



Daniel Newman: Aruna, it is so good to see you. I'm thrilled to have you here at the 2022 Six Five Summit.

Aruna Ravichandran: I am so, so excited to be here with you, Daniel, and really looking forward to this call.

Daniel Newman: Well, this being part of the collaboration track, everybody here is pretty stoked about hybrid work, so we aren't sad that this isn't in person. But I will say it has been too long. I do hope maybe at Cisco Live, we will cross paths. If not, at some time this year because I think the last time we actually got together was probably 2019, which is... It's just sad how fast this time has gone. But I guess it's also good, right, when time is flying.

Aruna Ravichandran: Exactly. That's right. I definitely hope to see you at Cisco Live, which is going to be there in two weeks now.

Daniel Newman: Oh, yep. Absolutely. I will be there. I am looking forward. It's great to see these events coming back live, fast and furious. That is one of those things, and you leading the part of the business and being involved in driving the future of hybrid versus in-person. But everybody went back to doing in-person again. So the Six Five Summit, we've stuck to our guns. We are going to continue to do this event remote because we just love the slate of people, including yourself, that we're able to get together.

But hybrid work, Aruna, is something I think that... Actually, it's kind of like Ucast or even collaboration kind of means something different to everybody. But I think we can all agree that the pandemic has taught us, whether it's a byproduct of happiness or productivity, that hybrid work is here to stay, and that most companies are going to rebalance their productivity, their strategy for work and for dealing with the workforce and for getting things done, to be more hybrid in the wake of it. I'm super interested with you not only doing this every day for WebEx and at Cisco, but also doing this every day because you have your team and all kinds of people, probably in many different locations, what's your view at the moment on hybrid work?

Aruna Ravichandran: My view is pretty simple, right. Hybrid work is about flexibility. It's about giving flexible options and choice to all of our employees, whether they want to basically work from home, they want to work from the office, or anywhere in between. The location really does not matter because what hybrid work has taught us, especially during the pandemic, over the last two plus years, I have to say, is we can still get all of our work done.

Before the pandemic, everybody used to think that if you don't come back into the office, you really cannot get work done. But the two plus years have really taught us that it's not about where you go. It's about the work you actually do. Being able to embed flexibility and experimentation into our practices is very, very important to us. Like you rightfully called out, we, at Cisco, have actually lived hybrid work just like the rest of the world. Our point of view is give people the flexibility, whether they want to work from home, the office, or anywhere in between because now technology's become a huge enabler in order to basically help us embrace hybrid work.



Daniel Newman: You said a lot of things there that I can certainly relate to. By the way, our firm also runs hybrid. Always have. That's one of the interesting things, too, is some people are like, oh, this is brand new. No, it's not brand new. By the way, video has worked really well for a long time. I guess if there's little peaks of sun rays that came through what was a really pretty horrific few years with the pandemic has been that we did transform faster, and we did learn to embrace new technologies, and we did keep our businesses running.

Aruna Ravichandran: We did.

Daniel Newman: In fact, Aruna, I would argue we became maybe even more productive, thanks to these tools. Having said that, there's an example right there. I actually think all of the great tools for hybrid work have almost put us on the edge of workaholics, even those of us that don't mean to be, and working too much. There's a challenge, for instance, that I see with remote work, but I'm kind of curious with remote and with hybrid work, sort of what are some of the challenges you're seeing because it's not all perfect.

Aruna Ravichandran: Oh, totally. Hybrid work is not like going back to the pre-pandemic days, I would say. It's both different and much more harder than what we've actually seen before. In my mind, I see four big challenges when you think about hybrid work.

The first one is something which everybody's talking about in the industry. It's about the growing concern about employee wellbeing, especially the mental health part and combating with video fatigue because we all spend a lot of our times going from back-to-back calls across the board. That, in turn, has an impact with respect to both the video fatigue, which in turn impacts the employee wellbeing.

The second one is there is also a concern that with hybrid work, now people have a choice whether they want to work from home or in the office or anywhere in between. Previously, people who actually came back into the office, they felt that they had the opportunity to have those face-to-face interactions. Now, if people are going to continue to choose the flexible option on being remote, how do you ensure that you create an equal seat at the table for everyone. Those people who are coming back to work should not be treated as priority employees or first-class citizens, right. We want to make sure that we continue to provide a very inclusive environment, and it's not about where you work, it's about what you do. That is another important element when you think about hybrid work.

Third one is the growing concern on real estate. Every CIO I've actually talked to as well as the facilities' leader, this is one of their top strategies, which they have in mind, right. Are they looking to see what kind of savings they can actually get by re-imagining their real estate footprint and their office footprint? Before the pandemic, not every office was equipped with video conferencing technology because people would meet face-to-face. Now, every one of the CIO, CXOs in IT are rethinking about how do they reimagine the real estate. That is another big challenge.



Last but not the least, it's about I think the world of IT got even more tougher because during the pandemic, everybody had to shift about thinking about how do they manage the experience from all of their employees' homes. Now, they have to not only manage the employees' homes, but they also need to continue to provide that same kind of an experience when people come back into the office maybe two days or three days, right. Security continues to become an important element. Manageability becomes an important element. I think IT's job just got a top notch harder.

Daniel Newman: Yeah, I agree with all of that. You mentioned a few things that I'd like to maybe ask you to drill down into a little bit more. You talked about wellbeing. You talked about fatigue. Those are two things that I was kind of alluding to when I talked about hyper-productivity. Burnout, right. This great resignation that people are talking about. Well, I think part of that is people burned out, and it just created almost like a hey, you got these great tools, and now I can be face-to-face all the time, and I can be working 24/7. By the way, no breaks between meeting.

I mean, Aruna, it sounds a little funny, but some of us, I feel like we had to negotiate bathroom breaks. When do I eat because it was like if there was a spot on your calendar, people would fill it. Of course, there's a little bit of, yeah, I'd be proactive, block out time and stuff like that. But there's also this, hey, I want to be good at my job. Of course, when everyone was worried about job security and all, so talk a little bit about how you kind of tie those things in, how you know manage to communicate the challenges related to the wellbeing and meeting fatigue.

Aruna Ravichandran: When you think about meeting fatigue, in my mind, it's a cognitive overload, right. People start to feel drain because they go from back-to-back-to-back meetings across the board. In fact, I, myself, is one of the people who actually went through that because when we shifted to working from home during the pandemic, there were no best practices in terms of how do you basically manage your calendar? We also did a recent study, and we found that 95% of workers have experienced video fatigue. This also requires some kind of changes to the company culture as well as being able to leverage the technology in order to reduce fatigue.

If I have to reflect on what we have done here at Cisco, especially from a technology perspective with WebEx, I think in the middle of the pandemic when the whole video fatigue was really real and a lot of people were experiencing that, we actually created a partnership with Thrive Reset. Have you heard of Thrive Reset, Daniel, or I'm happy to give you a little bit of an incremental color around that?

Daniel Newman: Well, just for everyone out there.

Aruna Ravichandran: Okay. Thrive Reset is an app which is owned by Arianna Huffington's company. What that particular app does is we now have a deep integration with the Thrive Reset app. I actually use the app, so that way, I don't schedule one hour meetings. I basically schedule 45-minute meetings or 50-minute meetings, and I give myself a 10-minute break. Then I launch this Thrive Reset app, and I have the opportunity to basically get the 10-minute break to basically do something of my choice. In my case, I practice meditation. It gives me an opportunity to bring up the app, and then do a breathing exercise, right.



What's research has shown that that 10-minute break, which you actually take between meetings has a tremendous amount of impact in terms of your mental health. Was that something which we all knew during the pandemic? Not at all. As this whole concept of meeting fatigue and burnout became real, the technology basically started to have a lot of additional transformation, and that's why we created this partnership with the Thrive Reset app.

The other things we also started to see is when people are working from home specifically, and now coming back into the office, as people are re-imagining their real estate, background noise tends to be a cognitive overload, right. Imagine if a lot of the spaces are going to become open spaces, or you continue to work from home from your kitchen or your family room or any one of the shared spaces, you'll always have people in the background. That becomes a cognitive overload as well.

Given that the purpose-built technology to completely eliminate background noise, as well as background voice. Eliminating background noise is a big deal. For example, if I was sitting in the kitchen right now, and you had a blender, you would not hear even one person from the blender, or if I'm working in the kitchen and my kids or my husband are talking in the background, I can optimize for my voice only, which means that while they can see the people in the background, they can only hear my voice, right. Those were some of the big technology advances we actually did.

Again, improving the video quality. That has to be there. Before the pandemic, very, very few people would join a video call. Now video is given. Everybody joins a video call across the board, and so the quality of the video is also very, very important. Those are some of the key things we have personally done in order to basically tackle this first-world problem, which is about employee burnout as well as meeting fatigue.

In addition to that, like I said, you also have to have cultural changes as well. For example, at Cisco, we have a day for me. In addition to the existing PTO days we actually get, our CHR, Fran, has given us four incremental days just to focus on ourself. We recently had our me day in third week of May. We are going to get another one in couple of weeks in June. I can tell you that every employee here at Cisco has tremendously appreciated the opportunity to have those incremental days, so that they can focus on their employee wellbeing. They can connect with their family members. Those are some of the cultural changes we have implemented.

Last, but not the least, it's about trust. If you really have to embrace hybrid work, it's about empowering your employees, making sure that you build the trust with your leadership team so that they can, in turn, walk the walk and talk the talk.

Daniel Newman:

Ooh, yes. You covered a ton of ground there. By the way, I don't do the meditation, but I have a little sofa outside my office here, and I have a 10-minute nap thing, and I'll take a 10-minute. I'll literally, if I get done with a meeting, and I have seven minutes, I will, literally, go lay flat, set my timer for seven minutes, and I will close my eyes. It's amazing sometimes even in just that little bit of time, how you open your eyes, and you really didn't sleep, but you're just having that



moment of sanctity. The amount of the amount of value in that, and so I hope that's coming through that it's our responsibility as business leaders to talk to our teams about it.

Hey, this is a lot. We know the pressure. We know the amount of meetings that you can take on in a given day. You have to pace yourself. You have to balance yourself, work to your objectives. Don't work just because there's hours in the day to work. By the way, for a lot of managers, that's really hard to not see everyone working all the time, but productivity comes from different things.

You cover a lot of ground. I like that you talked about equity of meetings. I mean, that's such a big thing. We talked about equity in the enterprise. Well, equity within the meeting itself is another really big topic.

Then you also sort of alluded a little bit to this real estate conundrum. If I can just add a little bit to that, Aruna, is companies are not going to just stop meeting in person, stop doing things in person, and stop doing events in person. I think you and I would agree to that. I think we're going to be more thoughtful and reflective. Do we need all this space? Do we need to have all these buildings? How can we use space more efficiently? How can we be more planful in the way we lease space, use space, where we put our buildings, how we allow talent to participate and from where.

I did want to kind of dig in a little bit to the IT narrative. Cisco's always had such a strong root in IT, Aruna. What is, in your mind, sort of the role that IT is playing in hybrid work versus just these collaboration solutions.

Aruna Ravichandran: Like I said, I think hybrid work actually made it much more tougher for IT because if you think about it now, IT has to basically think about managing all of their employees' homes. For example, during the pandemic, we actually shifted to managing the experience for 80,000 employees, which means 80,000 homes across the board. But that's not it. Now, with hybrid work, you still have to continue to manage the office and buildings, right, like the real estate, so that you can continue to provide the same kind of an experience whether the people are actually working from home or in the office or anywhere in between. That is one important element, right. Being able to manage across thousands and millions of workspaces across the board, whether it is home or remote, does not matter.

Then provide a single pain of glass. That is not something easy to do because it's about the bandwidth, the networking. It's about the security. Just think about how complex it got for IT when you think about this whole concept of manageability and security. If you think about it, IT, in my mind, which used to be siloed is no longer going to be siloed. IT and facilities, which usually are in different groups, now need to really play well together. If people are going start re-imagining their workspaces, you also have to have that pulse with the IT team. It can't be done in silos. That's another shift in change, which we saw with respect to hybrid work, where HR and facilities have come together in a very, very different way.



Last, but not the least, I've started to see an incremental transformation in many companies, including Cisco. For example, facilities now sits under our CHRO, and it's not just at Cisco. I've started to see that same kind of paradigm shift in many, many companies. Why is that? Because when you think about the planning, when you think about space allocation, when you think about safety, when you think about sustainability, when you think about employee productivity, when you think about efficiency, they are all goals which impact employees, and who, specifically, is responsible for that. It's actually HR. That's why now you see that facilities actually starts to report to the CHRO because there is a blend over there.

In my mind, when you think about the role of IT and hybrid work, it's not just IT. There are going to be three important functions which need to come together like a perfect storm, right. It's IT, it's facilities, and HR. That's when you can truly make hybrid work.

Daniel Newman: Well, I think that there may be a perfect way to sort of pull this all together, Aruna. I mean, we've covered a ton of ground, what happened, where it's going. Then, of course, this, by the way, first time, I've really heard it that way. I've got to say, I like that because you're sort of... We like to say things like people process tech or people process culture tech, but when you think about it functionally, what are the actual fundamental capabilities in an organization that need to be available and capable to deliver on the promise of hybrid work in this new era?

Aruna, I want to thank you so much. Brilliant. Really enjoyed having you as part of our Six Five Summit 2022. We're going to have to have you again soon.

Aruna Ravichandran: Look forward to that, Daniel. Thank you so much for having me today. Really appreciate it.

Daniel Newman: Pleasure was all mine. See you soon.