





From Surviving to Thriving in Hybrid Work

How employee experience defines the digital workplace

Contents

| Topic | Page no. |
|---|----------|
| Executive summary | 03 |
| Introduction: The Great Resignation is in the rearview mirror, but evolving hybrid dynand the challenging economy are changing the conversation | amics 04 |
| Employees are motivated by hybrid work, but most managers see room for improvement | 05 |
| Attract top talent by understanding your people | 07 |
| Empower decision-making for successful hybrid work | 09 |
| Develop employee experience programs that empower employees to advance your bottom line | 10 |
| Prioritize the technology experience of the hybrid workforce | 12 |
| Millennial vs. Gen Z: Designing the hybrid workplace with digital natives in mind | d 14 |
| Boost productivity with proactive IT support to save time and money | 15 |
| Secure enterprise data without impeding employees' ability to work | 17 |
| The Bottom Line | 18 |
| Research approach and survey demographics | 19 |
| HFS Research authors | 21 |
| Unisys collaborators | 22 |
| About Unisys | 23 |
| About HFS | 24 |

Executive summary

Employees' appreciation of the hybrid work model is clear. But if employers want to reap the benefits of this flexible work arrangement to fuel growth and productivity, they must optimize their hybrid work environments. HFS Research, in partnership with Unisys, conducted a study examining the intricacies of the hybrid work environment, in which employees work from home and spend one to two days per week in the office. We built this analysis of today's work environment on in-depth surveys of employers and their employees in the U.S., the U.K., Germany, and Australia, with 2,000 respondents from enterprises with revenue greater than \$500 million. We surveyed employers, identified as managers and above, and employees with non-managerial duties to understand the commonalities and tensions between the two groups. Net-net, an effective hybrid work environment is one in which employees, their teammates, and their managers communicate effectively remotely and in person, taking full advantage of secure, reliable, collaborative technologies and having productive in-office time together.

One major finding was the popularity of hybrid work among employees. Most employees using a hybrid work model (89%) report being either more engaged or similarly engaged in their jobs compared to six months ago. While employer understanding of hybrid work benefits is on the rise, many opportunities remain for managers to optimize their hybrid work environments. Only 26% of managers declare they have strongly pivoted their management style for hybrid work.

Our research points to crucial actions employers can take to design a hybrid work environment that drives business growth. This takes leveraging the full potential of the hybrid digital workplace, even as economic conditions likely become more challenging in 2023:



Use the flexibility of hybrid work to motivate your workforce: Our research shows that 87% of employees believe a hybrid model creates a very or somewhat effective work environment. Location flexibility for work-life balance is one of employees' top motivational factors, with 67% citing it as a factor influencing work performance.



Invest in your employee experience (EX) program for more engaged employees: The more mature an EX program, the more significant its impact. Approximately 74% of employers with a mature EX program think their employees are more engaged now than six months ago. For somewhat mature programs, 59% of employers report increased engagement, and for immature programs, only 24% of employers report an increase.



Leverage technology to drive empowerment: Nearly two-thirds (62%) of employees describing themselves as more engaged said having the right technology was highly motivating. However, it's important to tailor the technology to your employees to address generational differences in Millennials versus Gen Z (such as 26- to 45-year-olds seeing far higher value in chatbots, wearable devices, and virtual whiteboards than their colleagues 25 and younger). Employers also must recognize which technology solutions, such as automation tools, are universally appreciated across age groups.



Deliver seamless IT support to minimize downtime: Nearly half the workforce (49%) loses between one and five hours a week dealing with IT issues, and another 23% loses more than six hours each week. While employees demonstrate clear privacy concerns—they don't want bossware or productivity monitoring software—they are happy to share device and app performance data to enable IT teams to provide proactive, tailored support. Approximately 92% of employees surveyed are either very or somewhat willing to share if doing so will help resolve their technology issues quickly and effectively.



Design a security framework that doesn't impede employee collaboration and productivity: A third (33%) of employees report that restrictive IT security policies negatively impact their ability to work. Employers must modernize their approach and adapt to the needs of a hybrid workplace, addressing the growing risk of cyberattacks without imposing barriers to workforce productivity.

Note: 1 For Australia, enterprises with revenues exceeding \$250 million.

INTRODUCTION

The Great Resignation is in the rearview mirror, but evolving hybrid dynamics and the challenging economy are changing the conversation

Employers' reasons for implementing hybrid workplaces have evolved, and employees' expectations have changed. In the current challenging economy, many employers are pointing at remote workers as a reason for underperformance, and many high-profile organizations now mandate an in-office policy that is more "office first" than "people first." For example, Disney has mandated four days a week in the office, and General Motors and Starbucks have mandated three days a week at their main headquarters and regional centers. Social media firm TikTok has mandated two days per week and threatened employees with termination if they do not comply. Many other enterprises are following suit, with three-day-a-week in-office mandates becoming commonplace.

Many employees face the choice of working for employers with hybrid policies that suit their desire for flexibility, with two-thirds citing this as their number-one motivational factor in the workplace. Employers that can't deliver an effective yet flexible hybrid work model risk losing key talent.

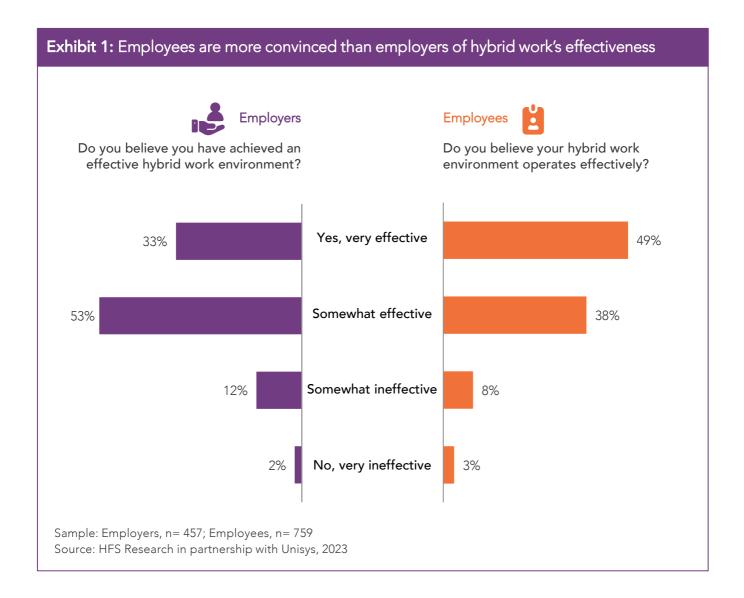
Approximately 68% of organizations have mandated hybrid work but many still struggle to align this model to support business performance. As enterprises weigh the effectiveness of their hybrid work policies and return-to-work mandates, 60% of employers with a hybrid model plan to change their approach in the next one to two years. However, most indicate they will shift to an alternative hybrid or remote work format—further confirming that the days of the completely in-office workforce are long gone.

The pivotal question for employers is this: How do you evolve your hybrid workplace to create superior employee experiences (EX) that drive business outcomes?

Employees are motivated by hybrid work, but most managers see room for improvement

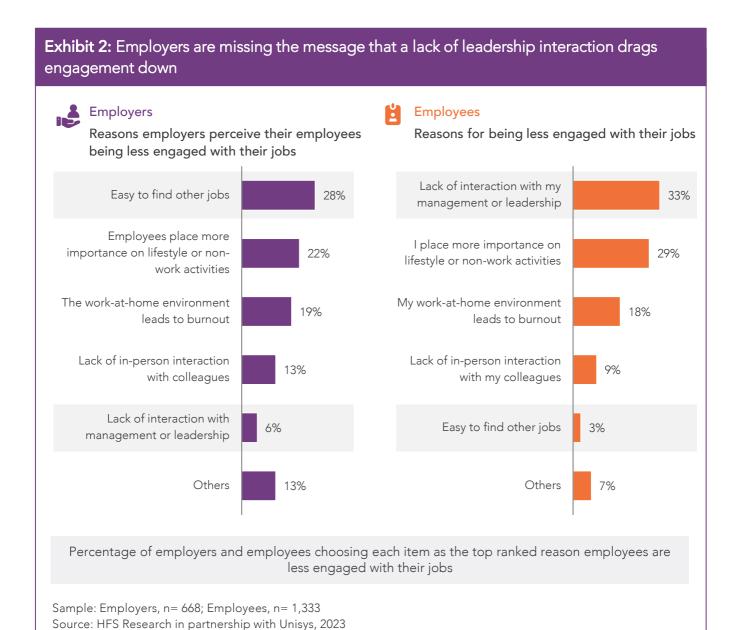
Managers and their employees generally agree that a hybrid work model is effective, with 68% of employers having implemented a hybrid work environment. However, employees remain more convinced of hybrid work's effectiveness than their managers. Nearly half of employees (49%) believe their hybrid work environments operate very effectively, while only 33% of employers rate

their hybrid work models as very effective (Exhibit 1). Managers need to communicate better with their hybrid workers to ensure performance expectations are better aligned, which can be achieved by optimizing collaboration technology and taking a strategic approach to spending time in the office.



One measure of the effectiveness of any workplace program or strategy is employee engagement. With the rise of hybrid work, 46% of employees say they've become more engaged. Nearly half of employees surveyed report being more engaged with their jobs than six months ago. And although only 11% disagree, our research uncovered a significant discrepancy between employees' and employers' perceptions of the cause of decreased engagement.

Approximately 33% of less-engaged employees say the main reason is a lack of interaction with management and leadership, and only 3% cite the ease of finding other jobs. However, employers indicate they believe the opposite: 28% attribute lack of workforce engagement to the ease of finding jobs, and only 6% identify lack of interaction with management as the most influential factor (Exhibit 2). A clear disconnect exists among employers that don't understand leadership presence and interaction is key to employee motivation, another element of why hybrid work suffers.

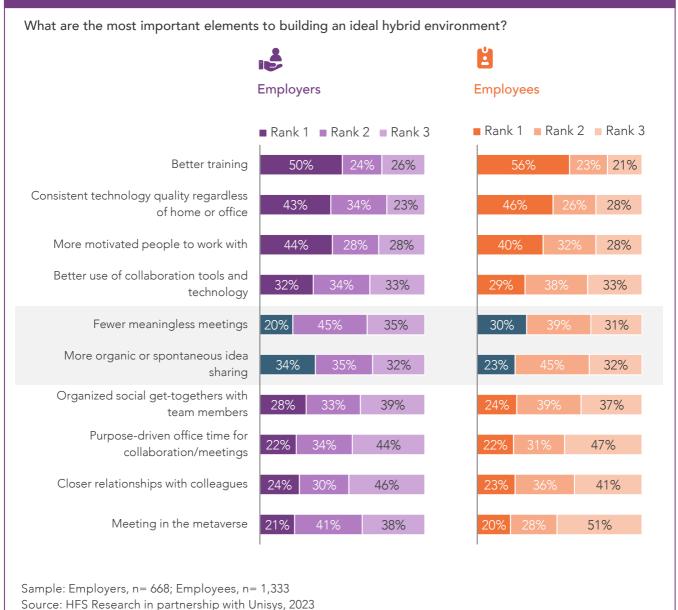


Attract top talent by understanding your people

Understanding what motivates employees is critical to creating an authentic hybrid work model that can help attract and retain talent. Employers and employees agree that the most important components of building an effective hybrid workplace include workforce training, consistent quality of technology, optimized use of collaboration tools, and a team of motivated colleagues (Exhibit 3).

When it comes to each group's vision for day-to-day communication and collaboration, however, they are not perfectly aligned. Employees ranked "fewer meaningless meetings" 10 percentage points higher than employers, and employers ranked "more organic or spontaneous idea sharing" 11 percentage points higher than employees when identifying the most crucial elements of a hybrid environment.





To thrive during this era of adaptability and change, organizations should seek to understand employees' needs and respect differences in employee motivations. It is also critical to acknowledge that employee experience directly impacts customer experience, which ties to business outcomes.

Hybrid work offers opportunities for creativity and productivity gains, but our research shows that leaders still struggle with activating them. To capitalize on these opportunities, leaders should distinguish between simply implementing a hybrid mode of working and making hybrid work effective. Combining technology, collaboration, IT support, and EX programs to provide a holistic digital workplace experience is the key to delivering an effective hybrid workplace. The data shows that we're not there yet.

Our study results reveal a blueprint for enterprises seeking to master hybrid work. An effective hybrid workplace combines technology tools, proactive IT support, and leadership that prioritizes workplace programs and culture that drives employee experience.

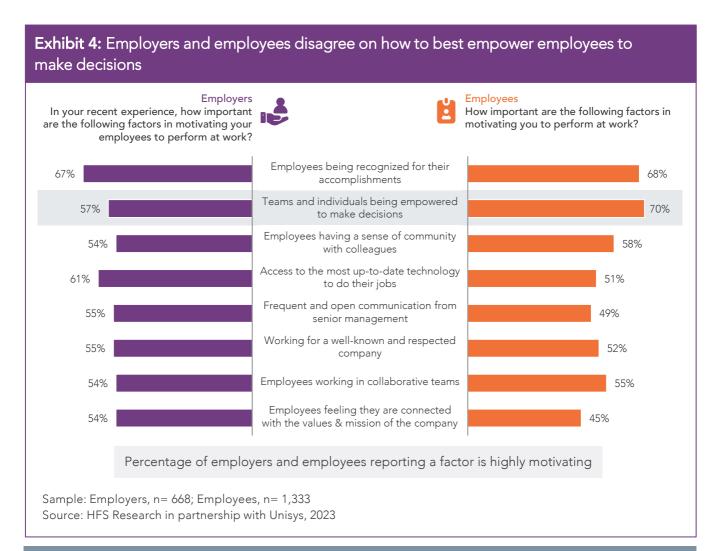
Empower decision-making for successful hybrid work

Understanding what motivates employees is critical to creating an authentic hybrid work model that can help attract top talent. Our research indicates employers and employees align closely across most vital motivational factors. However, the two groups diverge on the importance of empowerment for decision-making as a motivational factor for work performance. Nearly three-fourths (70%) of employees see decision-making as a key motivation, versus only 57% of employers (Exhibit 4).

Employees are less concerned about the old progression markers—moving from a cubicle to the corner office—and more interested in being given recognition for their accomplishments and the freedom to make decisions. Employers have an immense opportunity to tap into employees'

desire to make decisions to drive growth and productivity, but this shift requires increased trust and empowerment from managers.

The research also shows that employees place more value on feeling connected to their immediate teams than to the corporate mission; in fact, employees ranked "feeling connected with the values and mission of the company" as the factor least motivating them to perform at work. The in-office culture is less about aligning with a corporate mission and more about collaboration with direct colleagues, the recognition of doing a job well, and the flexibility to manage work-life balance. Employee motivations and values have changed, and employers need to pivot to enable better EX.

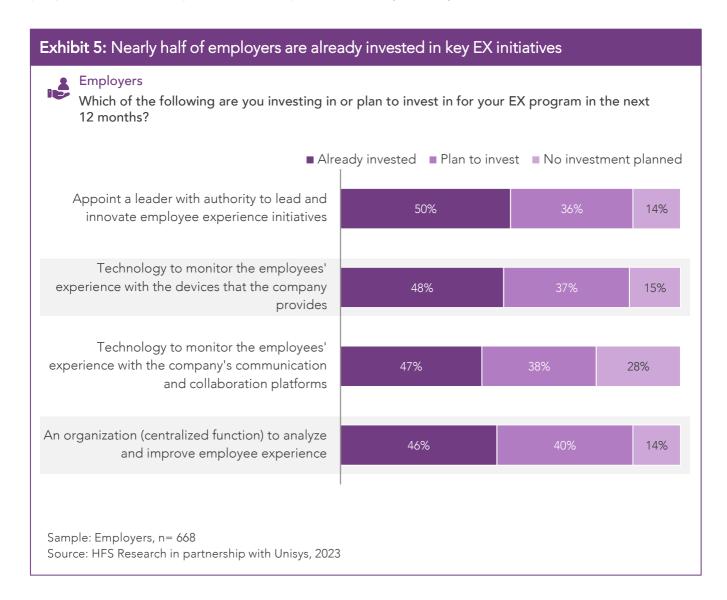


Key to success: Managers should communicate regularly with their hybrid teams, trusting employees to make decisions and relying less on hierarchy.

Develop employee experience programs that empower employees to advance your bottom line

So, how can leaders better empower their workforces to make decisions that drive business outcomes?

As businesses emerge from the Great Resignation, leaders are keenly aware that employee experience matters for their business. Successful companies are embracing EX programs to continuously measure and improve EX throughout all aspects of the hybrid workplace, including the provision of technology, work culture, and physical workspace. Leaders are keenly aware that EX matters for their business. Nearly half of the employers surveyed already have invested in some combination of experience management tools and programs, and more than a third plan to invest in the next 12 months (Exhibit 5).

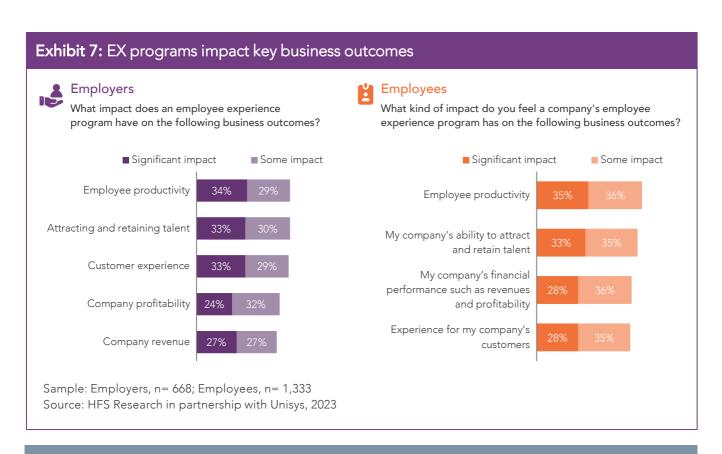


Our research findings clearly show EX programs are a game-changer for employee engagement, with 74% of employers with mature EX programs reporting their employees are more engaged than they were six months before (Exhibit 6). Indicators of EX program maturity include:

- The organization has specific methods or metrics to measure EX.
- Management regularly informs employees of EX measures and solicits their feedback to improve them.
- The company has a centralized organization or function that examines EX measures and makes recommendations to improve EX.
- The organization periodically reviews and updates EX measures as business goals or conditions change.



It is also clear that EX programs significantly impact other key performance indicators for businesses. Both employers and employees agree there is some level of impact on business performance metrics, such as revenue and profitability, but not surprisingly, they perceive the greatest impact is on employee productivity and attracting and retaining talent (Exhibit 7).



Key to success: Employers should mature their EX programs to create a hybrid work environment that engages employees and supports business performance.

Prioritize the technology experience of the hybrid workforce

As outlined above, one crucial metric of any EX program is employee satisfaction with the company's technology and digital tools. The quality of your employees' technology experience heavily influences workplace collaboration, productivity, and workforce retention. In fact, the research shows that effective communication and collaboration platforms and proactive IT support are primary factors in employees' decisions to leave or remain within a company or role. Responses indicate that employees who consider themselves more engaged are significantly more motivated by having access to the right technology (Exhibit 8). Additionally, consistent technology experiences and better collaboration technology ranked in the top four

Exhibit 8: Employers should provide a smooth end-to-end technology experience to motivate employees

Employees

In your recent experience, how important are the following factors in motivating you to perform at work?

Access to technology

About the same

Less engaged

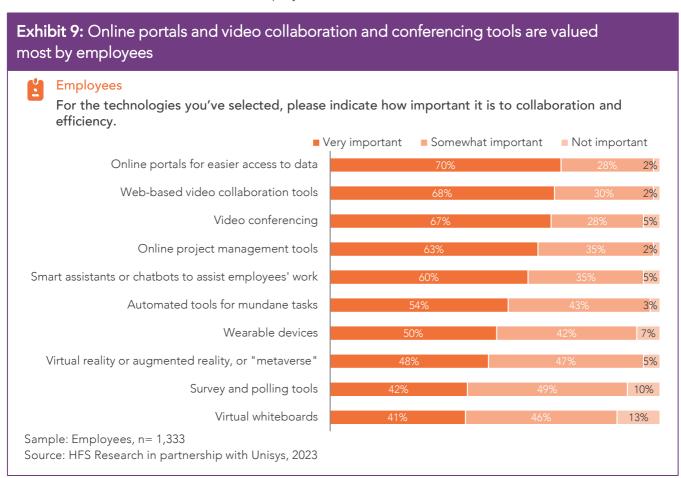
Percentage of employees from each engagement level reporting that access to technology is highly motivating

Sample: Employees, n= 1,333

Source: HFS Research in partnership with Unisys, 2023

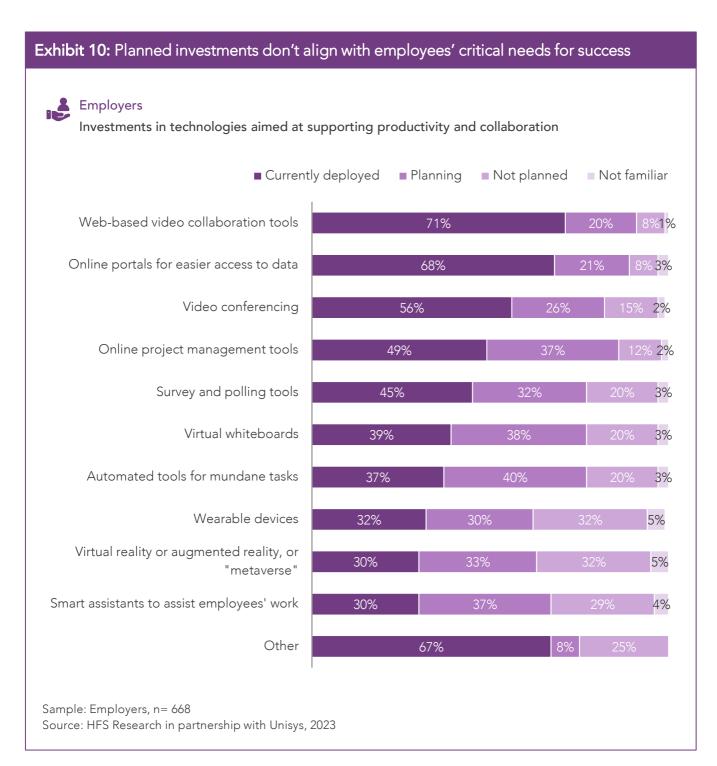
elements of building an ideal hybrid work environment (Exhibit 4).

So, what does "having the right technology" look like to employees? Results show that online portals for data access, web-based video collaboration tools, online project management tools, and automated tools for mundane tasks are most valuable to employees (Exhibit 9).



We also asked employers which tools and technologies they currently provide or plan to provide to their workforce (Exhibit 10). Responses demonstrate that employers are largely delivering or planning to deliver the technologies employees demand; however, some planned investments do not align with what employees identify as critical for their success. Approximately 77% of organizations currently deploy or plan to invest in virtual whiteboards, for example, which employees rank as least critical to collaboration and efficiency.

In addition, nearly one-quarter of organizations do not plan investments in or are not familiar with automation tools to streamline mundane tasks, which over half of employees deem very important to productivity. Similarly, wearable devices are on the lower end of deployment and planning, whereas half of employees consider them very important. There is a clear opportunity for employers to revisit and refine their approach to collaboration and productivity technology provisioning in today's digital workplace.



Millennials vs. Gen Z: Designing the hybrid workplace with digital natives in mind

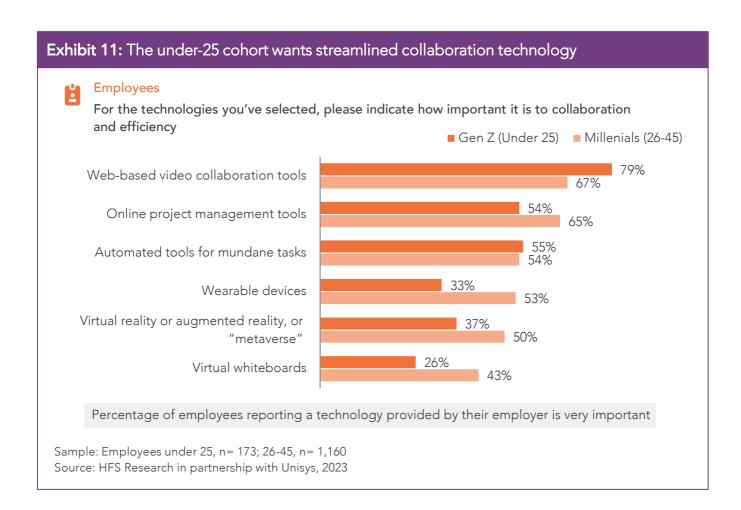
The research also exposed generational differences in attitudes to technology. Millennials (ages 26-45) see value in integrating emerging technologies into the workplace, such as wearable devices, virtual and augmented reality, and virtual whiteboards.

Employees under 25 (Gen Z), however, are less inclined than their older peers to find novel technology solutions important (Exhibit 11). Instead, they are more adamant about having access to reliable foundational technologies that foster digital collaboration and streamline efficiencies but don't strive to replace in-person communication. These technologies include webbased video collaboration and project management and automation tools. Gen Z came of age in the world of work during the pandemic,

and the research findings indicate they may not want every aspect of the workplace to be digitized.

Furthermore, the varying interest in different types of collaboration technology could mean that these generations have different definitions of what collaboration entails. For the younger generation, some technology, such as wearables or virtual reality, is just part of their everyday lives, so they might be less inclined to consider these tools "collaborative," especially within the context of the workplace.

Harmonizing employees' technology needs across demographic groups to create a genuinely hybrid environment will be vital. The bottom line is that having access to the right digital tools matters to workers of all ages, and effective technology can boost employee retention and drive productivity growth.

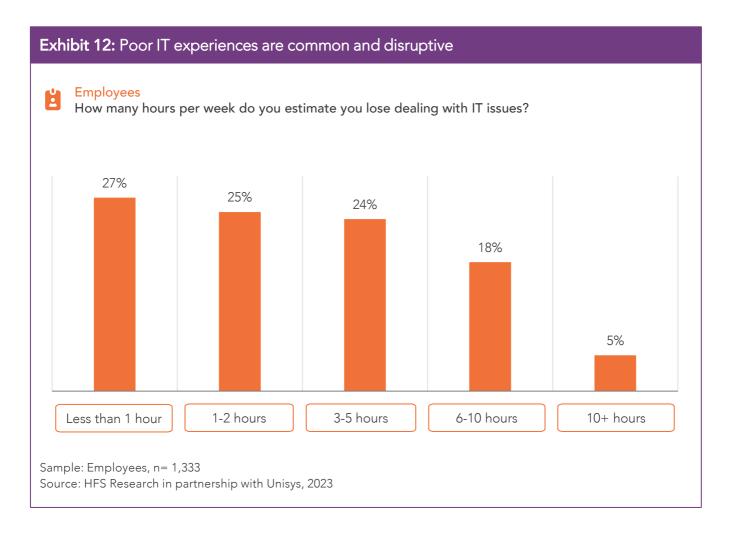


Key to success: Recognize that the technology experience is an integral piece of the employee experience. Design digital experiences keeping motivation and personal technology preferences in mind.

Boost productivity with proactive IT support to save time and money

A critical but often overlooked element of employee experience is the IT support experience. Employees depend on seamless interactions with technology to do their jobs effectively, but poorly functioning IT systems paired with lackluster tech support can lead to considerable losses in productivity. Streamlined IT support is even more important in a hybrid environment, where success relies more heavily on robust technology infrastructure.

Our research shows that 49% of the workforce loses between one and five hours per week dealing with IT issues, and 23% of employees lose six or more (Exhibit 12). It's clear the experience of navigating IT support is still painful for employees, and employers must elevate it or risk losing out on productivity and business growth.



Employees want tailored IT support that reduces downtime and empowers them to drive innovation, which means employers must evolve their support models to better enable productivity. The research shows 92% of employees are very or somewhat willing to share device and network usage information with the IT team—as long as the data is used to more quickly identify and resolve issues, helping them do their jobs better (Exhibit 13).

It's time to flip the script to prioritize proactive, rather than reactive, IT support that doesn't rely on employees to file countless service desk tickets and wait indefinitely for a response. The good news is that nearly half of employers (49%) report they have technologies deployed to identify and quantify IT issues before they impact users, and another 41% are planning a deployment. However, many employers are missing out on a key opportunity to demonstrate ROI, as 42%

report they don't measure productivity loss due to IT support issues. By establishing a baseline from which to measure improvement, organizations will be far better poised to quantify progress.

Employers should feel emboldened to measure device and app usage and performance data to proactively detect and resolve IT problems.

Employees want apps and technology to support collaboration, empower creativity, improve IT support, and reduce lost time—but they don't want bossware.

Employers are poised to gain from empowering their workforce with proactive IT support, but it requires a nuanced conversation, and they should participate with genuine openness. Sharing should lead to supportive interventions and open discussions with employees to address privacy concerns. Employers should openly communicate what data they collect and how they use it to alleviate employees' fear of misuse

Exhibit 13: Employees are willing to share data if it improves the IT support experience

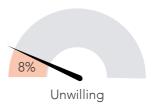


Employees

Thinking about your technology support experiences, how willing are you to share information (such as your app, device, or network usage and performance) in order to be provided with more predictive support, e.g., technology issues resolved proactively?







Sample: Employees, n= 1,333

Source: HFS Research in partnership with Unisys, 2023

Key to success: Proactive IT support is within your grasp. Capitalize on employees' willingness to share data to save time and money while improving experience.

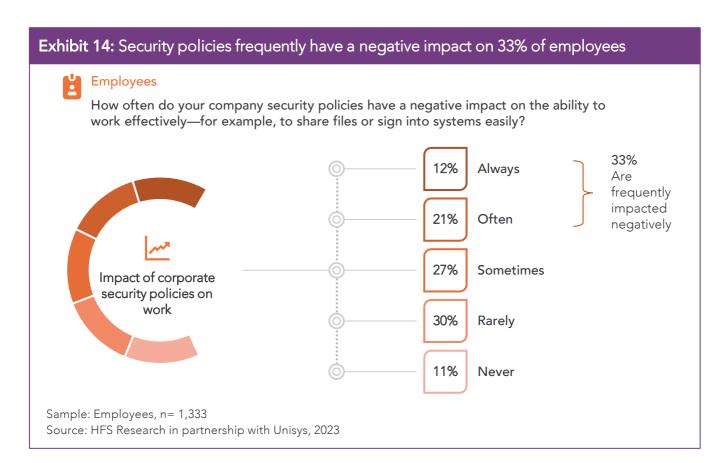
Secure enterprise data without impeding employees' ability to work

As organizations double down on security to combat growing cybersecurity threats, our study finds that restrictive IT security policies harm employees' ability to work effectively. At a time when the competitive landscape is fierce, loss of productivity, collaboration, and innovation is of considerable risk to an enterprise.

One-third of employees surveyed report being always or often negatively impacted by IT security policies (Exhibit 14), with more than 20% of customer-facing employees always or often impacted—nearly double the percentage point of those in non-customer-facing roles. From excessive restrictions on document sharing and communication with external partners to requirements for constant password updates, employees face countless barriers to simply getting their work done.

The chief information and security officer (CISO) role has traditionally been perceived as "the Office of No," but that mindset is due for a significant shift. Nearly half of employers that require in-office models cite the security risks of remote work as their primary reason for the mandate; however, this trend may indicate more deeply rooted problems of outdated network protections or vulnerable identity management.

Successful organizations design their security architecture to enable—not obstruct—innovation and collaboration in a hybrid work environment. Employers concerned about enterprise data security in remote and hybrid workplaces should evaluate their existing frameworks and identify opportunities to modernize and improve end-user experience.



Key to success: Keep the end user top of mind when developing security policies to strike a balance between data protection and employee experience.

The Bottom Line: Invest in creating the right conditions to shift from employee engagement to employee empowerment. Employers that don't act quickly risk losing their top talent. Leverage collaboration, proactive IT support, technology tools, security, and a leadership focus on understanding employee motivations to make hybrid work effective in this next era of the digital workplace.

The picture is brighter than many employers may think. Employees are more engaged, and the Great Resignation is in the rearview mirror. There are opportunities—even in an economic downturn—for organizations that can empower their workforces to respond to challenges agilely, leveraging the new possibilities of hybrid work.

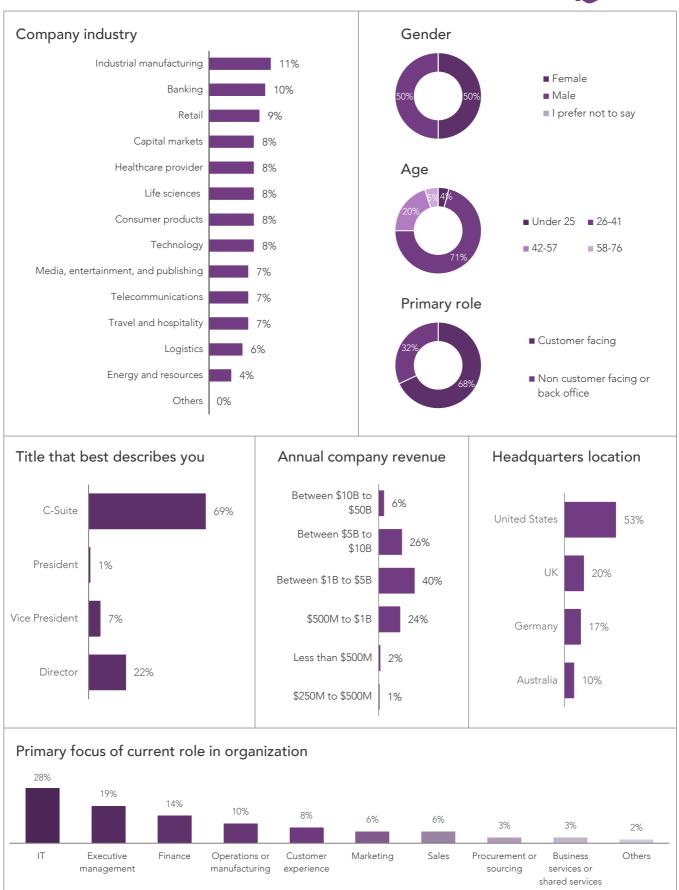
Data and communication drive most success factors for hybrid work. If you can understand employee experience and benchmark it, you have a baseline from which to move the needle. Employees have been clear that they're willing to share data to improve their experiences; it's time to capitalize on that willingness to develop EX programs that improve experiences and connect to your business outcomes.

Employee engagement programs are game-changers for successful enterprises. But employers should also have a nuanced and open conversation with their employees about what they need to be successful, such as new technologies and tools to support creativity and proactive IT support to streamline productivity. Doing so is the only way to engage employees, maintain productivity, deliver better customer experiences, and improve business performance.

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Survey demographics—Employers

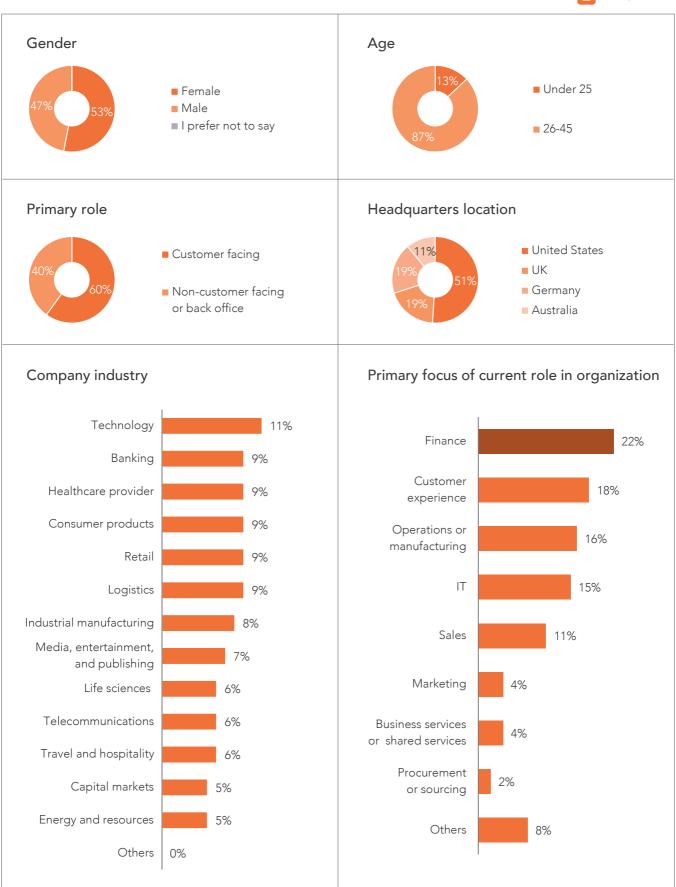




Source: HFS Research in partnership with Unisys, 2022

Survey demographics—Employees





Source: HFS Research in partnership with Unisys, 2022

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Melissa O'Brien is an Executive Research Leader and Head of Research Operations at HFS Research. Melissa leads HFS' research initiatives for all things customer experience, including contact center, digital marketing and sales, CX design, and conversational AI. Her industry research focuses on key services dynamics within retail, CPG, travel, and hospitality firms. Melissa also looks after operations across all research coverage areas, helping HFS realize our own version of OneOffice™. Melissa brings hands-on industry and analyst experience to her role at HFS.



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Phil Fersht is widely recognized as the world's leading industry analyst focusing on business operations and technology transformation, spanning more than two decades. He has a global reputation for calling out the big trends, being unafraid to share his honest views, and driving a narrative on the technology and business services industries shaping many leadership decisions. His reputation drove him to establish HFS Research in 2010; it has grown into one of the leading industry analyst firms and the undisputed leader in IT business services and process technologies research.

Unisys contributors



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Director of Global Strategy, Digital Workplace Solutions

Weston Morris leads the global strategy for emerging technologies that impact digital worker productivity—including natural language processing, artificial intelligence, automation, merged reality, virtualization and IoT. He was recognized by HDI in 2022 as one of the Top 25 Thought Leaders in Experience Management.

Weston has been with Unisys since 1988. Previous roles include chief architect for Microsoft strategic programs; manager of Microsoft consulting (U.S. Western region), client solution architect; and senior engineer in new product R&D. He has more than 30 years of experience in solution architecture, system integration and software engineering, having delivered solutions to clients in public sector, consumer packaged goods and finance.



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Joel's experience spans more than 20 years in technology solutions, and prior to joining Unisys, he was the chief operating officer and chief revenue officer for Unify Square. During his five years there, Joel progressed through several leadership roles and oversaw business development for the company's consulting, managed services, and service integration initiatives. Throughout his career, he has honed skills in operational excellence, alliance creation, team-building, partnership programs and delivery to create meaningful revenue streams culminating in acquisition opportunities.



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About Unisys

Unisys is a global technology solutions company that powers breakthroughs for the world's leading organizations. Our solutions—digital workplace, cloud applications and infrastructure, enterprise computing, and business process—help our clients challenge the status quo and create new possibilities. To learn how we deliver breakthroughs for our clients, visit unisys.com.

About DWS

Unisys Digital Workplace Solutions (DWS) empowers your workforce with the tools, solutions and services they need to work securely from anywhere, anytime, on any device. DWS helps you deliver end-user experience parity with a holistic and centralized approach to technology service management.



About HFS

Insight. Inspiration. Impact.

HFS is a unique analyst organization that combines deep visionary expertise with rapid demand-side analysis of the Global 2000. Its outlook for the future is admired across the global technology and business operations industries. Its analysts are respected for their nononsense insights based on demand-side data and engagements with industry practitioners.

HFS Research introduced the world to terms such as "RPA" (Robotic Process Automation) in 2012 and more recently, Digital OneOffice™ and OneEcosystem™. The HFS mission is to provide visionary insight into the major innovations impacting business operations such as Automation and Process Intelligence, Blockchain, the Metaverse and Web3. HFS has deep business practices across all key industries, IT and business services, sustainability and engineering.