

What employees really, really want from you

Three big themes from a new
survey of knowledge workers

Work ideas for big companies



It starts by listening.



When it comes to transforming how we work, we believe the best way to start is to ask the people doing that work.

That's why we're constantly in conversation with knowledge workers in companies of all sizes, to find out what they expect from work and learn about how they'd like to get things done every day.

Part of this means always looking into how work and employee expectations are changing for enterprise companies.

This report is based on a quantitative study by global firm Kelton Research that focuses on three of the clearest themes that have emerged in our discussions with knowledge workers.

Introduction

In this piece, we share Kelton's findings, and supplement the issues with data and insights from around the world of work.

A word on methodology

This Slack Future of Work survey was conducted online among 1,459 knowledge workers in the U.S. over the age of 18. The margin of error is 2.6%.

If you'd like to learn more about the methodology, or to see the data, contact keltonstudy@slack.com.

It reflects important changes in people's expectations about work, including:

- A desire for more transparency—in all directions
- The need to connect with colleagues more deeply
- The importance of better processes and collaboration tools
- The disconnects that are preventing progress on these fronts

We hope the research contributes to the ongoing conversation about work and suggests how enterprises can rise to the challenges of change.

Critically, we hope that it shows how every business leader—not just HR and IT leaders—can make a measurable impact on their organizations by focusing on relationships, connections and the way work gets done.

Big companies need to change—and know it.

It's not really what you'd call a secret: Work is changing pretty dramatically, and it's changing fastest for big companies.

Most large enterprises recognize that the things that made them successful in the past won't necessarily be the things that make them successful in the future. Leaders in every industry and every department understand that there's a real need for transformation:

- **We're all doing new things**

Digital transformation. Customer-centricity. New delivery models, products, and processes.

- **In new ways**

Distributed, mobile teams. Collaborating across disciplines and departments. Making more use of outside contractors. It's not just flex time; it's *flex everything*.

- **Deploying new technologies**

Automation, analytics, big data, and AI. New technology for streamlining, automating, and accelerating work—while making processes more intelligent.

- **In fast-changing markets**

New players in every market. Fueled by data-driven, on-demand, and “sharing economy” models.

That's a lot for any organization to tackle without making some big changes.

“Fifty years ago, the life expectancy of a Fortune 500 firm was seventy-five years; now it's less than fifteen.”

Beth Comstock,
Imagine It Forward

The change within

Alongside all this transformation is a very real change that's happening inside your company: the change in employee expectations.

Employees don't just want to see more diverse and inclusive workspaces, guided by a clear mission and sense of purpose. Their lives as consumers have also shown them a better way to work: Mobile apps, social media platforms and e-commerce experiences have given them exciting new ways to communicate; set up and participate in groups; share ideas, photos and stories; and get together to make things happen.

Then they get to work and it's back to email, conference calls, meetings and that intranet from the nineties.

Do we need to change the culture, systems and tools that support our working lives? Of course we do. The question for big companies is *how* to change.

Let's look at what employees are saying...

Three big themes: Transparency, Relationships and Collaboration Tools

In this research, we chose to look at three concerns already strongly indicated by a wide range of employees in all kinds of enterprises:



1. Transparency and alignment

A deeper partnership with company leaders and a better understanding of strategic and tactical decision-making.

This is one part of a wider desire for better access to the information needed to do one's job. We focused on the top-down vector here: the transparency of executive decision-making.



2. Relationships and connections

The desire for more and deeper bonds with colleagues.

This is especially important and challenging in a world of distributed, mobile and cross-functional teams.



3. Collaboration tools

The need for better employee experiences and faster, better-informed decision-making through improved communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

This is emerging fast as an employee expectation—as the means of communication that evolved to support old ways of working start to show the strain of the new demands.

Let's drill down into each. →

Theme 1

Transparency and alignment



Transparency and alignment

Employees today expect to be able to find the information, the people, and the resources they need to do their jobs.

That's reflected in a need for visibility into every aspect of their work:

Company visibility

Workers want clarity on the strategic direction of the business and the decisions that support it.

Market visibility

People want to understand the context of their business and industry, including insights on the competition and emerging trends.

Co-worker visibility

They want to see across departments and disciplines to better inform their own work.

For this study, we focused on the first kind of visibility: the transparency of strategic direction and executive decision-making.

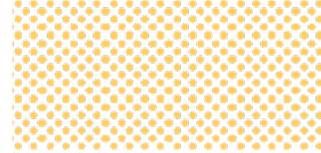
Building a learning/sharing culture

We're seeing that the top-down, 'command and control' cultures of yesterday's large enterprises are starting to give way to more open cultures based on transparency, visibility and knowledge sharing.

And pioneering business and HR leaders are playing a major role in this transformation, often leading by example.

“Being an accessible CHRO means that you're available to everyone... Through transparency and openness, you'll learn if your managers, directors and senior directors are administering the talent management structures according to your blueprint, vision and the organization's culture.”

Chris Fields, on [Spark By ADP](#), Dec 2017



Transparency and alignment

Key findings: Transparency matters

Knowledge workers want to feel connected to their company's mission. And that means hearing about the company strategy and the decisions made at the executive level.

A transparency gap

82% of knowledge workers say it's important that their organization is transparent. But only 19% consider their company to be "very transparent."

"Transparency is about more than executives being forthcoming. It's about whether people within an organization can actually see what's going on in different departments and working groups."

Stewart Butterfield, CEO, Slack

Enterprise alert

Knowledge workers at larger companies value transparency even more than those at smaller companies (89% vs. 80%).

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The big picture

80% of knowledge workers want to know more about how decisions are made in their organizations. Specifically, they want visibility into:

75%

Overall business strategy

75%

Business opportunities

74% & 71%

Industry and competitor updates

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A talent acquisition and retention issue

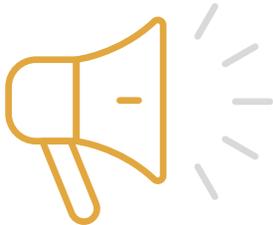
87% of respondents want their future company to be transparent.

The value of transparency

We looked beyond the survey results to bring other perspectives to the table. What we saw validated our findings: Transparency really does matter.

David Siegel, the CEO of Investopedia, gives every employee access to the same reports as he gets himself.

David Siegel,
Business Insider, 13 Sept 2018



“Cultures that thrive are bound by a mutual understanding and respect for the company mission, vision, and values. This shared connection requires companies to be intentional about how information is disseminated. The strongest cultures are highly effective in properly communicating news, changes, goals, and successes throughout their ranks and are inclusive in soliciting feedback.”

Niquenya Collins, Building Bridges Consulting



“We think of organizational health as more than just culture or employee engagement. It’s the organization’s ability to align around a common vision, execute against that vision effectively, and renew itself through innovation and creative thinking.”

McKinsey Quarterly, Sept. 2017



Only 25% of employees believe management is very transparent.

TinyPulse Employee Engagement Report, 2017

“We use something called the ‘Open Decision Framework’ to guide how decisions that impact other teams, or the company as a whole, are made and communicated. [...] We can get valuable feedback throughout the decision-making process and ... be more open about how (and why) we’re making certain decisions.”

Jim Whitehurst, President and Chief Executive, Red Hat



“LinkedIn’s CEO, Jeff Weiner, got one of the highest ratings available on Glassdoor, for running an organization built on transparency. [He takes the time] to listen to suggestions from employees, proving that everyone’s opinion matters.”

gethppy.com, Why Business Transparency is Key for Employee Engagement

Theme 2

Relationships and connections



Relationships and connections

We spend a third of our lives at work—and even though it’s work, social human connection is important.

Without it, workers are more likely to feel alienated and disengaged.

Attracting and keeping talent—as well as getting the best performance from everyone—means actively promoting a culture that fosters strong connections and greater trust among colleagues.

But forces like the increasing pace of work, more distributed teams, and more contract work can threaten the bonds that make work engaging and fulfilling.

The research findings support what we all intuitively feel: People want these connections at work—but they’re not always getting them.

Key findings: a universal need

We all need connections

91% of respondents desire to feel closer to colleagues in the future. And **89%** said they want to be more connected to their company’s mission and values.

Connection broken?

Only **26%** of knowledge workers describe their office as “connected.”

Building bridges

35% of knowledge workers feel that more social events with colleagues would boost their sense of connectedness. **33%** felt that “more collaborative work” would improve things. And **31%** believe that better communication tools should be a priority.

More meetings? Maybe not

Only **15%** of knowledge workers think that “more scheduled meetings” would increase their sense of connection.

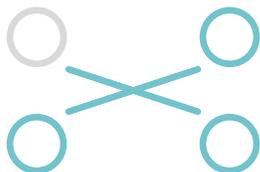
How relationships and connections influence business

The need to build connections in the new workplace is a growing theme across management and leadership discussion forums.



“If you can figure out how to unlock each person in your organization, you’re just creating more value. If two or three people out of every 10 are not unlocked... you’re leaving money on the table. If they’re not all in, they’re not executing at a level you need them to every day.”

Chinwe Onyeagoro,
President, Great Place to Work



“Only 24% of employees feel connected to their peers.”

TinyPulse Employee
Engagement Report, 2017



“70% of professionals in the U.S. today would not work at a leading company if it meant they had to tolerate a bad workplace culture.”

LinkedIn Censuswide
Research, 2018



“It’s important to have tools that make the remote worker feel as much a part of the organization as if he or she were in the office. Remote workers who feel remote also feel isolated from the company, and that drives down productivity.”

Zeus Kerravala,
Founder, ZK Research,
Harvard Business Review

“The greatest predictor of happiness is social connection, by far.”

Shawn Achor,
The Happiness Advantage

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“Respondents who didn’t have a best friend or strong relationships with co-workers only had a 1-in-12 chance of being engaged.”

Gallup, Wellbeing:
The Five Essential Elements,
Tom Rath and Jim Harter

“30% of respondents who reported having a best friend at work were seven times more likely to be engaged at their jobs than those who didn’t.”

Gallup, Wellbeing:
The Five Essential Elements,
Tom Rath and Jim Harter

Theme 3

Collaboration tools



Collaboration tools

Despite the dramatic changes in the dynamics of knowledge work, it's still supported by a decades-old collaboration infrastructure: meetings, teleconferences and email.

While all of these play an important role in any effective organization, today's employees expect and crave new collaboration tools to help them do their jobs.

Key findings:

Growing dissatisfaction

Only **31%** of the knowledge workers surveyed are “extremely satisfied” with their current work communication tools.

The modernization imperative

74% think that work environments of the future will be more collaborative.

Get real (time)

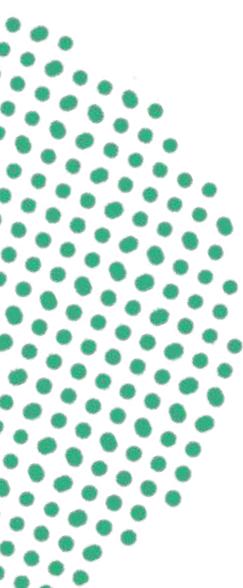
80% expect colleagues to answer emails as quickly as possible. And about three-fourths, or **74%**, prefer the ability to send real-time messages at work.

Better tools, please

Better communication tools at work would make people feel more connected (**31%** of respondents) versus more meetings (**15%**) or a more open office space (**13%**).

Connecting the dots

Those who communicate via workplace messaging and collaboration apps are more likely to describe their office as connected (**30%** compared with **22%**).



Weaving the new fabric of work

Collaboration tools alone can't create a more connected workplace culture. But there's increasing research that shows that collaboration tools can have a major impact on productivity and engagement.



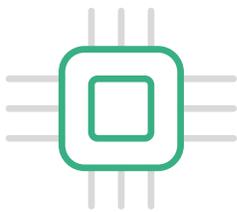
42% of millennials say they'll quit their job if the technology available to them is substandard.

Dell and Intel, Future Workforce Study, 2016



70% believe that workers will spend more time on collaboration platforms.

Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends, 2018



“For the first time in HR, our profession is being told that we need to be a technology proponent. Technology is not just for the IT department anymore. It's for the HR professionals.”

Cara Capretta, VP–Human Capital Management Transformation Practice, Oracle

Robert Cross, a management professor at the University of Virginia, has studied network connections in hundreds of organizations. He's found a 50 percent increase in what he calls 'collaborative intensity' over the past 10 years. Specifically, Cross finds that knowledge workers today spend 90 to 95 percent of their work hours in meetings, on the phone, and responding to email. A decade ago, those same tasks filled only 60 to 65 percent of their time.

Harvard Business Review, 2018, “Why Today's Digital Teams Need a New Class of Collaboration Tools and Solutions”

“Moving beyond thinking of personal productivity and technology tools in isolation is critical for organizations to achieve positive results. A combination of culture, leadership, and incentives needs to come together for effective collaboration and productivity to reign. To do this, HR organizations must work with IT to bring their expertise in team management, goal-setting, and employee development to help make using the new wave of connectivity tools productive, simple, and engaging.”

Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends, 2018



“72% of our survey respondents have already seen benefit from using connected workplace tools.”

Deloitte, Global Human Capital Trends, 2018

Conclusion

A clear direction for change



A clear direction for change

The more we listen to knowledge workers talk about their work experiences and expectations, the clearer we can be about the kinds of changes leaders and managers need to prioritize.

The three themes identified in this new research—the need for better Transparency, Relationships and Collaboration Tools—are important guides to organizational change.

“Our recommendation is clear: start managing your organizational health as rigorously as you do your P&L, providing pathways for leaders at all levels to take part and embedding and measuring the new ways of working.”

McKinsey Quarterly, Sept 2017

The good news

Big, global companies across all industries are already making significant progress on all three fronts:

- **To boost transparency**
They’re supplementing the standard ‘all-hands’ meetings and top-down announcements with more open, fluid communication using collaboration hubs and workspaces based on real-time messaging and knowledge-sharing.
- **To boost connectedness**
They’re allowing teams to set up their own, often cross-functional, collaboration spaces—covering ‘the work of work’ and supporting the social, interpersonal aspects too.
- **To boost collaboration**
They’re bringing in tools that can integrate existing work applications into a more seamless, cohesive, collaboration infrastructure.

And, thanks to the new, open IT delivery models, these transformations aren’t limited to the traditional enterprise IT vendors or legacy office stacks. Instead, they’re leveraging a new generation of open applications that are easily integrated with existing work software.

It's time for champions

The profound changes in work happening right now create an enormous opportunity for business leaders across all departments who can connect the dots between culture, systems and work-styles.

The transformation cannot just be driven by IT or HR—though it may well start there. Leaders across any line of business can pave the way for this new collaborative revolution, starting with their own teams. All it needs is a clear perspective on collaboration and employee experience as they relate to your business goals.

This is happening fast

Companies that get ahead of transparency, connectedness and collaboration trends will not only find it easier to attract, retain and motivate their people. They'll also play a far more visible role in the business outcomes every CEO is looking for: innovation, efficiency, customer-centricity and change acceleration.

“There’s actually a huge degree of overlap between what executives want and what workers want. People want to move quickly and feel engaged; to operate in alignment and have the autonomy to make decisions.”

Stewart Butterfield, CEO, Slack

So now what

Reports and articles

McKinsey on [Organizational Health: A Fast Track to Performance Improvement](#).

[The 2017 State of the SaaS-Powered Workplace Report](#), by BetterCloud Monitor.

[I Have a Best Friend at Work](#)—Gallup on the twelve key dimensions that describe great workgroups. (We wrote [a blog post](#) on this subject, too).

[How collaboration and connection shape our work experience](#), an interview with Pamela Hinds, Professor and Director of the Center on Work, Technology, and Organization in the Department of Management Science and Engineering at Stanford University about her research into how emerging technology influences the way people feel about their work.

Adam Grant’s great piece in The New York Times called [Friends At Work? Not So Much](#).

[Why business as usual is killing team performance](#), an interview with Andrew DeMaar, the head of research at Deloitte’s Center for the Edge, about the shifts in employee expectations that necessitate a new way of working and leading.

Posts on the future of work from our own folks

[We Don’t Sell Saddles Here](#), by our CEO Stewart Butterfield.

[Making work tools feel more human, so people can thrive](#), an interview with Slack’s head of research, Christina Janzer, on the role that tools play in employee engagement.

Want to learn more about Slack?

Read [The Gartner SWOT Report](#).

Or maybe this one from IDC on [The Business Value of Slack](#).

Or visit [Slack.com](#).

Want to take Slack for a test drive?

[Request a demo!](#)

Want to actually talk with someone?

Thought you’d never ask. Do get in touch.

For more information on this research, contact keltonstudy@slack.com

About Slack

Slack is a layer of the business technology stack that brings together people, data and applications—a single place where people can effectively work together, find important information, and access hundreds of thousands of critical applications and services to do their best work.

From global Fortune 100 companies to corner markets, businesses and teams of all kinds use Slack to bring the right people together with all the right information.

