

The High-Performance Workplace Defined

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A high-performance workplace focuses on increasing people's influence on a business, as well as the impact of processes, methods, physical environment, and technology and tools that enhance their work. To be successful, balance investment, business goals and value.

ANALYSIS

Earlier this year, Gartner introduced a new area of research, called High-Performance Workplace (see "Introducing the High-Performance Workplace: Improving Competitive Advantage and Employee Impact"). Within this research area, we focus on many of the traditional workplace issues and on the relationship between technology and business strategy, the factors that contribute to performance (vs. mere productivity) and the human challenges of using technologies (such as search) that enhance users' performance. Gartner defines a high-performance workplace (HPW) as:

"A physical or virtual environment designed to make workers as effective as possible in supporting business goals and providing value. A high-performance workplace results from continually balancing investment in people, process, physical environment and technology, to measurably enhance the ability of workers to learn, discover, innovate, team and lead, and to achieve efficiency and financial benefit."

There are several key parts of this definition, including:

People and business goals: The HPW takes the view that the workers are central to executing company strategy. Thus, the operations, organization and infrastructure of the company should be designed to support those who execute that strategy. Support of an HPW is not about supporting people just because it is a "good idea." To support an HPW means that the focus of investments in people's work is driven by corporate, team or division-level goals. If an organization lacks this clarity of business vision or goals, delivering an HPW is nearly impossible.

People, process, physical environment and technology: Support of an HPW is not just about technology. An HPW is an environment that fosters high individual, workgroup and corporate performance. It includes support for a spectrum of factors that may affect or enhance a user's ability to deliver business value, including people, process, physical environment and technology. For a user point of view, this may include behavioral perspective (How do various behaviors, such as learning and discovery, have an impact on overall performance?) and from a physical one (How does the physical environment affect workplace performance?).

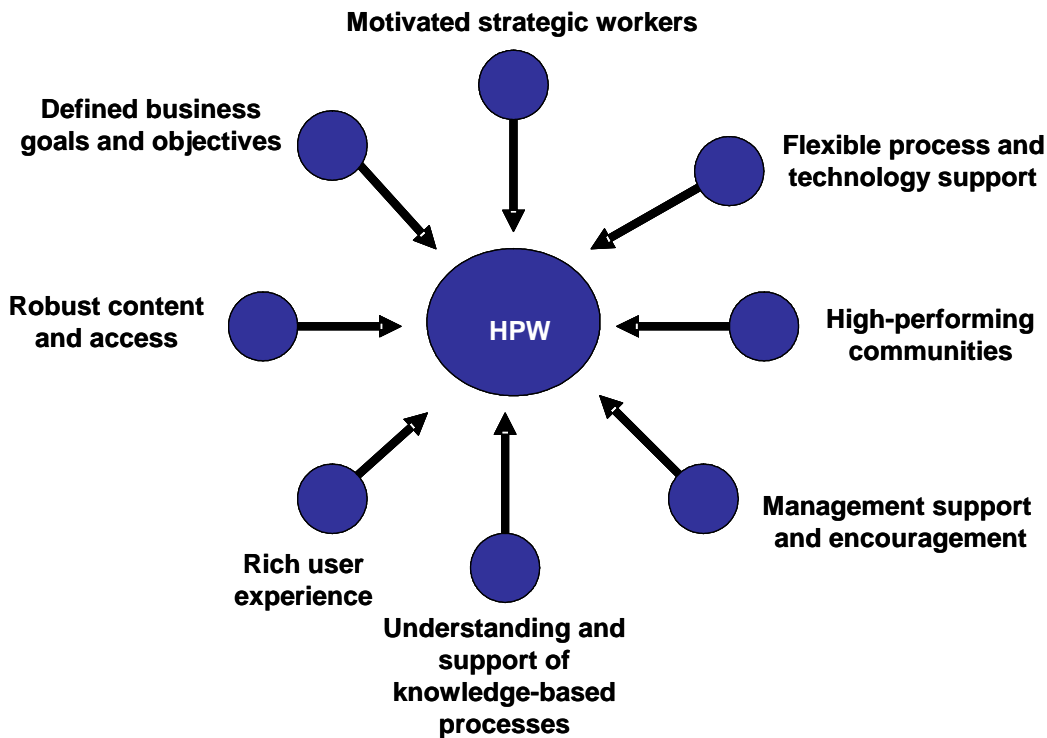
Balance: Support of an HPW is not just focused on either cost savings of investments or enhancing the talents of highly skilled workers so they can be more creative and innovative (learn, discover, innovate, discover, team and lead). Support of HPW is also about achieving the appropriate balance of these investments based on business goals and objectives.

Point in time: Support of an HPW is not a state that an organization achieves and then is "done." Internally, your organization is in constant flux and change, as are your people, business goals and market value. In addition, the external factors that may influence your company are changing (for example, economic facts, market landscape, well-being of partners and competitors, or technology innovation). Your support of an HPW must be revisited and adjusted to reflect the changes within and external to your organization that may affect your business goals and value.

What does it take to support an HPW?

An HPW combines technologies, processes and management so that workers can find new ways to create value for their companies. Ideally, the HPW will unleash the analytical and creative powers of workers so that they can regularly generate new businesses and dramatically improve the old ones. To accomplish its goals of creating new paths to revenue and profit, the HPW must integrate many perspectives and many technologies (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Key Requirements for a High-Performance Workplace



Source: Gartner (July 2005)

Defined business goals and objectives — An HPW requires that executives set and communicate strategy and goals, define core values, create the appropriate organizational structure, and provide the necessary leadership to execute on the strategy and achieve the goals. It provides individuals and workgroups the proper tools, systems and work environment to support and evolve the processes required to execute on strategies and achieve business goals.

Management support and encouragement — For sustainability, it is critical to have management (executive, department or team) sponsorship and commitment, and an understanding of the business value (cost benefit) of the human actions to innovate, create, discover, learn and lead. Clearly, teams can support and encourage technologies that enable an HPW without management support (see "Apply the Knowledge Gained From Building a 'Wiki'"). However, the value of gaining that support is that management can and should help provide the corporate vision that will define and drive collaborative work.

Motivated strategic workers — An HPW is an environment in which each individual is highly motivated, through the proper mix of strong personal interactions/relationships, career development opportunities, and rewards and incentives, to succeed (individually and with the business).

Rich user experience — The HPW is defined by rich, diverse and agile support for work behaviors, along with support for personal preferences, provides an enhanced user experience. Support for technologies and processes should be focused at abstracting the complexities of "doing" work (for example, applications, technology and processes). Support of the HPW focuses on providing support and encouraging skilled workers to become more engaged and measurably more productive.

Flexible process and technology support — The HPW integrates a diversity of perspectives and a variety of technologies, including business intelligence, collaboration support, business process management, content and knowledge management, communications, e-learning, productivity tools, and the physical workplace and related infrastructure.

Robust content and access — An HPW consists of rich media support (highly effective communication); relevant content (to the job, to interests and which is appropriately complex); relevant and sophisticated push, pull and alerts; individual, intra-enterprise and interenterprise association, profiling and personalization; taxonomies represented in user-recognizable terms with relevant links; and content that is searchable or browsable with ease.

High-performing communities — These are working environments in which intra- and intercompany communities form and disband easily; where people are linked in natural work-and-interest communities; and one in which the tools and processes are available for teams to allocate work and data spaces, and share complex tasks.

Understanding and support of knowledge-based processes — Having defined processes makes a company and its people more efficient, but the HPW must strike a balance between defining processes and enabling them to be flexible. The HPW needs ad hoc processes that are supported and augmented by knowledge-based processes. Tools and techniques that enable process definition and support without prescribing each step in an inflexible way are essential parts of an HPW strategy.

The support of an HPW is about finding the right and appropriate balance of investment (people process, physical environment and technology) in cost-savings efforts and in enhancing the ability for users to learn, discover, innovate, discover, team and lead. A core success factor in supporting an HPW is to continually rebalance your investments based on your evolving business strategies and value, and based on the changes in how people work and their impact on the business.

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