



REPORT:

2021

Digital workplace  
trends & insights



## INTRODUCTION

The fact that the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the workplace is old news. But what can we actually learn from these changes to shape the future of work for the better?

Beezy set out to dig deeper into the experiences of remote employees over the past year and uncover the meaningful insights business leaders need to support a happier, more engaged, and more productive work environment.

From commute-free days to a spotty home wi-fi connection ruining an important presentation, many of us have now experienced the ups and downs of working remotely. Already remote employees, once relegated to conference lines in the corners of meeting rooms, are no longer the exception. And the cracks in remote workflows are deepening for everyone under the pressure.

Despite the challenges we've experienced, remote work is here to stay. Why? Because we were already "working remotely" before the pandemic. Even when we were gathered in a shared office building, many of us were working in separate virtual spaces, emailing and messaging one another rather than physically communicating. But we also think the office is here to stay. It might look a little different — fewer individual workstations and more spaces for in-person collaboration and bonding.

The future of work isn't easily definable because it won't be one thing. Some of us will work remotely permanently, while others will go back to in-person work sites full time. And many more will fall somewhere in between, working from the office some days, their living room on others, or from transient locations such as trains, coffee shops, and temporary job sites. If there's one thing we've learned during our year of remote work, it's that most employees thrive given flexibility.

But what do companies need to empower this new era of the hybrid physical-virtual enterprise?



We surveyed 800 employees and IT managers at large organizations to find out.

Their experiences helped us understand the state of the digital workplace — and provide the insights businesses need to empower employees in hybrid work environments.

**OUR FINDINGS REVEALED:**



# 01.

## Remote work has amplified underlying workflow issues.

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### TREND

Employees who worked remotely before the pandemic were already grappling with the unique challenges of virtual work.

# 73%

**Nearly three-quarters (73%)** of employees who worked remotely before the pandemic said virtual work presented certain challenges that in-person employees didn't experience.

Those who experienced remote work challenges before the pandemic may have been few and far between — and therefore easier to brush aside. But COVID-19 pushed many organizations to shift the majority of their operations to the digital world.

# 45%

## TREND

Employees who transitioned to a fully virtual work environment during the pandemic reported inefficient experiences plagued by outdated, buggy, and limiting tools and processes.

**Almost half (45%)** of respondents had a difficult experience transitioning to remote work, with each working generation reporting unique pain points.

### Top 5 pain points while working remotely:

- 01 Company's intranet
- 02 Communication
- 03 Hardware
- 04 Knowledge sharing
- 05 Digital processes and workflows

### Biggest remote **work pain** point for each generation:



**Gen Z:**  
Hardware



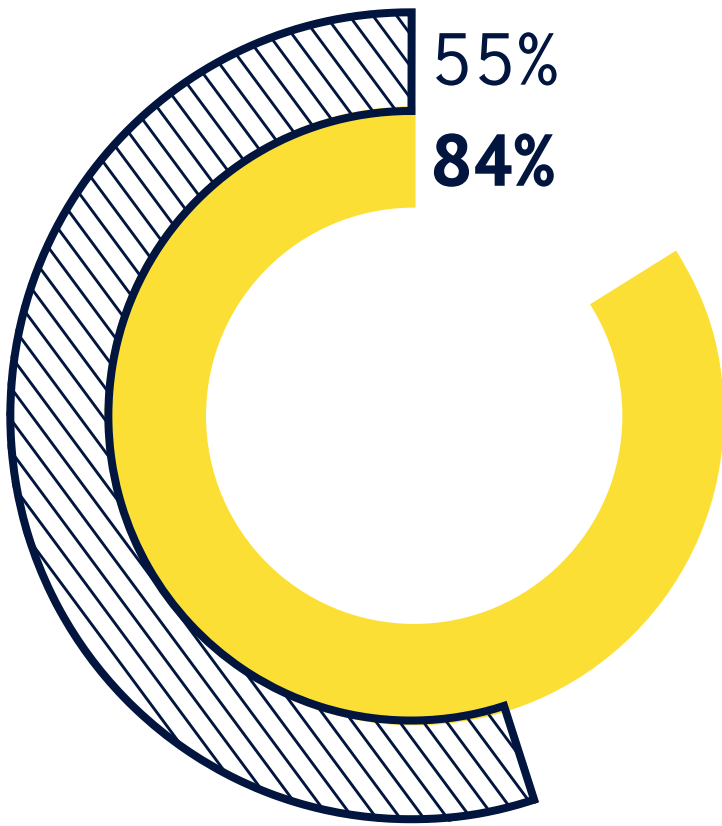
**Gen X:**  
Communication



**Millennials:**  
Intranet



**Baby boomers:**  
Collaboration



#### TREND

These challenges are especially concerning considering the vast majority of employees want a more flexible future of work.

**84%** of employees say they would be **more willing** to work for or stay with a company that offers more flexibility (i.e., the ability to work from home permanently or several days a week). **55%** of employees say they would be **much more** willing.

As many organizations embrace permanent flexible work options, employees will have their pick of employers willing to meet their demands.



IT employees say it's been more challenging to ensure employees at their organization have the ability to complete work tasks remotely than non-IT employees report.

## IT vs. non-IT challenges completing workplace tasks

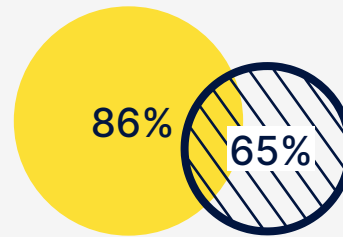
These numbers indicate the burden of transitioning to remote work has fallen heavily on the shoulders of IT teams. What's more, misalignment across teams points to a larger issue: organizational silos that can quickly derail remote communication, collaboration, knowledge sharing, and workflows.



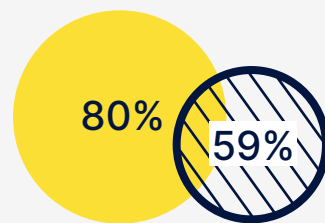
IT respondents who said it's been challenging to ensure employees at their organization have the ability to do the following tasks while working remotely.



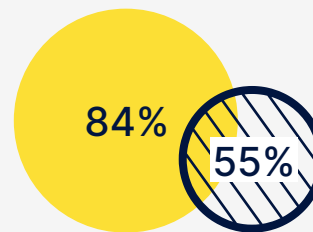
Non-IT respondents who said it's been challenging to complete the following tasks while working remotely.



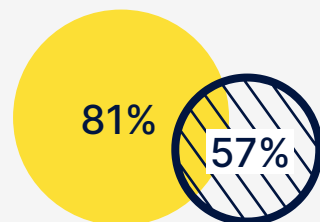
Collaborate across teams, departments and/or location.



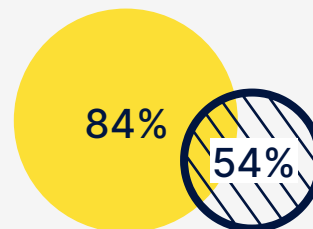
Communicate quickly and seamlessly across platforms and devices.



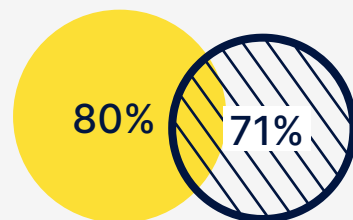
Find and share organizational knowledge.



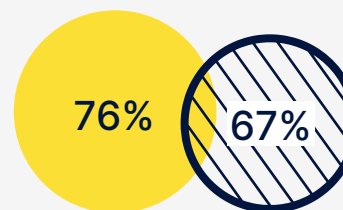
Locate specific files or people with specific expertise.



Follow workflow processes using the appropriate tools and platforms.



Solve technical/IT issues.



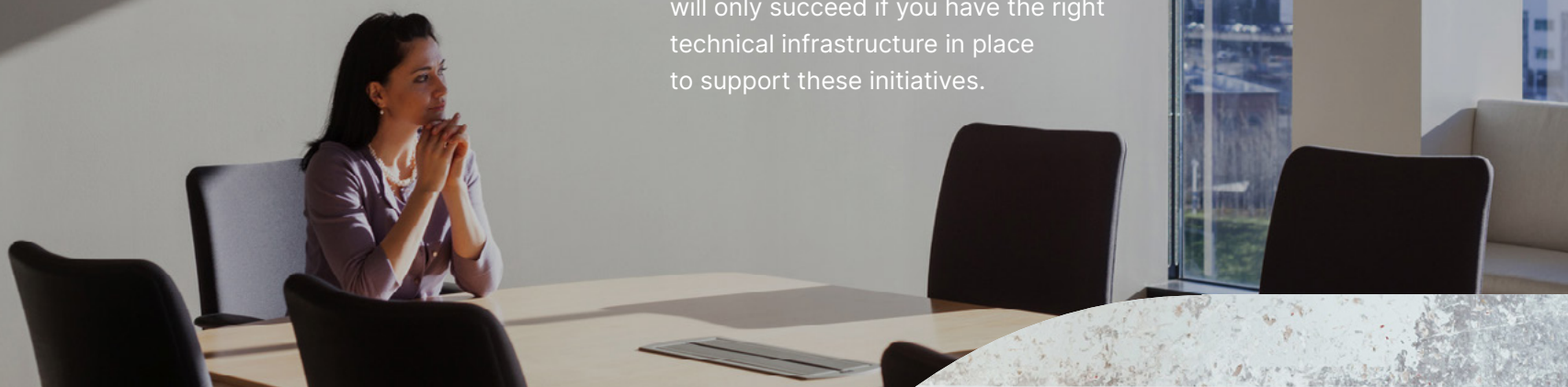
Participate in corporate culture.

## INSIGHT

The last year has highlighted existing organizational issues companies must fix now to prepare for the flexible future workplace employees are demanding.

The fact that employees continue to grapple with outdated company intranets, poor communication practices, buggy hardware, limited knowledge sharing, and inefficient digital processes should be a wake-up call for organizations. At this point in the lifecycle, there's no reason these tools should be working against you.

Organizations that don't address these issues now will quickly fall behind the competition and likely face increased turnover, decreased engagement, and lower innovation. But enterprises must work to ensure their intentions align with their execution. Offering flexibility options as a way to attract and retain top talent will only succeed if you have the right technical infrastructure in place to support these initiatives.



## PRO TIP

**Look for ways to get more value out of your productivity stack.**

Microsoft 365 continues to serve as a strong foundation for the digital workplace. But like most solutions, it's what you do with it that matters most.

Intelligent digital workplace solutions like Beezy help enterprises get the most out of Microsoft 365 and SharePoint by bringing together the best productivity tools and innovative features. This integration means organizations have everything they need to support key workflows and improve how employees communicate, collaborate, and share knowledge – all in one place.





# 02.

## Meeting fatigue is the new app fatigue.

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### TREND

If it feels like your day has become dominated by video calls, you're not alone. And excessive meetings are extending the work day.



**54%**

of respondents say they're attending more meetings now (virtually) than they were before the pandemic (in person).

**41%**

of these respondents say they're attending **4-7** additional meetings now per week.

**More than half (54%)** of employees say they're working more hours remotely, compared to before the pandemic. **26%** say they're working **far more** hours now.



**TREND**

Employees question whether all these meetings are really necessary, especially when so many are disrupted due to tech issues.

**36%** **More than one-third (36%)** of respondents believe the increased frequency of meetings during the pandemic is unnecessary and unproductive.

**49%** **Almost half (49%)** of employees say at least two of the virtual meetings they attend each week are disrupted due to technology issues.

**85%** of employees believe they'd be able to successfully complete their jobs with fewer virtual meetings/calls.

## TREND

Of course, app fatigue still exists. When compounded with excessive video meetings, it all points toward a common denominator: **tech overload**.

12% 41%



Additionally, there's a strong correlation between tech overload and desire to return to the office, suggesting digital processes are breaking down at home.

Employees who want to return to the office full time after the pandemic report feeling more overwhelmed by technology.

Respondents who say they're **extremely overwhelmed** by the quantity of tools and technologies used by their company.

\* Future of work preference (after the pandemic ends)

67%

Return to the office in-person full time\*

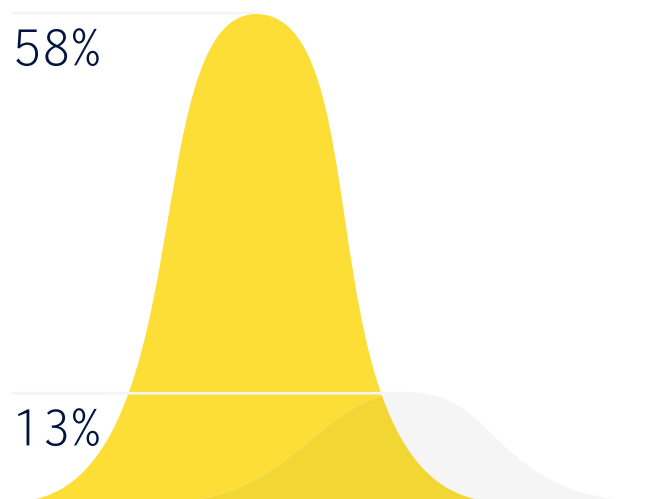
15%

A mix of in-person and remote work\*

18%

Fully remote\*

58%

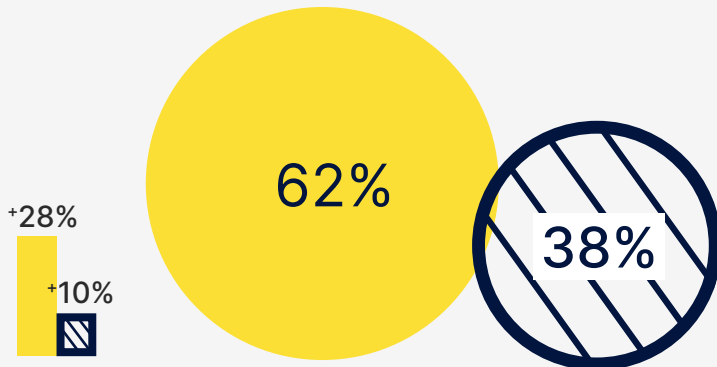


58% of employees say frequent application notifications decrease their productivity.

13% say frequent application notifications significantly decrease their productivity.

## IT managers are **overwhelmed and overworked.**

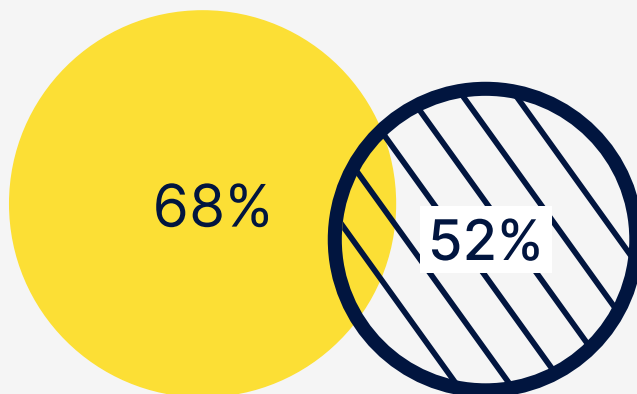
Respondents who say they're overwhelmed by the number of tools and technologies they are required to use at their company:



**IT:** 62% (more than a quarter [28%] are *extremely overwhelmed*)

**Non-IT:** 38% (just 10% are *extremely overwhelmed*)

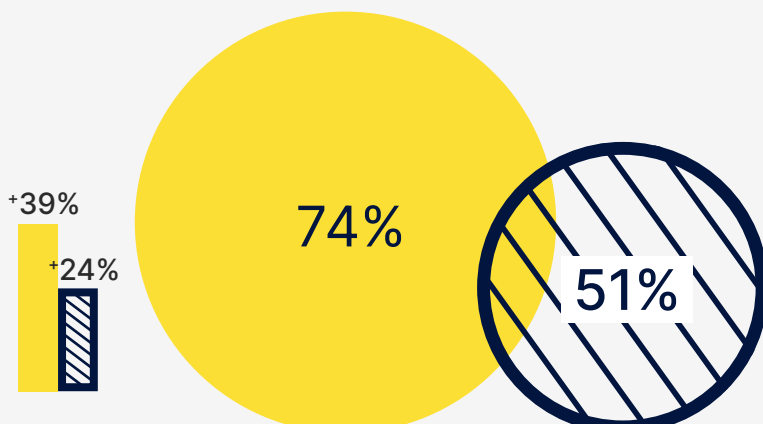
Respondents who are attending more meetings now (virtually) than they were before the pandemic (in person):



**IT:** 68%

**Non-IT:** 52%

Respondents who are working more hours remotely now per week, compared to before the pandemic:



**IT:** 74% (39% are working *far more hours* now)

**Non-IT:** 51% (24% are working *far more hours* now)

## INSIGHT

By reducing meeting frequency, organizations free up their employees to use their time more strategically — and gain a **better work-life balance**.

With fewer meetings, however, companies will need to leverage digital tools to keep projects moving. Yet many employees are struggling with the sheer quantity of digital tools they're required to use while working remotely, which is likely why **the most overwhelmed by technology are the most inclined to return to the office full time**.

Organizations must centralize and streamline their workplace technologies to set employees up for success. Any new strategies and investments should **include input from both non-IT and IT employees** to ensure alignment and success.

## PRO TIP

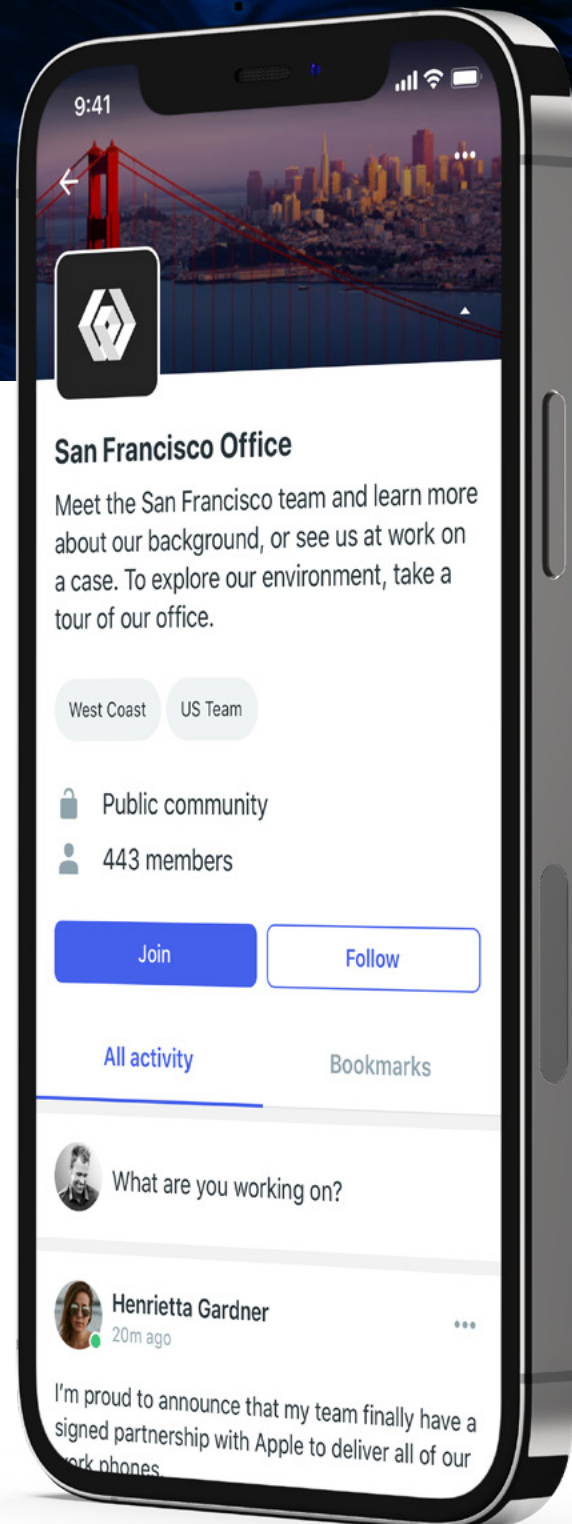
Expand your digital horizons with immersive communication and collaboration tools.

Beyond asking “Do we need a meeting for this?” consider “What tools could we use instead of a meeting?”

**Social media features are popular for a reason:** *They're engaging.*

Workplace tools that mimic these experiences, like digital communities, newsfeeds, employee profiles, blogging, and bots, can enhance communication and collaboration on the job — without the need for yet another video call.

**But** be sure to choose interoperable technologies that work in tandem with one another to prevent feelings of app fatigue and tech overload.



# 03.

## Employee happiness is stable, but engagement is slipping.

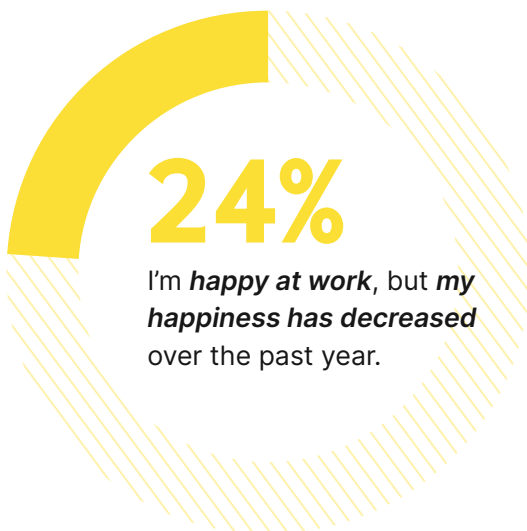
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### TREND

Many employees are happy at work, and that sentiment has remained *mostly* stable — *even increasing for some* — over the past year.

But employers should note that nearly one-third (**29%**) of employees said their happiness has decreased over the past year, and that's due to the many factors outlined in this report.

When asked to describe their sentiment toward work, respondents said:





## TREND

Employee engagement, which indicates employees' emotional commitment to their organization, is deteriorating in remote work environments.

**More than half (51%)** of employees say they're struggling with feeling connected to their work in all-virtual settings. Many are also struggling with team bonding and participating in company culture.

And despite remote work's promise of democratizing digital experiences, nearly **one-quarter (24%)** of respondents say they're having a hard time being included in video meetings or online conversations.

**When asked to describe their engagement while working remotely, respondents said:**

**51%**

I'm struggling with feeling **connected and engaged** with my work.

**41%**

I'm struggling with feeling a sense of **camaraderie** with my coworkers.

**39%**

I'm struggling with finding a sense of **belonging and culture** at my company.

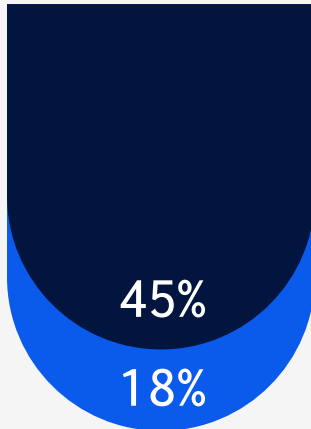
**24%**

I'm struggling with inclusion in **virtual meetings, email, or messaging conversations.**

## TREND

From Zoom happy hours to video lunch and learns, virtual culture-building efforts are falling flat.

**45%** of respondents say their organization has been ineffective at transitioning culture-building events (e.g., happy hours, lunches, games, birthdays, etc.) online as a result of the pandemic.

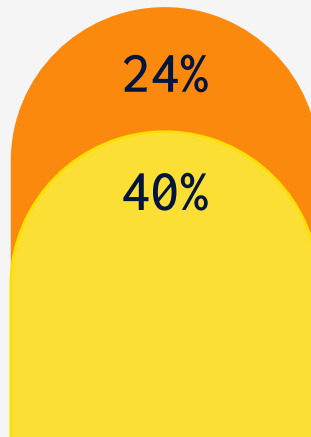


**18%** say their organization has been **extremely ineffective** at transitioning culture-building events.

Considering how fatigued remote employees are with video calls, many of these efforts can feel like just another meeting.



If virtual engagement issues go unaddressed, all employees are likely to experience long-term feelings of isolation.





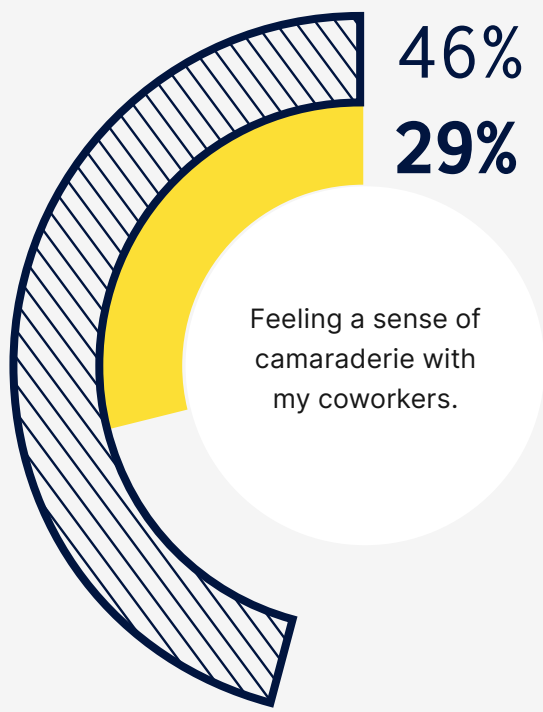
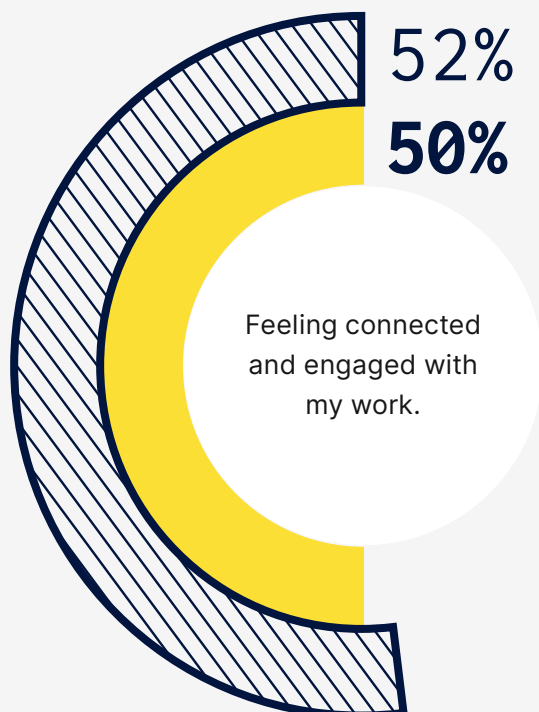
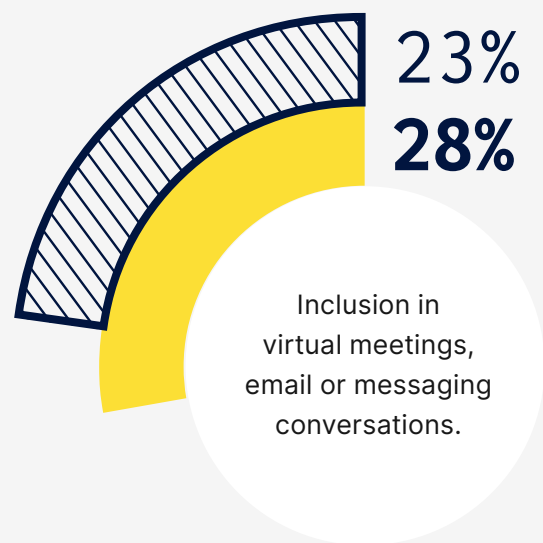
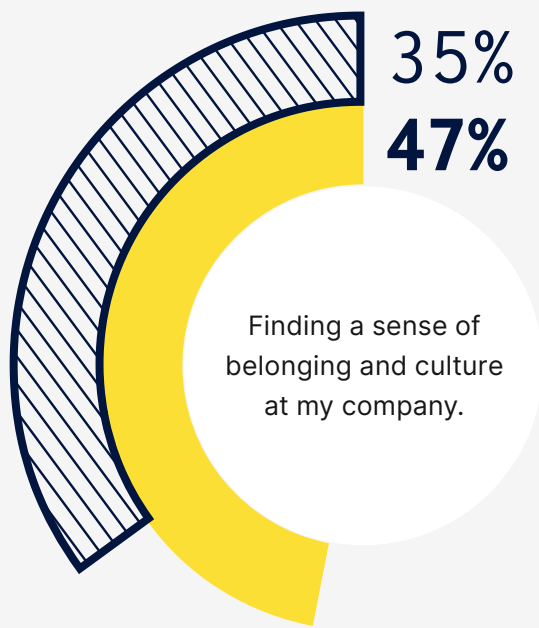
Already remote employees reported higher levels of **increased happiness** in the past year (**40%**) compared to newly remote employees (**24%**). This could be because the pandemic leveled out the virtual experience for everyone.

While newly remote employees are struggling with the abrupt absence of in-person team bonding, already remote employees are grappling with a sense of alienation that has likely existed for some time. This paints a picture for the future of work without employer intervention.



## Employees' engagement struggles differ depending on their remote work status

 Newly remote     Already remote





## INSIGHT

Organizations must remember that employee happiness and engagement are separate levers that require distinct approaches.

There are a variety of reasons employees may be feeling happy with remote work — **more flexibility, no commutes, less pressure on appearance**. Of course, many simply like what they do. But those perks come with a trade-off — **disconnection from their work and colleagues**.

As the workplace continues to blur virtual and physical boundaries, organizations need to re-evaluate engagement strategies in a remote setting. Simply transferring happy hours to Zoom, for example, won't move the engagement needle for employees who are already experiencing video meeting fatigue.

Of course, companies must continue to **focus on employee happiness** in addition to engagement. A noteworthy number of employees are unhappy and disengaged — a combination that will hurt your talent retention rates if left unaddressed.

### PRO TIP

**Focus on fostering strong workplace relationships, not events.**

Pre-pandemic happy hours and friendly office competitions were never really about the events themselves. They were about building relationships with colleagues that motivated employees to engage more deeply with one another at work.

Because of nonverbal overload, video calls don't do a great job fostering these relationships. Instead, turn to solutions that facilitate casual conversations, like chat groups, newsfeeds, mobile apps, gamification features, and social collaboration tools.

# 04.

## IT gaps are widening in remote work environments.

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### TREND

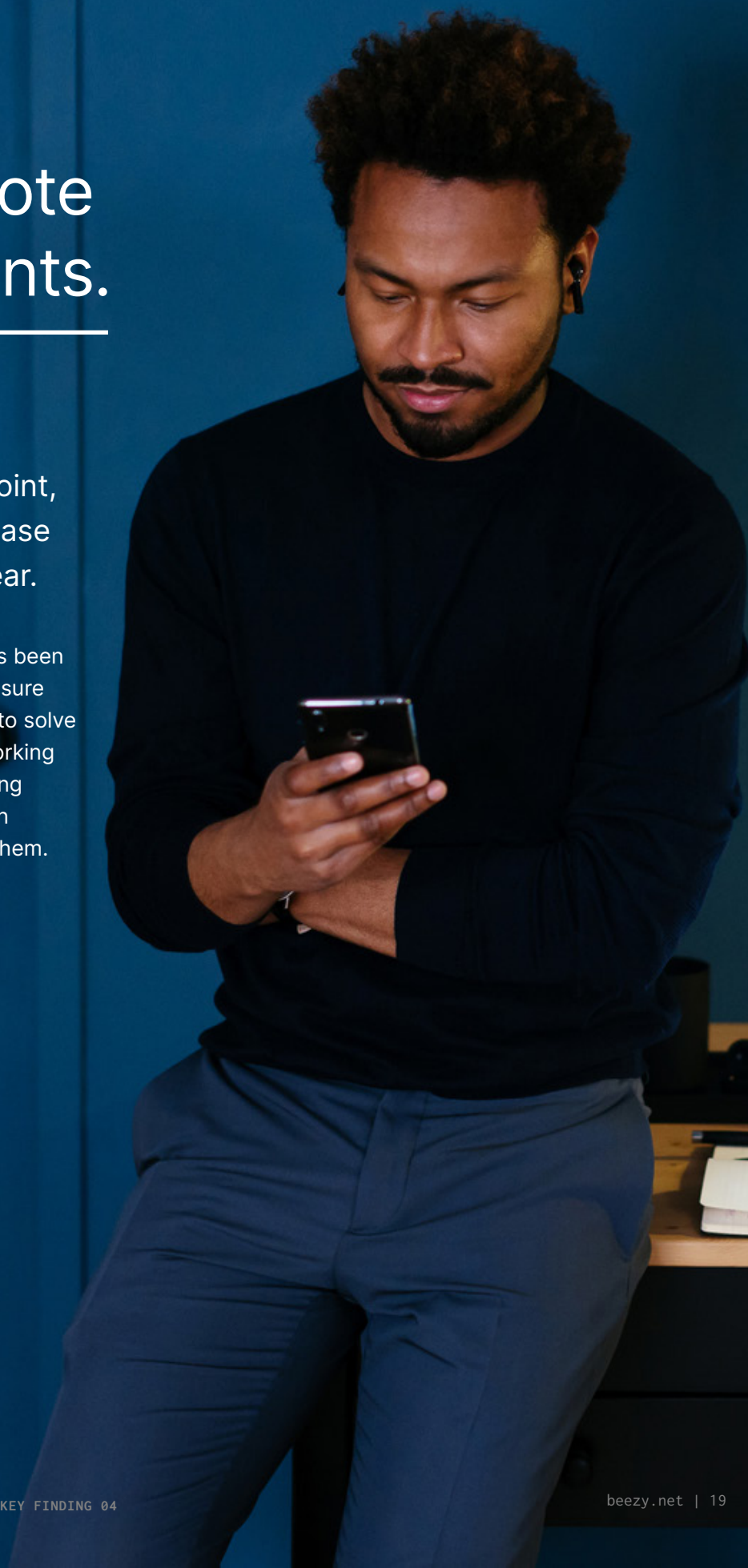
IT has been a remote work pain point, which could explain plans to increase tech investments over the next year.

# 39%

39% of IT managers said it's been extremely challenging to ensure employees have the ability to solve technical/IT issues while working remotely. 24% agreed solving technical/IT issues has been

# 24%

*extremely challenging* for them.



## TREND

The majority of respondents aren't totally satisfied with the workplace technologies offered by their organizations.

**61%**

of employees say they're not completely satisfied with their company's workplace tools and technologies.

When asked why they weren't completely satisfied, employees cited a variety of challenges including bugginess, lack of buy-in, and poor integration.

**Top 3**  
reasons why  
employees aren't  
satisfied with their  
digital tools:

**01**

**They're buggy or unreliable.**

**02**

Not everyone in the company uses the same **tools and technologies.**

**03**

**They don't integrate** well with other tools and technologies.

A woman with long dark hair and glasses is sitting on a dark couch, looking down at a laptop computer. She is wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and blue jeans. The background is dark and moody, with a vertical light source on the right side.

## TREND

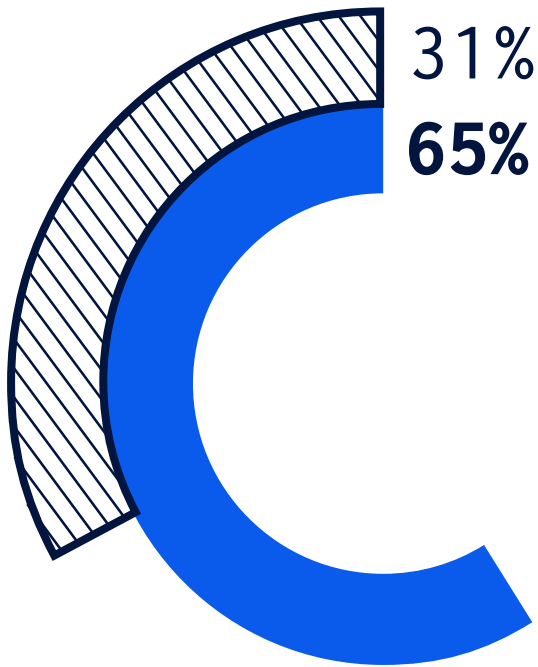
People are turning to unsanctioned tools — even though **85%** know or believe their company monitors their activity.

**40%** of respondents say they use communication and/or collaboration tools while working that are not explicitly approved by their company.

**85%** of employees know or believe their company actively monitors them.

**54%** of employees say their company actively monitors their communication or behavior on company-owned devices.

**31%** said they don't know if their company does, but assume they do.



The use of unsanctioned technology differs by **age** and **prior work experience**.

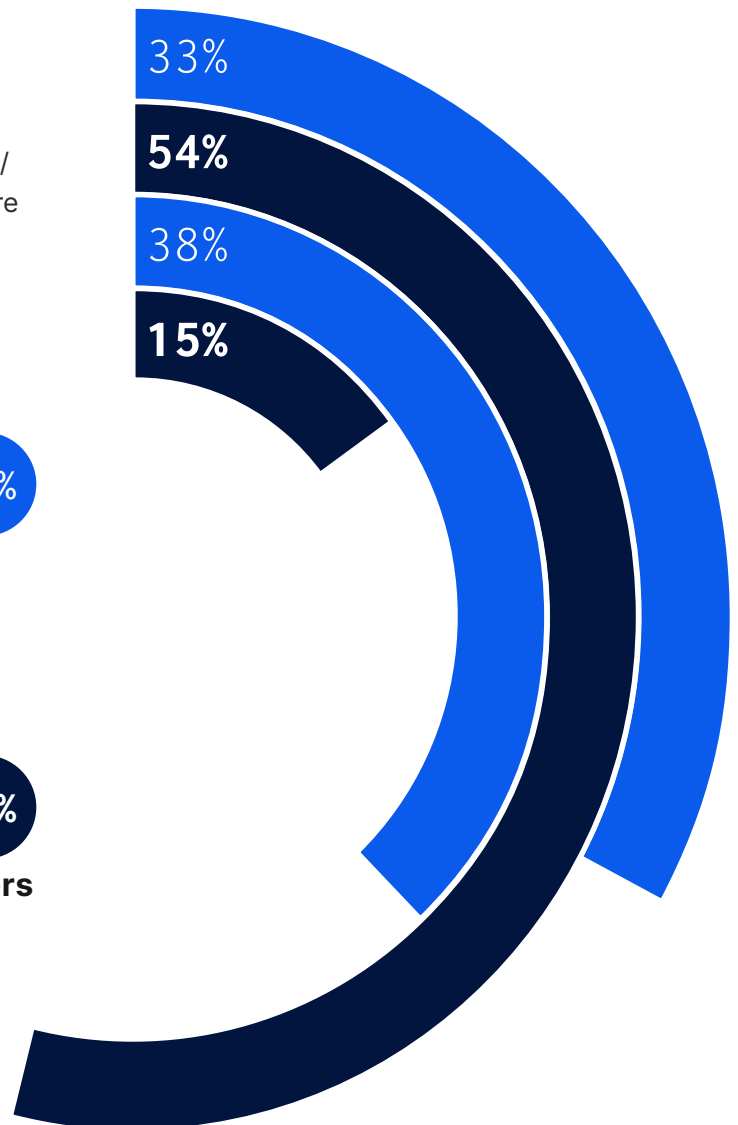
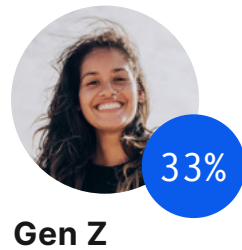
Employees who already worked remotely before the pandemic have a much stronger reliance on shadow IT (*use of unsanctioned technology*).

Employees who use communication and/or collaboration tools while working that are not explicitly approved by their company:



Baby boomers **aren't rule breakers.**

Respondents who use communication and/or collaboration tools while working that are not explicitly approved by their company:



## INSIGHT

Unsatisfied with their existing workplace technologies, employees are resorting to shadow IT practices to do their jobs.

Response data from already remote employees suggests these IT gaps have existed in the shadows for some time, signaling the need for organizations to fundamentally adjust IT strategies and investments. Employers must act now to prevent newly remote employees from going down the same shadow IT path as already remote employees.

**Top 5** technologies respondents said they need to do their jobs more effectively while working remotely:

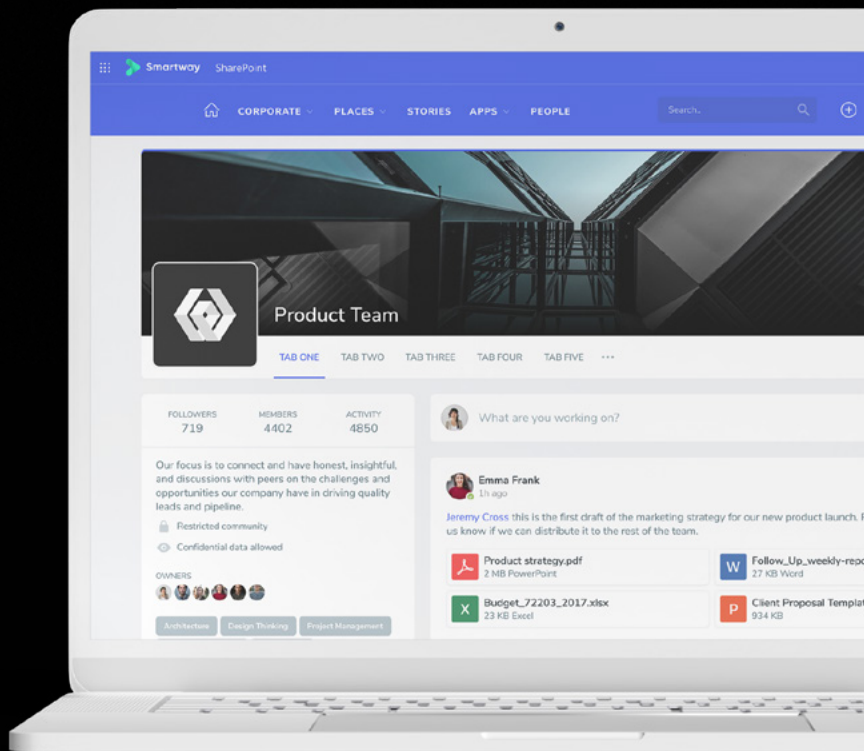
- 01** Communication tools
- 02** File sharing tools
- 03** IT self-help
- 04** Company intranet
- 05** Productivity tools

## PRO TIP

Update, connect, and automate workplace tools and tasks to close IT gaps.

Start by **roadmapping** your digital workflows and processes to identify technologies in your current productivity stack that are outdated or lack interoperability.

Then, find out which unsanctioned tools your employees are using to determine opportunities for more investment. Be sure to select new technologies that layer seamlessly with your **Microsoft 365 suite** to ensure proper integration and maximum productivity.



# Enterprises continue to invest in Microsoft 365

To succeed in the hybrid work environment, organizations must empower their workforce to communicate and collaborate better. And they've standardized on Microsoft productivity tools.



60%

88%

In fact, **88% of the IT managers** we surveyed said they plan to increase their investments in Microsoft 365 over the next 12 months (**60% plan to do so significantly**). Just **5%** of respondents said they don't use Microsoft 365.

If your organization is using Microsoft 365, implementing tools that integrate with and improve its user experience – like Beezy's digital workplace solution – is the best way to drive employee adoption and success.

To learn more about empowering your employees and unlocking new efficiencies in a hybrid workplace, [get in touch.](#)



# The 5 pillars of an intelligent workplace

In many ways, the future of work will look a lot like the (recent) past of work. We've long relied on digital tools in the workplace, resulting in many of us "working remotely" side by side.

But it's only now, after transitioning entire workforces to remote operations, that many business leaders have come to fully understand the implications of disjointed digital workflows at scale. This transition has only cemented a future of the enterprise that blurs the boundaries between physical and virtual realms.

Our survey revealed that employees are experiencing significant workflow challenges as they work remotely. But organizations can *start addressing these issues now* by prioritizing the five pillars of an intelligent workplace.

**01 Seamless collaboration:** Your digital workplace should make it easy for employees to create and engage with each other, no matter where they are.

**02 Continuous communication:** Employees should have the ability to easily connect with each other across a unified platform.

**03 Centralized knowledge:** No employee should have trouble delivering information or finding knowledge.

**04 Streamlined processes:** Digital tools and workflows should be interoperable and automated to maximize productivity.

**05 Inclusive culture:** Your workplace technologies should make employees feel connected, engaged, and included at your organization, not fatigued or left out.



## METHODOLOGY

We surveyed **800 employees** across job levels and departments, including **150 IT managers**, in the U.S. in February 2021. All respondents were full-time employees who worked at organizations with more than **1,000 employees** and shifted to partial or fully remote work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. All IT respondents worked at the manager level or above.

## ABOUT US

Beezy is the all-in-one intelligent digital workplace, built for Microsoft 365 and created to deliver the best possible employee experience. [Learn more at www.beezy.net](http://www.beezy.net)

