to keep employees safe – will unfortunately cripple the ability of employees to network and collaborate. That’s a big problem since networking and collaboration are the key ingredients in the innovation that businesses need to grow and succeed.

Another big shift is that many people will never even return to a physical office space, as evidenced by the growing number of companies deciding to shutter expensive office locations

and take advantages of the benefits a remote workforce offers. That also makes sense. The unexpected experiment in forced remote work went much more smoothly than most companies would have expected, so the idea of reducing costs while increasing productivity just makes good business sense. But it does mean that companies will have to double down on making sure they’re designing digital experiences that work equally well for all employees, whether they return to an office, work remotely, are frontline workers or are in the field.

So how can organizations bridge these gaps and create a digital workplace that can withstand the shifting needs of today, as well as the changes the future will certainly bring?



Future-proofing the digital experience

As organizations rethink their strategies behind how the physical and digital workplaces intersect, they will also have to rethink the employee experience. A flexible, seamless experience that simplifies the work day will be fundamental to the ongoing success of existing employees. In addition, the quality of the experience that's delivered during these times of change will also be judged by prospective employees who will most certainly use it as a guidepost in their decision to either join a company or not, making it a critical factor in the ability to attract and retain top talent.

So how can companies empower every employee in all of the unique situations that this **"New Abnormal"** has created? And how can they continue to create experiences that support the success of employees and the organization over the long-term?

Here's a three-phase plan to help organizations make it happen...

Phase 1: Understanding

Noted author and organization development strategist **Jon Ingham** didn't hesitate when asked what he thought the one mistake was that companies could make regarding the return to work and the shift many organizations are making to support a distributed workforce:

"The biggest worry is always that we forget to put people first."

That's an awfully big mistake to make at a time when employees' expectations of digital experiences are higher than ever before and attracting and retaining top talent is such a big focus.

Thankfully, organizations can avoid an error of that magnitude by simply putting employees first — making a genuine effort to understand what it is that they want and need to be successful.

In fairness, that can be easier said than done — understanding requires empathy and commitment — but it's an exercise that will pay off in spades when it comes to creating quality digital experiences that are able to meet the challenges of rapidly changing business requirements.

So what's the best way to achieve that kind of understanding?

Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to understanding the true experience of employees throughout their entire tenure with an organization, so it's best to undergo a full **journey mapping exercise**.

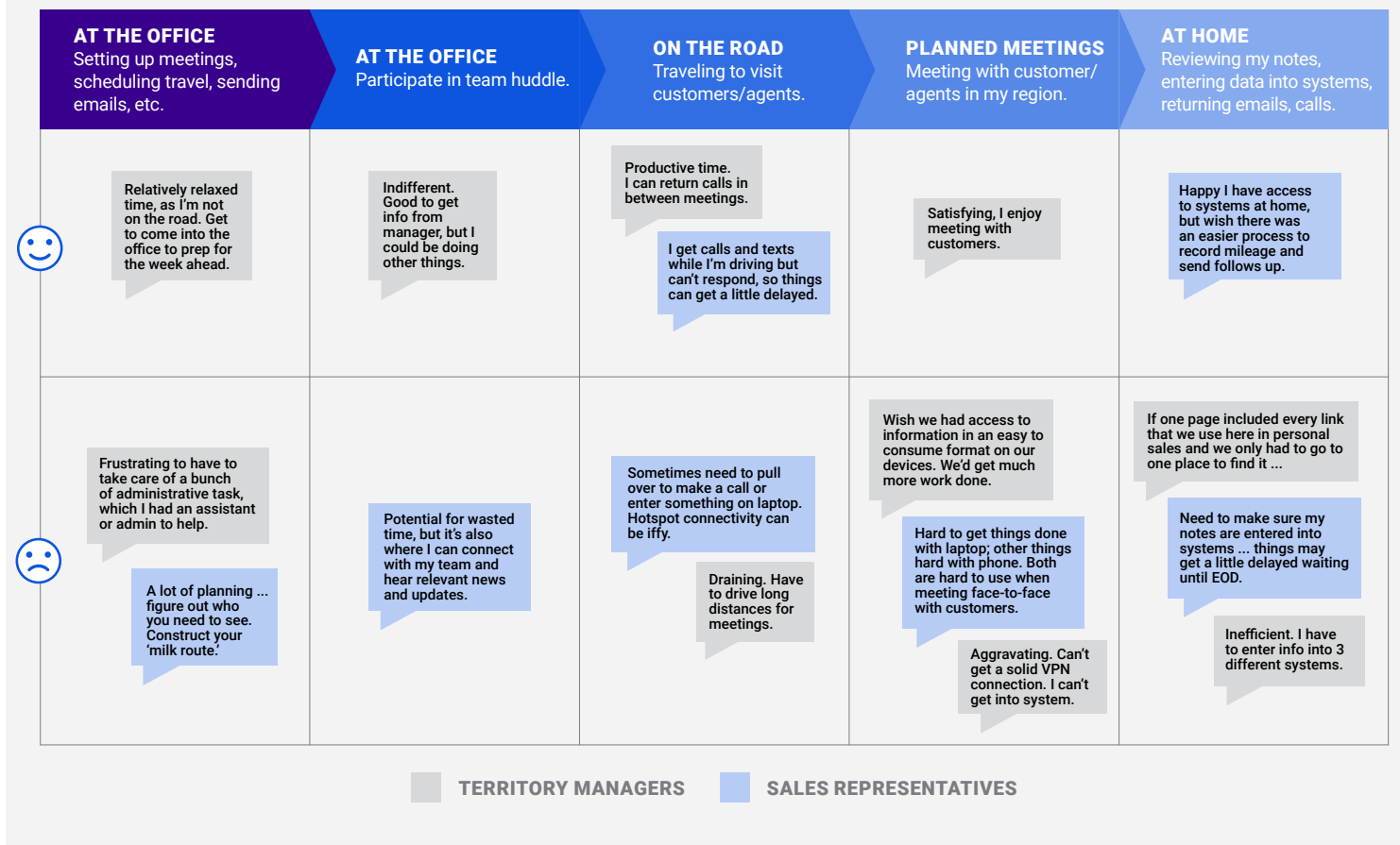
For organizations that aren't familiar with journey mapping, it's a tool used to identify opportunities for improving the employee experience by visually outlining the end-to-end experience an employee has throughout their time with

an organization. This process includes all the touchpoints an employee has that might impact their experience and also details how they're thinking and feeling at each point, making it possible for organizations to understand any pain points from the employee's point of view. The steps for conducting a journey mapping exercise are pretty straightforward and include defining the personas and segments of your organization, building out full profiles for each persona, and mapping out the journey for the experiences that need improvement.

Management teams should lead with empathy and demonstrate an understanding that while all of their employees have experienced this crisis, they haven't all experienced it the same way.

— PWC

Sample Employee User Journey



The sample above illustrates a hypothetical user journey for evaluating the "work day" of a front-line worker persona.

Even if you've already created personas, don't be tempted to go with what you have and assume that the needs that have already been laid out are still applicable. The pressures and expectations of work have entered an entirely new world. Employees are working under a diverse set of circumstances and, because of that, will require different access to different resources across a variety of different channels. It's important to revisit the personas you have and update them to reflect the challenges employees are currently facing.

The insights you'll gain by engaging in a journey mapping or [voice of the employee exercise](#) will be well worth the effort, helping you to identify the critical moments that matter to employees who are in desperate need of improvement. With those identified, it then becomes easy to enact changes that have significant and long-lasting impact on the employee experience across the organization.

Some common needs that employees express, particularly in circumstances like these, include:

- ✓ *Better communication channels* for important information, such as updates on new policies and procedures, announcements about office openings and closings, details about training opportunities, etc.
- ✓ *Easy-to-use tools and systems* that don't require a lot of specialized knowledge.
- ✓ *Simplified processes* that aren't bogged down with lots of steps.
- ✓ *A centralized location* for finding information and asking questions.
- ✓ *More time to spend on the meaningful work* that keeps employees engaged and happy.
- ✓ *Flexibility* – the continued ability to work when and where it's convenient. It's the only way employees can juggle the many conflicting responsibilities they're facing right now.

So that leads us to the next phase of the plan ...

“ Clear and inspiring communication is central to making this next unsteady phase a success. ”

– [MCKINSEY](#)

Phase 2: Implementing

As tempting as it might be, you can't simply take the processes and experiences you developed for the physical world and create digital versions of them – they won't translate well. In order for employees to effectively adapt to the new way of work, they need an entirely new approach to technology, one that gives them the right tools, the right access to information, and the right support to develop the skills, mindsets, and behaviors they'll need to succeed.

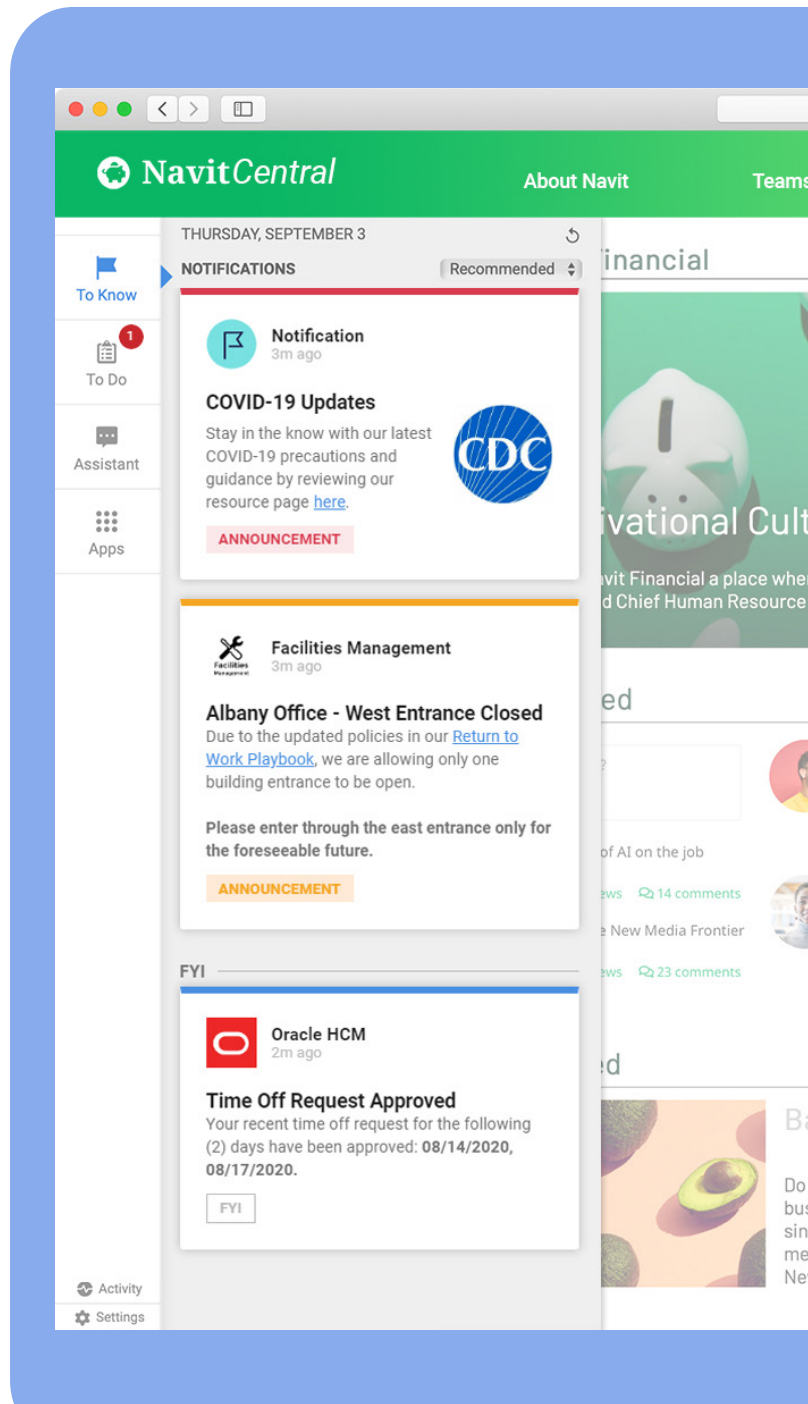
Ultimately, they need technology that's **single-mindedly designed to serve their needs**.

Here are few foundational areas where the use of intelligent, employee-focused technology will enable organizations to create digital experiences that support employee success throughout the storm of changing business conditions. They are relatively easy to implement, leverage existing technology investments, and they will help businesses make the small changes that lead to big wins in delivering a better digital experience for employees:

Centralized location for tasks and information

The office has always been the glue that bound the entire work experience together, the nucleus that all the other work-related rituals revolved around, particularly for areas like knowledge management, where information was able to pass readily from person to person on an as-

needed basis. With that no longer being the case for many employees, it's important to create a digital equivalent. Workers still need access to information, and if they can't turn to the coworker sitting next to them and ask a quick question, then they have to find it somewhere.



The intranet is the perfect resource to fill this gap. That may sound surprising, but it shouldn't. The intranet is an ideal option for centralizing the tasks and information employees need to be effective because most organizations already have one and they're already designed to serve as an information resource – they just aren't being used as effectively as they could be.

The time has come to deliver a modern intranet experience that finally lives up to everything it could (and should) be.

By leveraging intelligent technology that gives employees centralized access to everything they need to know and do, your intranet can serve as a flexible and agile platform that delivers the experiences, content, applications, and services employees need today – as well as the innovations of tomorrow. It can serve as the ideal front door to your digital workplace, and it can do so without replacing any of your existing technology.

Supercharging the intranet is a win/win for everyone. HR can be confident that employees have easy access to a single source of truth for important information and Digital Workplace and IT leaders will be glad to finally take steps toward creating an information resource that employees find useful.

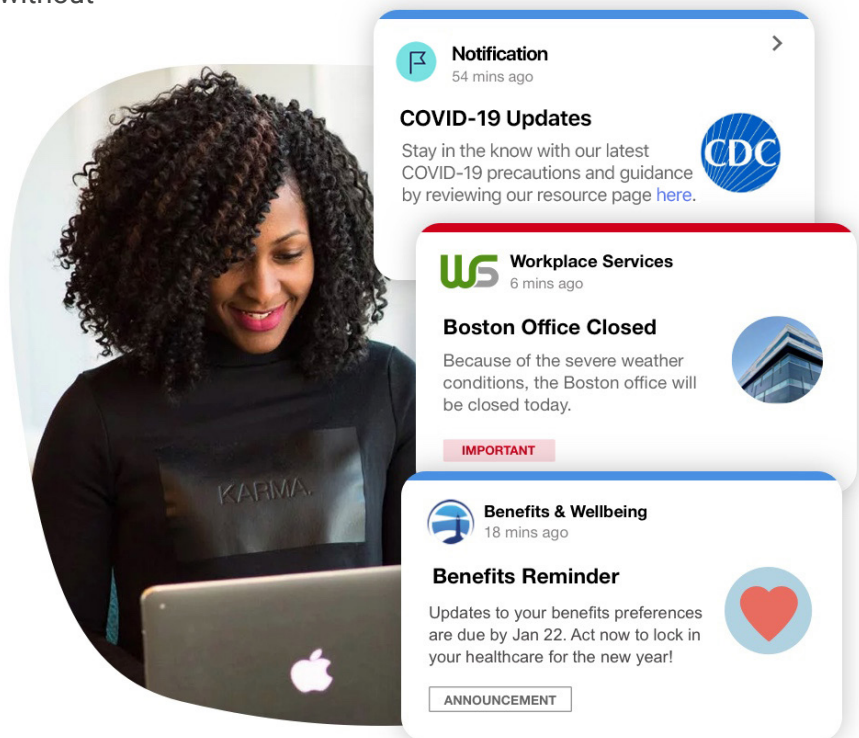
A modern intranet experience can also serve as the platform for many of our other recommendations, such as ...

Communication channels that work

Communicating effectively with employees – all employees, whether they return to the office, will continue to remain at home, are on the road or front lines – will be key to the success of navigating all of the changes happening in workplaces today, as well as whatever comes next.

But it isn't just a simple matter of *more* communication, or even more *channels* for communication. If anything, that's part of the problem. Workers are inundated with communications and they desperately need help to understand what's important and needs to be seen right away.

They need a centralized location for important communications they can trust.



Imagine the impact if HR teams had an easy way to send communications - everything from the typical updates related to benefits, training opportunities, etc., to the important policy updates and wellness information that employees are desperate for. And what if they could do it outside the chaos of email where employees were sure to see them?

And what if the internal communications team could quickly and easily send targeted, contextual notifications to employees with critical updates about office closures, new safety procedures, etc. – so employees always knew what they need to pay attention to, no matter where they were?

The ease at which information can flow and be found will be a major success factor in how well organizations navigate the ongoing shifts of the workplace.

The ability to foster productivity is another ...

Better self-service functionality

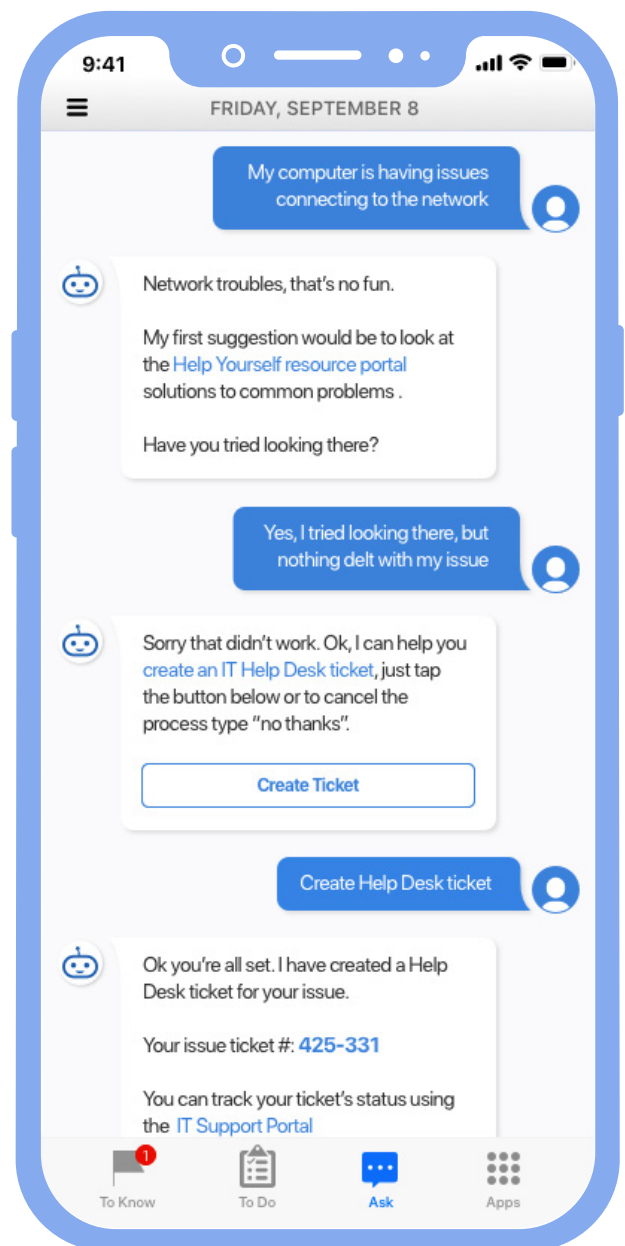
Typical service delivery methods often suffer from some historically detrimental shortcomings ...

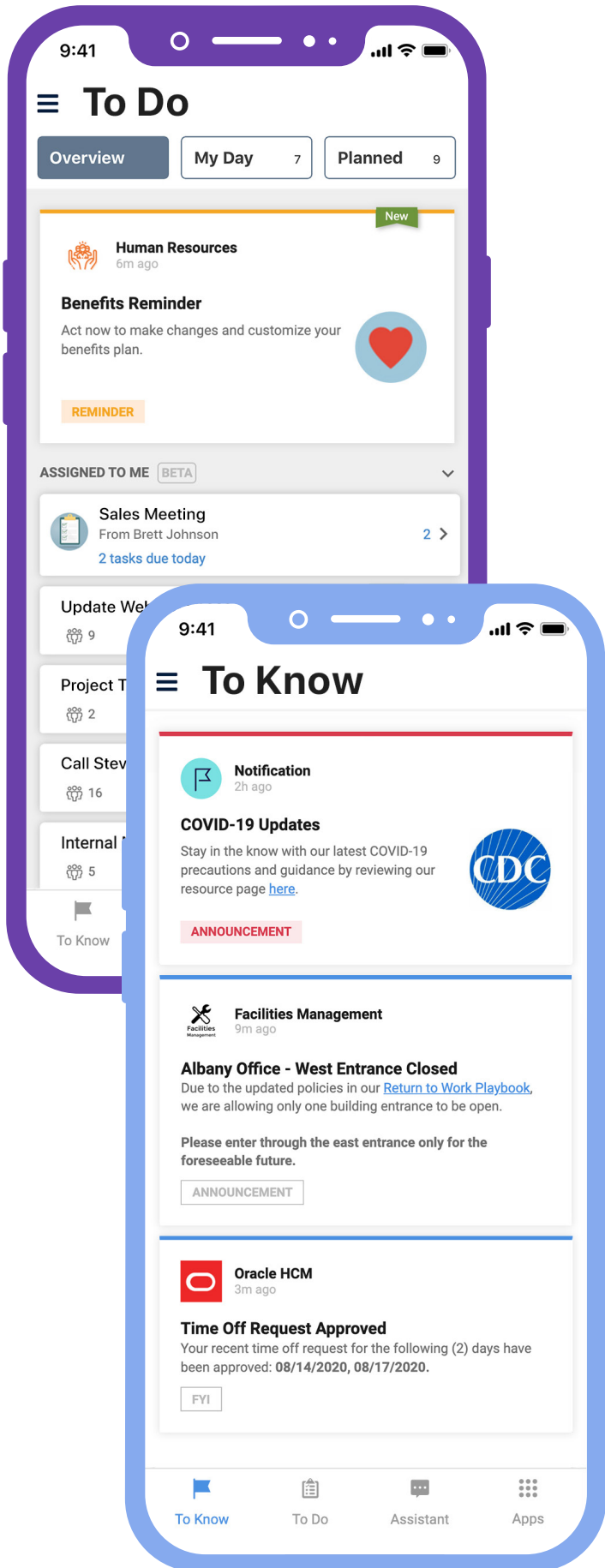
✓ **Volume** – Help desks universally face rising call volumes, boxing staff into the corner of being perpetually reactive to employee needs, with little or no time to focus on strategic issues.

✓ **Response times** – Despite the best of intentions, service desk representatives can only respond to the constant barrage of questions and issues so quickly. Unfortunately, it's not usually quick enough to satisfy the

expectations of a workforce accustomed to the response times of customer-centric organizations like Amazon.

✓ **Siloed service centers** – A lack of connection between enterprise service centers creates a confusing and disjointed experience for employees, forcing them to figure out on their own where to turn for help answering a question or solving a problem.





This is a big frustration for employees that can be eliminated (while significantly reducing costs, by the way) by giving employees intelligent technology that empowers them to handle a lot more of the typical service center tasks on their own.

Modernizing service delivery creates an easy user experience that increases both productivity and employee satisfaction.

HR and IT departments are particularly impacted by improvements in this area, with the efficiencies achieved by both departments translating directly into cost savings. Digital Workplace leaders will also find improved self-service functionality to be a win because it significantly improves a process that has historically been the source of a lot of frustration.

Help employees be productive at home

Some employees might be returning to their offices, but many – far more than ever before – will be remaining at home. The lucky ones will only have to worry about work as their primary responsibility, but for others, a continued encampment in their home office might also require them to juggle the hats of homeschool teacher and/or primary caregiver to children, aging family members, etc. If the plan to help those workers is to just digitize old paper-based processes, expect it to fail because it just won't work.

The remote workers of today are balancing a lot of conflicting responsibilities and because of that, they need flexibility to work wherever and whenever it's convenient for them. Enabling the kinds of mobile access they'll need to tasks, information and resources will require a new way of thinking.

Some key things to think about will include:

- ✓ Making sure they have seamless mobile access for everything they need to know and do, as well as a better process for managing all of the enterprise tasks they're responsible for.
- ✓ Giving them a centralized way to organize and prioritize all their tasks, both personal and from across the enterprise, so they can manage their time holistically.
- ✓ Simplifying complex processes, such as approvals, so they can be done quickly and easily while on the go.

Improvements like these would be a big check mark in the “DONE!” category for Digital Workplace and IT leaders who are looking to make sure every single employee always has easy access to the resources they need to operate at peak levels.

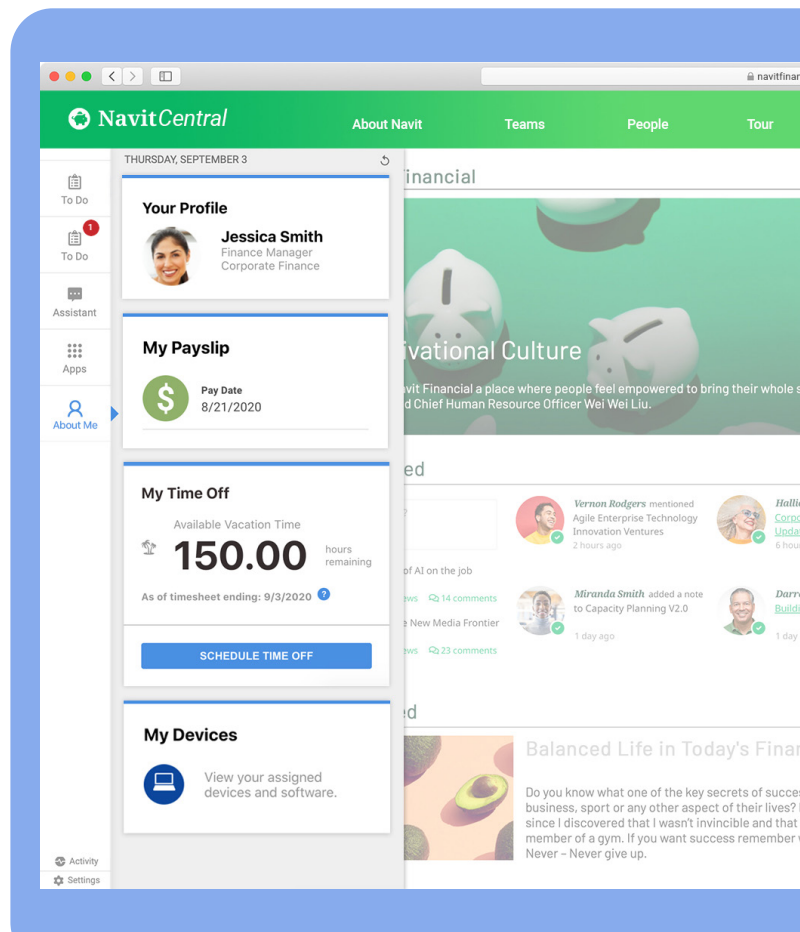
Modern digital access to services

Hopefully by now your organization has replaced old-school, paper-based services with digital ones. If you haven't yet, you might want to get on that ASAP because employees have high expectations when it comes to digital experiences. Provide the kinds of modern, intelligent experiences they need, and you'll not only win their loyalty for years to come, but your business will also see rewards from improved productivity and reduced frustration. And if you fail to deliver the right experiences? Your ability to attract and retain talent will suffer and likely so will your business results.

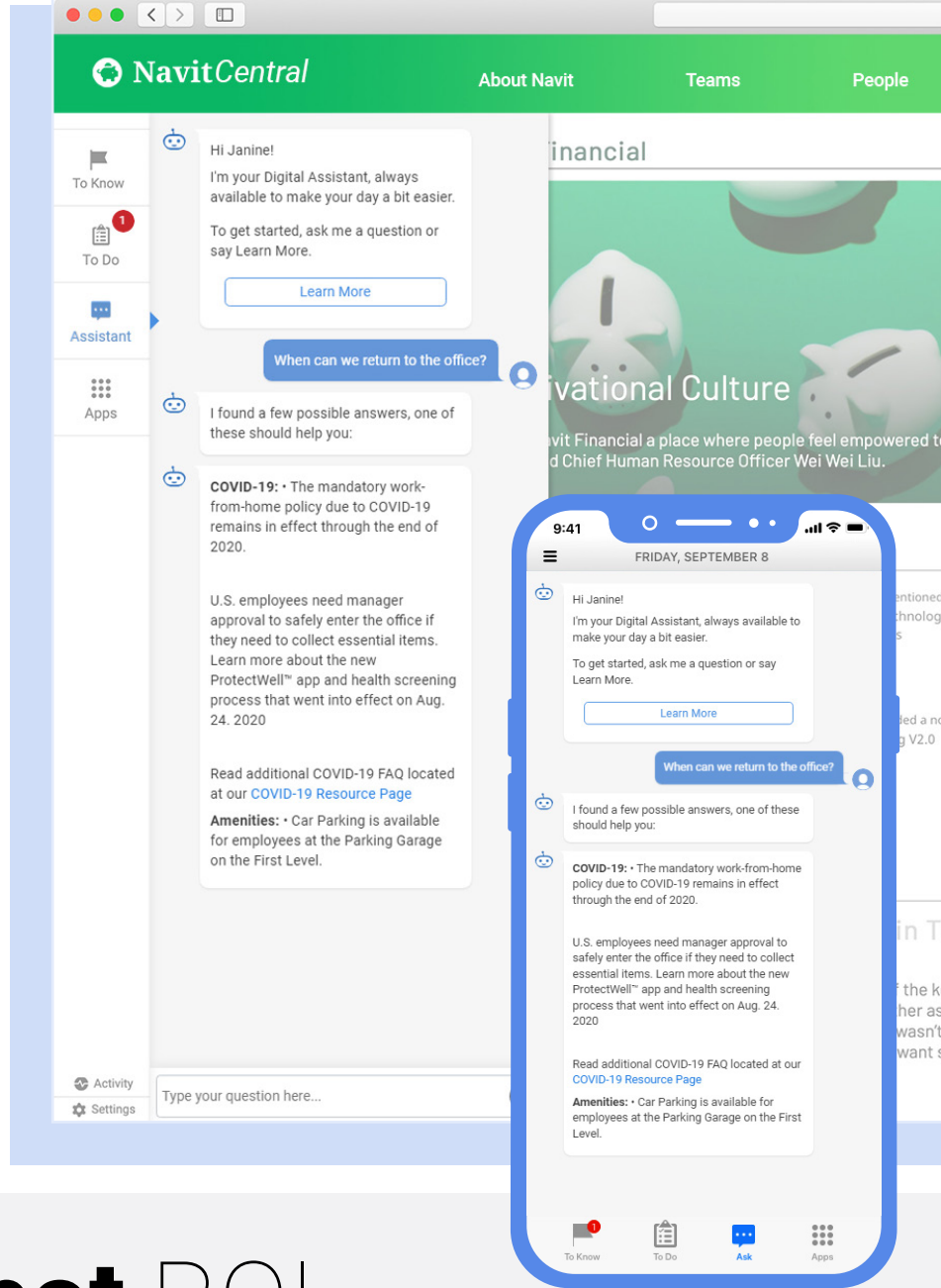
Thankfully, there are plenty of options to help modernize your enterprise, automating tasks for

employees and providing the modern employee experiences they need and deserve.





Leveraging microapps to make interactions with complex systems easier is a great place to start simplifying the work day for employees and improving the overall employee experience. Microapps eliminate frustration and simplify the work day by abstracting the most common tasks and information (like time off balances and payroll information) from back-end systems. They then present that information in a single and intuitive workspace, without requiring navigation between multiple systems. And because they deliver highly customizable functionality that enables single-click access to exactly the information and task-based functions employees need, when they need them, there's more time for workers to spend on the work that drives real value for the business.



A natural language chatbot is another way to add modern functionality that mirrors the consumer experiences employees are accustomed to. There are many areas across an organization that could benefit from that kind of intelligent functionality, such as HR. A chatbot would enable employees to get instant answers to all their most common questions, day or night, without having to wait for responses from someone on the HR team. That's a significant time savings for both employees and knowledge owners, and that alone would be enough to make chatbots the cornerstone of the remote work experience, but there are countless other use cases as well, such as facilitating help desk inquiries and requesting time off.



The Chatbot ROI

Objective	Prior	Chatbot	Business Value
Reduce Average Handling Time (AHT)	15 Minutes	2 Minutes	 93% Expense reduction per help desk transaction
Reduce Average Speed of Answer (ASA)	142 Seconds	0 Seconds	 2 FTE Capacity savings annualize*
Convert 5% of mobile help desk call volume to chatbot	0	18%	 \$222,250 Projected annualized savings*
Increase Satisfaction (eNPS)	9	10	 10% Increase in employee satisfaction

*Annualized savings/capacity calculated at a 50% adoption rate based on average mobile calls per year and average salary data.

Phase 3: Understanding

Creating a digital experience that has what it takes to help employees do their best work is not a “one-and-done” endeavor. It takes time, as well as a commitment to a process of continual improvement that involves reviewing and revising the practices that are in place, soliciting employee feedback, and making adjustments to fine tune the experience as necessary. Employees will tell you what they need if you take the time to ask.

“If you want people to be engaged, surely this is the time you need to give them a voice.”

— JON INGHAM

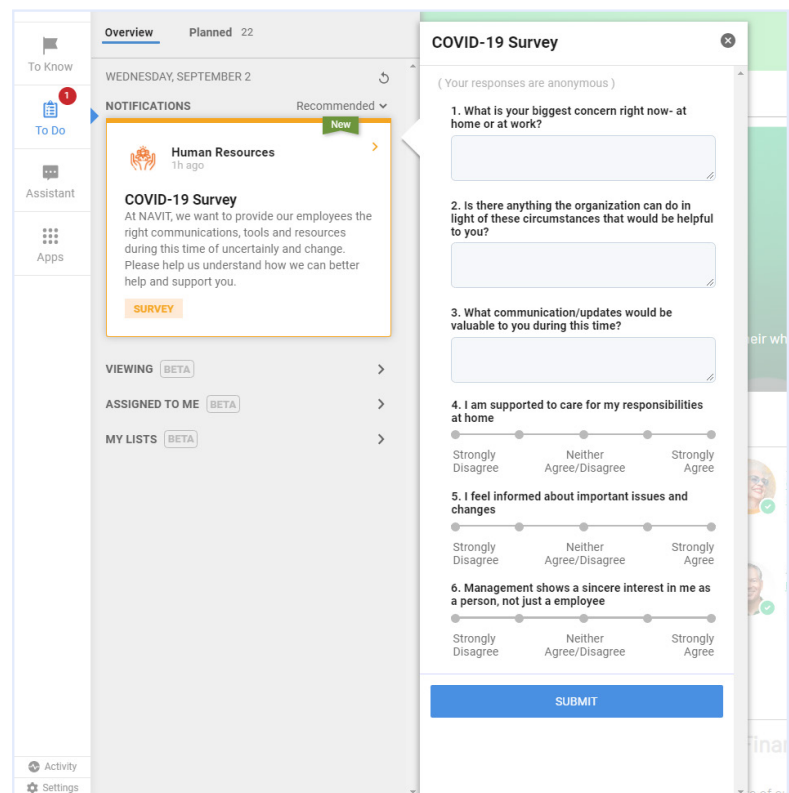
To get an accurate and holistic pulse on how employees are feeling, organizations need to implement a strategy that involves a variety of feedback channels, such as:

Surveys

Surveys provide a lot of value and allow organizations to focus on specific problems that need to be addressed. They are also great tools for identifying areas of the business that need to be aligned with what’s being prioritized across employee experience initiatives.

Make sure to have touchpoints with employees throughout each stage of their journey, however.

Doing so will ensure that the organization stays on track to deliver actions that meet employees’ expectations. Once actions have been implemented, organizations should also create a closed-loop process where follow up surveys are being implemented. For example, if a survey is conducted on employee onboarding and uncovers feedback that the first week is the most challenging for new employees, it should be followed up with surveys throughout the following weeks and months to ensure the experience has improved and addresses any problems that still remain. Leveraging tools that can trigger pulse surveys is a great way to automate the process and ensure that sentiments are being captured at the most opportune moments.





User studies

User studies are an excellent way to obtain feedback especially as it relates to employees' use of technology. As companies look to leverage design thinking to improve the employee experience, employees should be involved in every step of the process, from understanding user need and defining problems, to ideating/creating solutions and testing.

When conducting user studies, it's also important to understand how employees are feeling. Are they feeling anxious or bored? Interested or confused? Do they have a sense of belonging? By understanding those feelings, you can design experiences accordingly. Onboarding is a great example of where this kind of empathy can be invaluable. Employees are awash with different emotions when they start with an organization, and those feelings change dramatically (good, bad or otherwise) throughout their first weeks and months. By understanding the voice of the employee (VoE) in that situation, organizations can create experiences that address employees needs proactively.

Open feedback channels

In addition to more formal feedback mechanisms, employees should also always have the opportunity to share their thoughts, concerns, and needs when it's top of mind for them.

Beyond just the old standby of the anonymous comment box, there are lots of open-ended ways to encourage employees to share their thoughts. For example, some organizations have found "Ask Me Anything" sessions to be productive, where employees are encouraged to submit their

questions anonymously, all of which are answered by a member of the leadership team. By hearing the questions employees ask and talking with them about what's on their minds, the leadership team can learn the sentiment around different topics and where the organization may need to do a better job communicating or implementing different approaches. It also allows management to transparently share details on changes that are happening across the organization and what actions are being taken to address feedback that's been previously received.

Ultimately, it's all about trust and access. Create an environment where employees feel safe to share their truth and give them lots of opportunity to provide that feedback.

Finally ...

What employees need the most during these times of constant change and uncertainty isn't so different from the needs they had a year ago — or even the needs they'll have a year from now, really.

They want fast, easy access to reliable information. They want the flexibility to do their jobs when and where it's convenient for them. They want intelligent technology that's easy to use and a streamlined way of getting work done. They want a faster, easier way to manage all the administrative tasks that prevent them from doing the meaningful work they were hired to do.

They just want a simpler work day.

Organizations that can make that happen won't just be amply prepared for the return to work, they'll be prepared for long-term business success.

The future of work
requires flexible,
seamless, and
employee-centric
digital experiences.

**VISIT US AT [WORKGRID.COM](https://workgrid.com) TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
HOW WORKGRID'S DIGITAL EXPERIENCE PLATFORM
IS HELPING ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESS THE SHIFTING
NEEDS OF THEIR EMPLOYEES.**



Workgrid