EBOOK

The State of Modern Employee Experience

Exploring the need to streamline in a cluttered digital workplace

Presented by **Workgrid** | **reworked**

Introduction

Today's workforce faces a peculiar dilemma. Employees are better equipped with resources and tools than ever before. New workplace innovations continue to hit the market, following an unprecedented rise in remote and hybrid work models over the past three years. In fact, the digital workplace market was valued at $27.3 billion in 2021, and analysts predict it to grow by 22.3% between 2022 and 2030. These new technologies purportedly stand to usher in a new era of productivity, efficiency, access, and results.

But while technology is undoubtedly improving the business environment, it's creating problems of its own. Technology should be aiding employees, but many now find that the sheer volume and complexity of tools are impeding them from accomplishing what they need to do. This has led to increasing "digital friction", which Gartner® describes as "the unnecessary effort an employee has to exert to use data or technology for work."

However, even when employers offer best-in-class, intuitive technologies, it's possible for employees to experience friction because of how many different solutions they're expected to navigate on a daily basis. To further explore this situation, Workgrid, in partnership with SMG, surveyed more than 500 mid-level employees to find out how they communicate and perform their work in today's environment and how they feel about the applications and tools they use.

This report explores the specific challenges these "solutions" often create for managers and their teams, as well as the opportunities to improve employee experience in a digitally-driven environment.

Gartner, Take These 3 Actions to Make Digital Workplaces Happier, Faster and Smarter, 14 September 2021. GARTNER is a registered trademark and service mark of Gartner, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the U.S. and internationally and is used herein with permission. All rights reserved.

Key Findings

- Managers and employees are largely using more tools and applications during their work day than ever before.

- Email still reigns as a preferred way of finding information and collaborating, but it's losing its primacy as other tools become preferred.

- Managers and teams do experience discontent with the applications and tools they're given, but there's a high degree of toleration for this dysfunction.

- Digital friction abounds in the workplace, with few who truly have a seamless experience with the technology they use.

- Managers are open to improvements, including new technologies, that would streamline the digital workplace.

Demographics in Brief

The Digital Employee Experience survey received 400 responses from professional or desk workers ranging from the managerial to vice presidential level.

The *Digital Employee Experience* survey received

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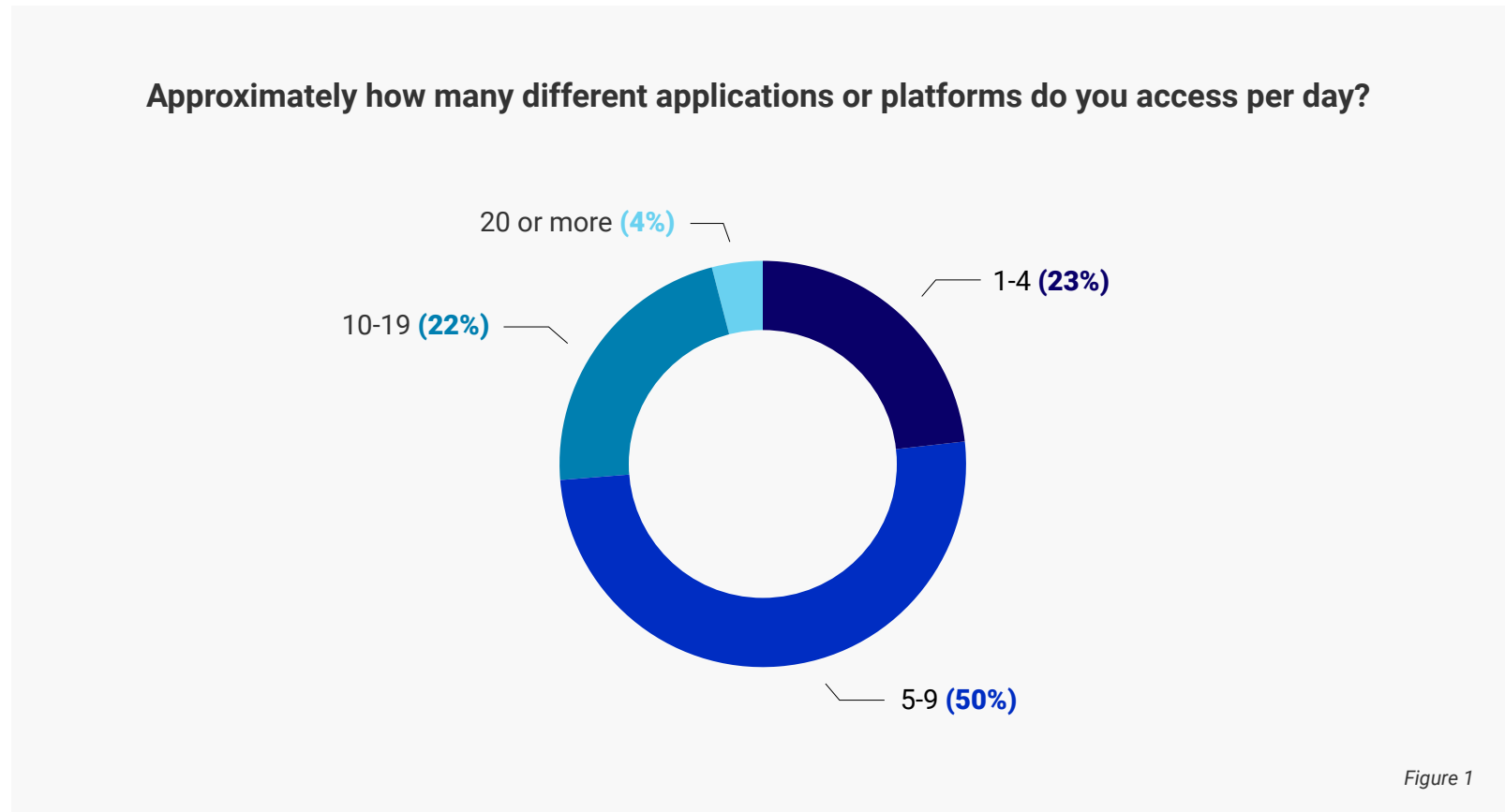*responses from from professional or desk workers.*

See Appendix for full demographics information.

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New Applications Abound

Managers and employees are generally using more tools and applications than they used to, particularly following the shift to remote and hybrid work that started in 2020. In fact, a recent study from Harvard Business Review showed that workers performing certain transactions had to switch between 22 different applications and web properties to do so, which left them toggling between windows and apps more than 3,600 times in an average day.

Sixty-six percent of respondents in this report's survey said they're using more applications than before the onset of the pandemic. The majority of respondents (72%) also said they use at least five applications on a daily basis (Figure 1). Less than 25% of respondents use fewer than five applications per day, while approximately 25% are using 10-19 applications per day.

Approximately how many different applications or platforms do you access per day?

20 or more **(4%)**

1-4 **(23%)**

10-19 **(22%)**

5-9 **(50%)**

Figure 1

According to a [report from Okta](#), businesses actually deploy an average of 88 apps at their organization, with larger companies averaging about 175 and smaller companies averaging 73. Tech companies were also the most likely to deploy more apps, and the government sector has seen the number they use increase as well.

Regarding the type of applications most commonly used, the managers surveyed said they spend the most time on messaging and communication apps, followed by collaboration tools and role-specific applications (Figure 2).

Which types of applications do you and your team spend a significant amount of time in on any given day? (Select all that apply)

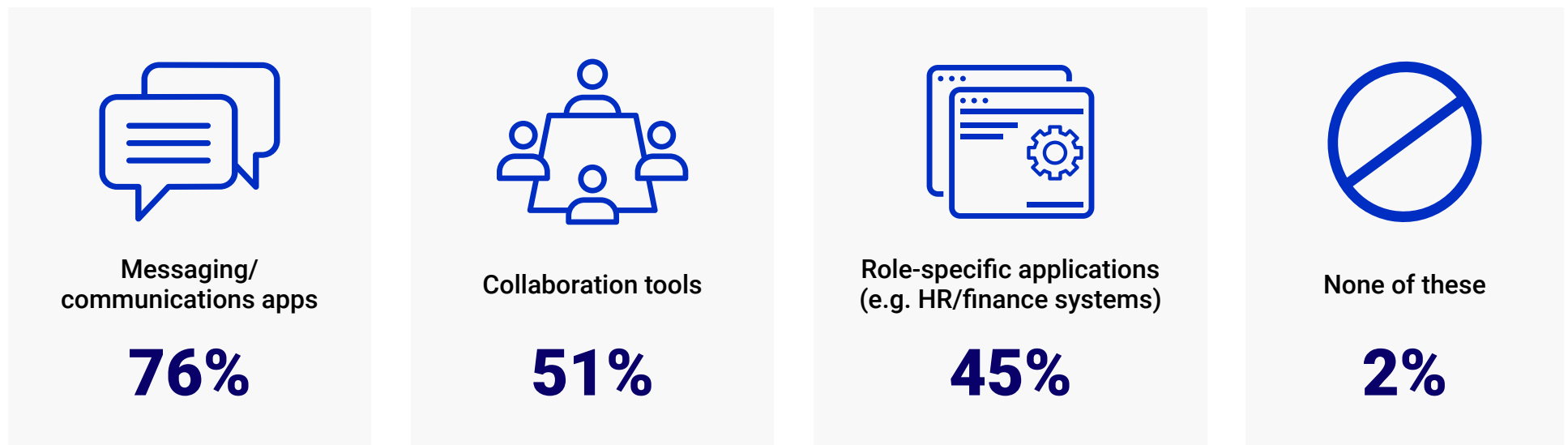| Messaging/ communications apps	Collaboration tools	Role-specific applications (e.g. HR/finance systems)	None of these
76%	**51%**	**45%**	**2%**

Figure 2

Accessing payroll information and viewing time off balances were ranked as the most difficult routine tasks to perform by managers, and the most difficult tasks for their teams to complete. Furthermore, just a quarter of managers say they can process approvals in less than a day. The majority of approvals (67%) happen between 1-5 days (Figure 3).

Including all steps necessary in the approval process, how long does it take to process approvals for your team?

Over a week **(7%)**

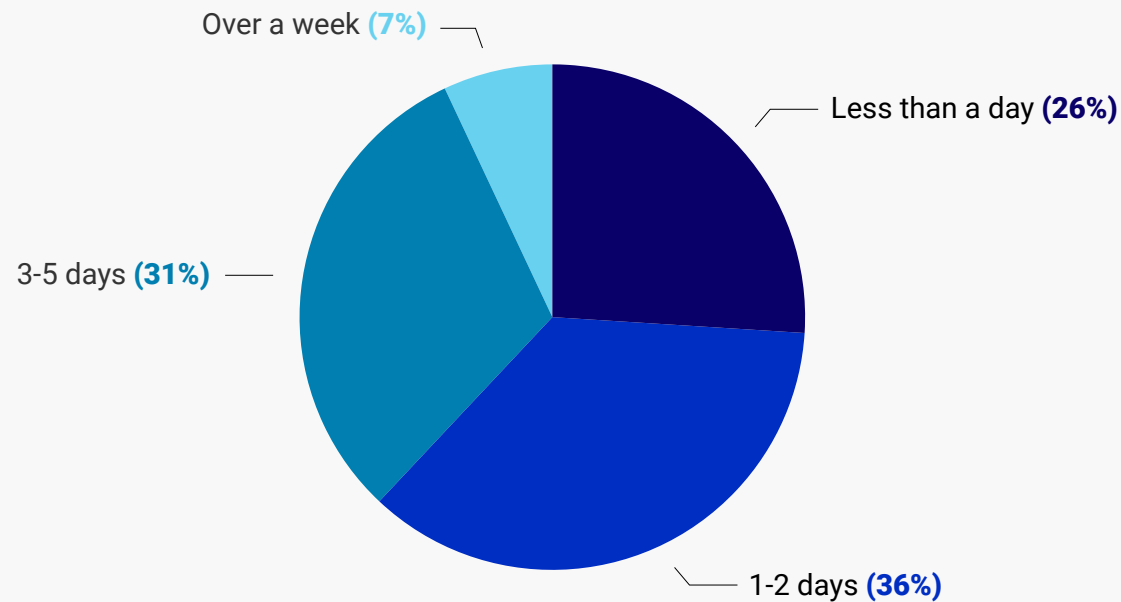Less than a day **(26%)**

3-5 days **(31%)**

1-2 days **(36%)**

Figure 3

The HBR study found that this amount of context switching, or jumping between different tasks, has the potential to become taxing and decrease focus in employees – and when the systems themselves are inefficient or unintuitive, it could exacerbate this problem.

Email as a Productivity Blocker

Managers reported email as their most significant productivity blocker during the day, and said it generates the most complaints they hear from their teams. This isn't surprising, considering that a review of internal data from Sanebox found that only about 38% of the average inbox contains emails that are relevant or important.

Top productivity blockers for managers:

1. Emails

2. Too many notifications/pings/alerts

3. Being interrupted by colleagues

4. Inefficient systems

5. Manual processes and data entry

Figure 4

Top complaints received by managers:
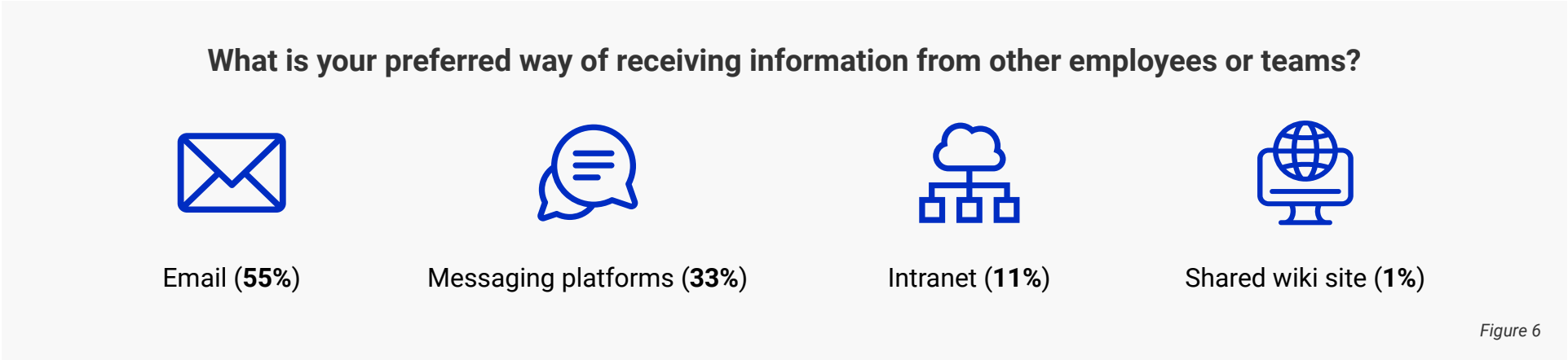
1. Emails

2. Inefficient systems

3. Unable to find information quickly

4. Too many notifications/pings/alerts

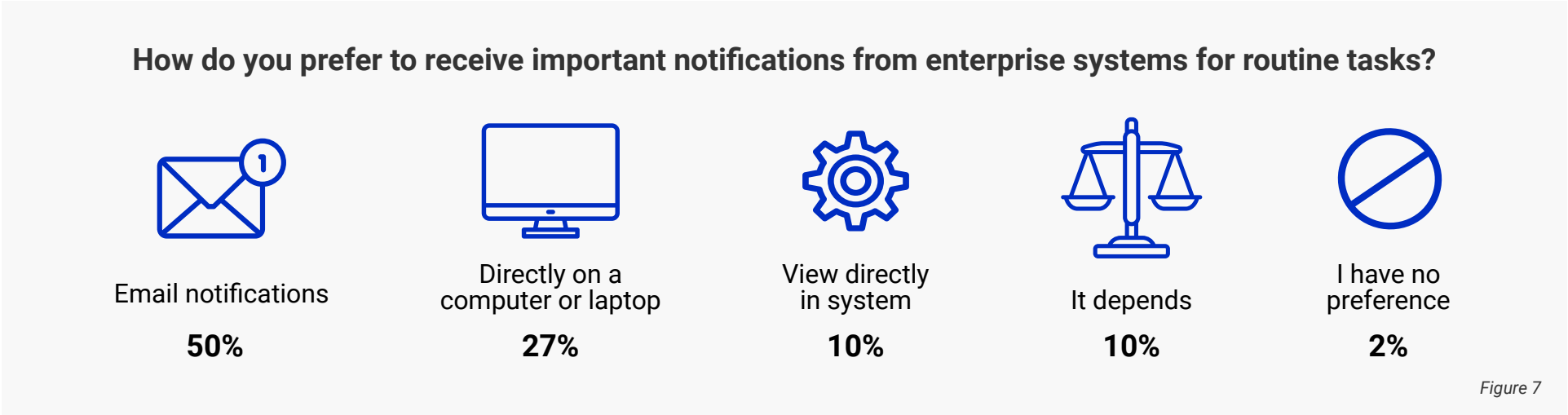**5.** Too many different platforms

Figure 5

While email has long been the primary form of communication for most professional workers, this could be changing. The survey found that email still reigns as a preferred way of finding information and collaborating, but it's losing its primacy as other tools become preferred in a hybrid environment.

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Eighty-five percent of respondents listed it as a tool they use, followed by MS Teams, Zoom, and Google Meet. However, while 55% said they prefer email to receive information from other employees or teams, the remaining 45% preferred different options, including messaging platforms and intranets (Figure 6). Among the groups that were more likely to prefer email were those at small organizations and those working fully in a corporate office.

What is your preferred way of receiving information from other employees or teams?

Email (**55%**)   Messaging platforms (**33%**)   Intranet (**11%**)   Shared wiki site (**1%**)

Figure 6

Half of respondents also said they prefer to receive notifications on routine tasks in their email; but the rest of respondents said they prefer push alerts directly on their computer or elsewhere (Figure 7).

How do you prefer to receive important notifications from enterprise systems for routine tasks?

Email notifications   Directly on a computer or laptop   View directly in system   It depends   I have no preference

50%   **27%**   **10%**   **10%**   **2%**

Figure 7

Discontent and Complacency With Current Solutions

While managers said they and their teams can generally use applications and tools easily, there's still discontent, although there's a high degree of tolerance for this dysfunction. A certain amount of frustration with technology and processes is baked into the manager's perspective, but it doesn't mean they don't want things to be better.

More than 25% of in-office workers claimed that finding information was difficult. However, for those in a fully remote environment, 30% claimed that finding information was difficult. In addition, mid-sized organizations (2,000-9,999 employees) also seemed to have slightly more difficulty tracking down information, while small and large organizations found it slightly easier than average.

Ultimately, nearly 70% of the respondents believe that there's room for improvement in their digital workplace experience (Figure 8).

When you consider your entire digital workplace as a whole (apps, software, technology, etc.), how do you feel?

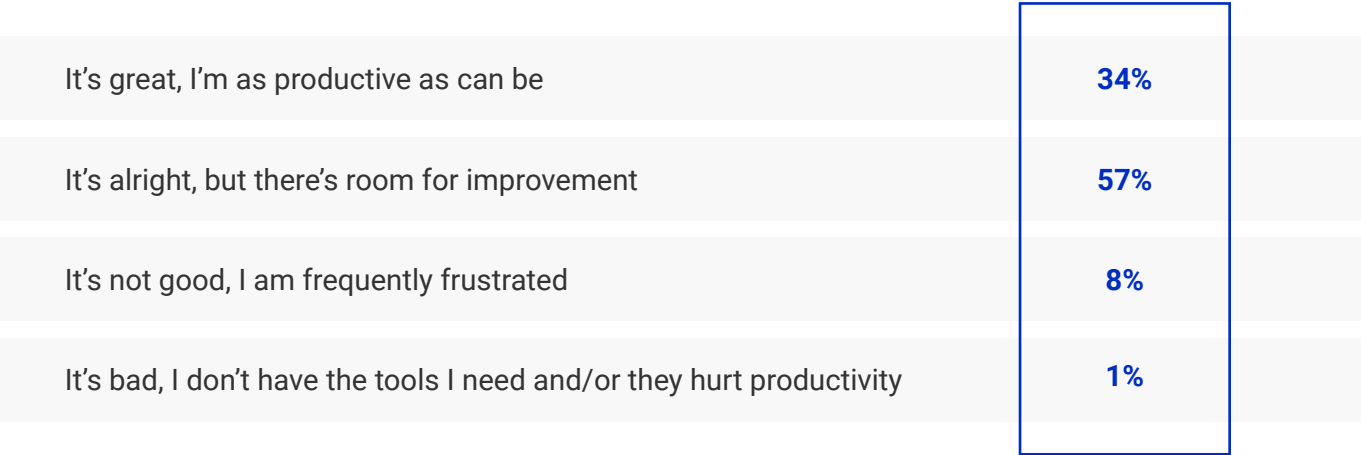|	
It's great, I'm as productive as can be	**34%**
It's alright, but there's room for improvement	**57%**
It's not good, I am frequently frustrated	**8%**
It's bad, I don't have the tools I need and/or they hurt productivity	**1%**

Figure 8

In addition, 44% of respondents said the collaboration tools given to them by their organization frustrate them. Another 41% said they're difficult to use. Here, about half of respondents from small and mid-sized organizations agreed with these statements, while the percentage of those from large organizations was far lower.This suggests that larger organizations may have access to better quality tools.

When asked to describe the amount of time spent answering questions from their team about department policies or other routine things, 67% said it was just "acceptable" (Figure 9), suggesting that while they may be able to manage the level of support requested from them, they're not thrilled about it.

How would you describe the time you spend answering questions from your team about company or department policies, procedures, approvals, requests or other routine functions?
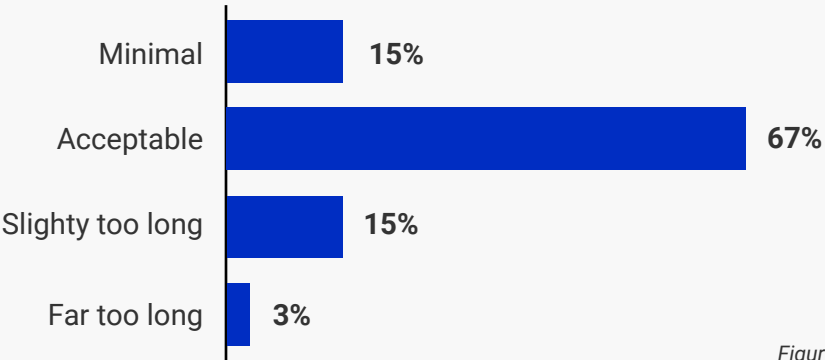
Minimal	15%
Acceptable	67%
Slightly too long	15%
Far too long	3%

Figure 9

Digital Friction is Nearly Universal

Even if employees accept the applications and tools they're told to work with, they aren't making their jobs any easier. Digital friction remains a huge problem in the workplace, with 96% of respondents saying they experience it to some degree (Figure 10).

How often do you feel you experience "digital friction" today?

- Constantly (**12%**)
- Most of the time (**39%**)
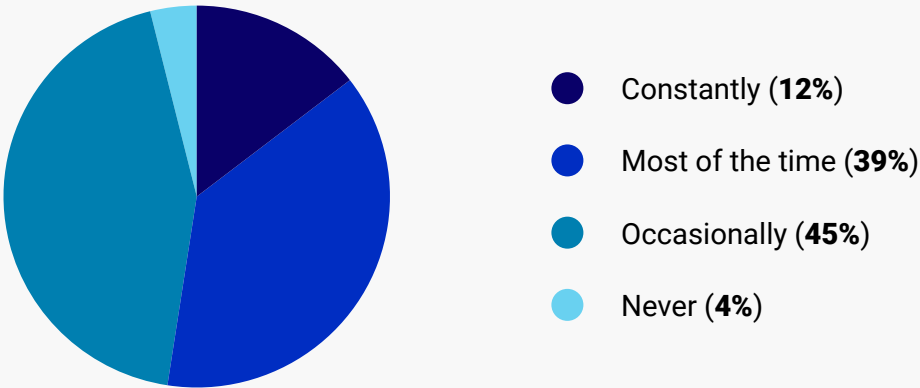- Occasionally (**45%**)
- Never (**4%**)

Figure 10

Furthermore, 60% of managers at mid-sized companies said they experience it constantly or most of the time, the highest percentage out of all groups surveyed.

Managers also feel that technology can have a negative impact on their team, as 73% of respondents said that the applications and technology they use get in the way of their and their team's productivity. Managers at mid-sized and smaller companies were more likely to feel this way than those at large companies, where only 56% said it got in the way (Figure 11).

Do you feel the applications and technology you use often get in the way of you and your team being more productive?
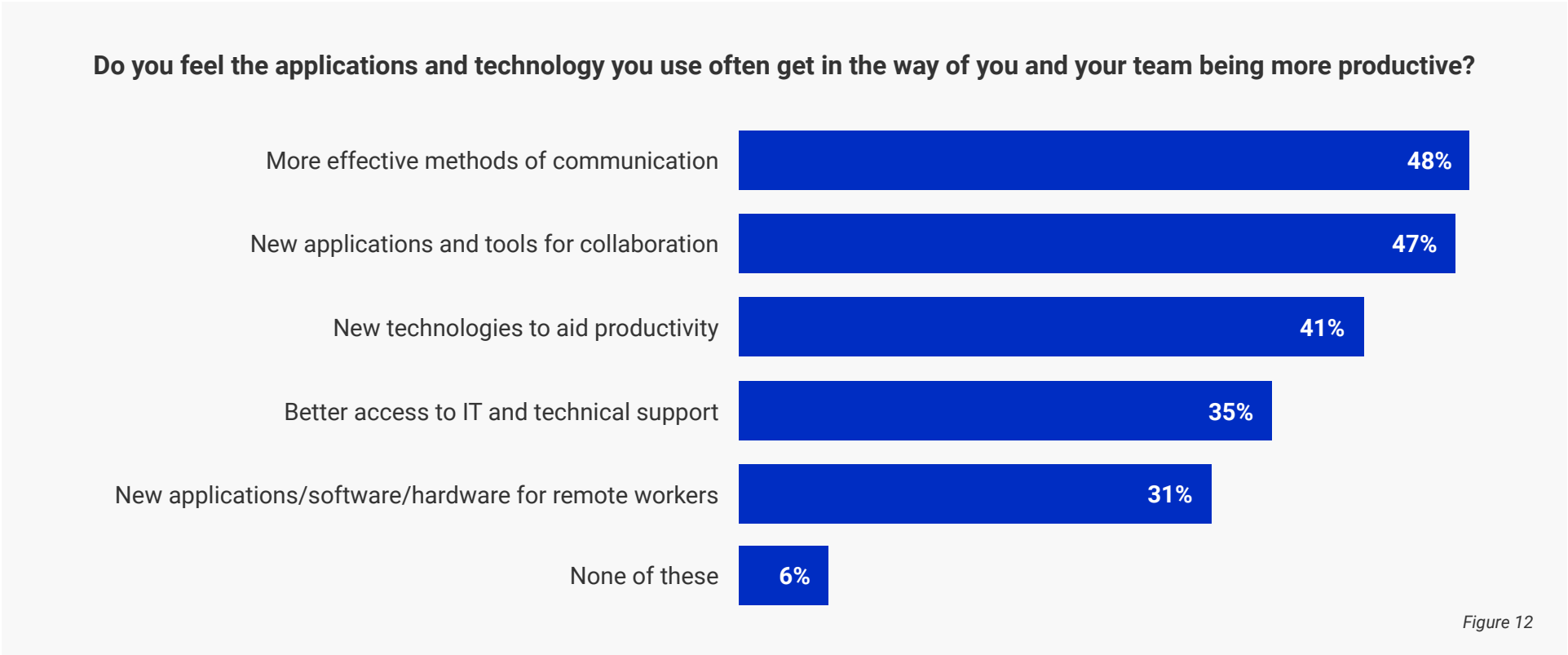
Yes	**33%**
To some extent	**46%**
No	**21%**
I don't know	**0%**

Figure 11

Aside from emails, managers said the biggest detraction from their work is responding to incoming communications, followed by keeping up with activity on various applications. However, from the manager's perspective, their direct reports seem to be struggling with inefficient systems and searching for information more than managers themselves (Figures 4 & 5).

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An Openness to Change

Despite digital friction in the workplace, managers still have a positive orientation towards new technologies and improvements and they want to see continued advancements. Since the pandemic, nearly half of managers said that their organization has introduced new applications and tools to support collaboration. Similarly, 48% said they've introduced more effective methods of communication.

Do you feel the applications and technology you use often get in the way of you and your team being more productive?

More effective methods of communication	48%
New applications and tools for collaboration	47%
New technologies to aid productivity	41%
Better access to IT and technical support	35%
New applications/software/hardware for remote workers	31%
None of these	6%

Figure 12

Furthermore, more than half of the respondents (57%) say their overall digital experience is okay but that there is room for improvement, but only 34% say it's great and they're as productive as they can be (Figure 8).

Asked about what in the digital workplace could be changed to improve their experience, many respondents signaled a desire/need for less friction: they pointed to improvements that would allow them to access systems and complete tasks with fewer steps and app switching. Other respondents said they'd like to use fewer apps or have a more integrated system by which to access them. Specifically, respondents hope that by integrating various applications, tools, and platforms, they could better leverage their data.

Conclusion

Digital friction is a significant and growing problem. The sheer amount of information employees are flooded with, combined with disparate tools and systems they must constantly switch back and forth between, has left them overwhelmed. While they may have a high degree of tolerance for this type of dysfunction, it still creates frustration, a lack of focus, and disengagement. All of this threatens to hurt productivity and create an attrition problem in a labor market already plagued by shortages, resignations, and "quiet quitters."

However, managers recognize that there's room for improvement, and new technology introduced during the pandemic has opened their minds to accept that there may be better ways of working. While new technologies have improved productivity, communication and collaboration in the workforce, employees could benefit from a more integrated, efficient digital experience.

Mid-sized organizations, in particular, seem to have the biggest reason to act. While managers at larger organizations seem better equipped with the tools they have, smaller companies seem to struggle more with finding ways to create an efficient, streamlined experience, perhaps due to a lack of resources.

There are options for employers looking to create deep, utility-rich integrations between the various systems used in the workplace, but leaders need to align on the importance of investing in the digital employee experience. From there, a more strategic approach to the digital workplace can help companies choose more relevant solutions for their workforce and find ways to embed these technologies to create a seamless, delightful experience for the employees using them.

Appendix[1]

Demographics

<u>Name of survey</u>
Digital Employee Experience Survey

<u>Number of respondents</u>
530

<u>Respondent level</u>
Manager: 74%
Director: 20%
Vice President: 6%

<u>Type of work performed</u>
Professional, desk, clerical, managerial, or administrative labor: 100%

<u>Organization size</u>
250-999: 13%
1,000 to 2,999: 25%
3,000 to 9,999: 36%
10,000 or more: 25%

<u>Represented industries[2]</u>
Software: 16%
Information Services and Data Processing: 14%
Finance and Insurance: 13%
Manufacturing: 12%
Banking: 12%
Healthcare: 9%
Business and Professional Services: 9%
Computer and Electronics Manufacturing: 6%

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[1] Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding
[2] All other industries make up less than 5% of respondents.

About

Workgrid

Workgrid is guided attention technology that focuses employees' attention to the critical moments that matter. We drive personalized employee experiences across the digital workplace, minimizing digital friction and daily disruptions.

Our no-code platform enables you to integrate with top cloud applications, optimizing the digital workplace by intelligently surfacing, nudging, and granting access to daily tasks, information, and reminders at the right moment, in the right channels to help people work more efficiently.

Reworked

Reworked is a popular native digital publication, produced by Simpler Media Group (SMG), with a mission to advance careers via high impact knowledge, networking and recognition. The publication caters to a global community of enterprise learning, talent management, collaboration and digital workplace professionals, and is dedicated to covering the people, culture, technology and infrastructure that make up our quickly evolving workplaces. Reworked is also the host of the Digital Workplace Experience conference and Reworked IMPACT Awards.

Simpler Media Group

SMG is a B2B technology information and research services company serving a 3 million+ strong community of global digital business leaders.

Our flagship publication, CMSWire, is complemented by our Reworked publication and our Digital Experience Summit and Digital Workplace Experience conference series. Our research division produces a range of annual state of the industry reports, quarterly market segment guides and a range of focused industry insights briefs. We offer performance marketing, custom research, content development and custom event production services directly to our clients.

Our obsessions: next generation digital customer experiences, navigating the r/evolution of work and advancing enterprise learning.

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