



# The future of work:

## Will better tech mean better meetings?

HP's Chief Experience Architect says VR, AI and machine learning will boost productivity and creative collaboration.





A meme that recently made the rounds on social media features a fictional children's play set made up of a plastic table with chairs and...a conference phone. Around it, children re-enact a workplace meeting to hilarious effect. The product is called "The Soul Crushing Meeting." Its tagline: "Now your kids can suffer just like you!"

There's too much truth to the joke. In the US, American companies hold 11 million meetings a day, with unproductive ones costing the country \$37 billion a year. Tips and tricks for holding productive meetings abound, from crafting concise agendas to Jeff Bezos's meeting-size limit of two pizzas' worth of people. Now, advanced technologies seem poised to relieve some of that pain.

### Supernaturally productive

Alex Thayer, Chief Experience Architect for HP's Immersive Experiences Lab, believes that artificial intelligence, virtual reality,

language processing and machine learning will dramatically improve meeting productivity — as long as their developers observe and apply how people actually learn, work and collaborate best.

"One of our lab's focus areas is what we call supernatural productivity," says Thayer, whose Ph.D. thesis explored human collaboration. His team aims to understand how technology can enhance people's day-to-day rather than become a burden. "If you don't understand people — their workflows, their habits, their messy lives — how can you craft technology solutions for them?"

"It's only recently that we can choose to work in either the physical realm or the digital realm," Thayer adds. "For example, if workers are more productive using physical notebooks, then by all means, the future of technology doesn't mean we have to kill paper." Rather, he envisions a future with "activated paper," where people can take notes by hand while remaining connected to their digital workflows.



Alex Thayer, HP's Chief Experience Architect, works to find ways technology can enhance people's productivity.



## From video-conferencing to VR collaborating

Advanced technologies are already being harnessed to improve meetings. Mark Benioff, CEO of cloud-based services provider Salesforce, brings an AI machine to the company's weekly executive gatherings. He says the technology helps process and analyze data in real time — often out-predicting the high-performing humans around the table.

And virtual-reality meetings could soon replace Skype and Zoom as the video-conferencing platform of choice. Chance Glasco, co-founder of popular video game franchise "Call of Duty," is now co-founder of a new VR-meeting software startup called Rumii. The software provides interactive desktops, VR slide presentations and the ability to make virtual eye contact with teammates.

Back in this reality, a wearable device called Bird lets meeting presenters turn any surface into a tactile, interactive projection screen for brainstorming and

hands-on creative collaboration. In other words, a table you're all gathered around could suddenly become an all-hands whiteboard.

## Past, present, and the not-to-distant future

As businesses continue to grow globally, with employees working from decentralized locations — last year, a Gallup survey found that 43 percent of US workers spent some time working remotely — virtual reality could radically evolve collaboration across teams.

And, using data from AI, machine learning and voice systems, it could be possible to upload and store meetings in the cloud, Thayer notes.

"A meeting in 2030 might entail literally having a dialogue with four versions of yourself from the past, plus some people in real time," he says. "Your meeting might start by saying: 'Let's review what we said six months ago and make sure we're on track.'"

*If you don't understand people - their workflows, their habits, their messy lives - how can you craft technology solutions for them?*

Alex Thayer,  
HP's Chief Experience Architect

## From the future of work to the here and now



The HP Elite Slice desktop allows users to run conference calls for easy collaboration.

But what about meetings in 2019? Which technologies exist today that can immediately improve the way people collaborate?

HP is betting on seamless collaboration in the workplace by making key investments in technology advances like the Elite Slice and ShareBoard – two products that have the power to immediately improve meetings and conference calls.

Elite Slice packages the power of a desktop in a portable and cable-free device that can be customized and turned into a conference phone. Meanwhile, ShareBoard transforms the traditional whiteboard into an online collaboration system by digitally capturing sketches and providing a real-time feed to remote participants.

So, what does this mean for today's meetings?

"Many people are heavily reliant on whiteboards as part of their workflows – it's a really democratising, levelling technology," notes Thayers.

"But if they want to share ideas and notes that have been committed to the whiteboard, there's a bunch of intermediate steps that take up time and make it harder to integrate what you've done on the whiteboard with what you need to do next," he says, referring to the common practice of saving photos of whiteboard sketches and emailing them to colleagues.

"ShareBoard is really exciting because it doesn't replace the markers and it doesn't replace the whiteboard. All it does is activate the space and let you take that information and you use it more quickly."

The office of the future that HP is driving towards uses products like ShareBoard in conjunction with Elite Slice. That would allow you to use the whiteboard for ideation and then jump straight into a conference and have your sketches and notes available for all to collaborate on.

"What I've noticed is that these tools together offer more of a solution perspective instead of a per-device basis," he says. "This is important because once you can offer this type of solution and start stitching the seams together, people can focus on collaboration."

## Collaborating with machines

These kinds of innovations could unleash a world of creative ideas and business solutions as well as new global opportunities for talent.

Of course, as time goes on, Thayer notes, we'll also be collaborating more and more directly with the technology we build. "For the thousands of years that humans have had meetings, we've never invited technology to play an equal role in the meeting," he says. "I'm curious how partnering with intelligent technology is going to change the dynamics of meetings over the next five or 10 years."