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Introduction

The world of work has undergone a seismic shift over the past few years. In 2019, when we last reported on the state of work, the biggest challenge that software engineering teams faced was misalignment. Fast-forward to today, and the picture is vastly different: a pandemic disrupted the way we work, and an economic downturn is forcing everyone to improve speed and productivity with fewer resources.

In our latest State of Work report, we found that software developers and operators are leading the way in embracing automation and AI – not just as buzzwords but to meaningfully transform their work and overall productivity. In an era of resource constraints, this can be a massive edge for companies trying to do more with less.

### Actions that executives have taken in reaction to economic downturn

- **Budget reductions**: 49%
- **Hiring freezes**: 47%
- **Productivity audits**: 43%
- **Pivoting business strategy**: 43%
- **Reduced technology spend**: 36%
- **Lay-offs**: 30%

*BASE: SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVES*
Methodology

Slack, a Salesforce company, conducted this global survey in partnership with the research firm Qualtrics between 24 February and 21 March 2023. The total sample size of engineering professionals was 943 desk workers and executives across a range of industries in the following countries: United States, Australia, France, Germany, United Kingdom, India, Singapore, Japan and South Korea. The groups surveyed included office-based workers, remote workers and workers adopting a hybrid model. The survey did not target Slack employees or customers.

In this report, we refer to the following respondent groups:

**Executives and leaders:** Presidents, partners, C-suite

**Managers:** People managers, ranging from team leads to VP-level leads

**Desk workers:** Independent contributors

The survey questions were designed to capture a wide range of data, including the challenges that engineering teams face, their productivity metrics, their use of automation and AI, and their views on employee experiences and wellness.
Engineering leaders need to rethink productivity metrics

In the realm of software development, numerical metrics are considered the benchmark of productivity. But our survey reveals a disconnect between how leaders and workers perceive productivity and how it should be measured.

A significant 33% of engineering executives rely on activity and visibility metrics, such as hours spent online or in the office. However, 27% of developers advocate a different approach, preferring to be measured based on the achievement of team key performance indicators (KPIs) and goals.

This discrepancy has created an environment where developers feel pressure to engage in ‘performative’ work, leading to a higher incidence of burnout. Our survey found that 59% of developers feel pressure to respond quickly to messages, even those sent after standard working hours.

Additionally, 56% of developers feel pressure to constantly demonstrate to their colleagues or manager that they’re at work and being productive.

When asked about the top challenges impacting their productivity, developers pointed to spending too much time in meetings and writing emails (41%), difficulty in coordinating or communicating with colleagues at work (33%), and the inefficiency of switching between multiple apps or tools to get their job done (32%).
Prashanth Chandrasekar, the CEO of the software developer platform Stack Overflow, suggests that determining the right mix of inputs and outputs is one of the biggest obstacles that many organisations face in properly measuring productivity while navigating choppy economic waters.

‘Anyone can game a single metric, so you must consider a blend of leading and lagging indicators. The lagging indicator is what happened. It’s “reading the news”, and if you look at it in isolation, it’s not very helpful – whereas leading indicators give you a proactive look at the speed and progress the company is making.’

Prashanth Chandrasekar
CEO, Stack Overflow

Our research shows that software development leaders would do well to focus on how they could remove these productivity roadblocks. By aligning their measurement metrics with their developers’ preferences and addressing the challenges that developers face, leaders can create a more productive and less stressful environment for their teams.
Engineering orgs are leading the way on automation and AI

Engineering organisations are setting the standard for productivity gains through their strategic use of automation and artificial intelligence. We found that a significant 71% of software development teams are using some form of automated processes, the highest adoption rate among all teams within an organisation.

These automated processes are not just fancy additions to daily operations; they’re having a tangible impact on productivity. A staggering 90% of these developers affirm that automation has had a positive effect on their productivity, bringing about significant changes in the way they work.

What does this mean in practical terms? For a quarter of developers who use automated processes, it translates into a time savings of up to six hours per week. That’s practically an extra day, allowing them the luxury of wrapping up early on a Friday or dedicating more time to complex problem-solving tasks like developing new features or optimising app performance.

When asked about the biggest benefit of automation, 70% of developers pointed to its ability to help them achieve more with less time and resources. This is a clear indication that automation and AI are not just about doing things faster, but also about working smarter.

As we continue to navigate the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the adoption and effective use of automation and AI will play a crucial role in enhancing productivity in software development. Engineering teams that embrace these technologies will be well-positioned to set new benchmarks for operational efficiency and productivity in the process.
Most common engineering processes that get automated

- Unique automations to make core tasks easier (e.g. automating simple yet tedious or repetitive tasks): 57%
- File sharing and storage: 48%
- Alerts (e.g. from third-party integrations to your main workspace): 42%
- Onboarding (e.g. automating access to specific tools and documents for new hires): 39%
- Work orders and requests: 38%
- Sending messages to colleagues: 36%
- Expense approvals: 29%
- Requests for time off: 26%

BASE: SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS
Drive productivity by improving employee experience

Beyond simple task completion, productivity is deeply intertwined with job satisfaction, engagement and mental wellness. When employees are content and fully engaged with their organisation, their productivity soars – a sentiment echoed by 82% of all employees.

However, there is a significant obstacle that hinders productivity among engineering teams: excessive time spent on meetings and email, as reported by 41% of respondents. Addressing this issue is crucial to fostering a productive environment.

One way to boost job satisfaction and wellness is to offer more flexibility in work schedules. About 41% of engineering desk workers report feeling more productive when they have the freedom to choose their working hours. In addition, 54% believe that flexible work schedules are the most effective way employers can enhance their productivity.
### Biggest barriers to productivity for developers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spending too much time in meetings and email</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty coordinating or communicating with colleagues at work</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switching between multiple apps or tools to get their job done</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble staying motivated</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not finding the information or context needed to move work forward</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty staying focused</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of clarity about priorities</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive cost-cutting measures</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Base:** Software Developers
Deep work, short conversations, brainstorming and group decisions are often more productive in an office setting. For instance, 51% of respondents reported feeling more productive doing deep work in the office as opposed to remotely. Similarly, 45% find short conversations easier in the office, and 47% feel a stronger sense of community when being physically present with their colleagues.

It’s also important to note that certain tasks, such as meetings and focused work, can be just as effective in remote settings.

Interestingly, 85% of employees report that they’re more productive when their immediate team is in the office at the same time. To enhance the employee experience, companies should consider experimenting with concepts like anchor days, hybrid work models, designated meeting-free days and asynchronous work processes.

Finding ways to reduce meetings and encouraging asynchronous work when possible is another effective strategy to combat the time-suck that developers reported. In fact, according to our survey, nearly half of all meetings could be eliminated with no impact.

By concentrating on these areas, engineering leaders can create an environment that enhances employee wellness and satisfaction while fostering greater productivity.
The lesson

Market volatility has intensified the pressure on engineering teams to unlock new levels of productivity. Based on insights from the State of Work survey, here’s what we recommend:

- **Focus on both inputs and outputs when measuring productivity.** This approach ensures that the quality of work is just as important as the quantity, providing a more balanced view of team performance.

- **Adopt automated workflows and explore new ways to use AI.** These technologies not only reduce time spent on routine tasks but also allow for more time to be spent on strategic, value-adding work.

- **Find creative ways to balance flexible work schedules with in-person work.** This could involve implementing policies such as flexible working hours, hybrid work models and asynchronous work processes – all of which boost both employee satisfaction and, crucially, productivity.
Slack can help

As an engineering leader, you don’t have to navigate the future alone. Slack for engineering is a powerful platform that can help you unlock the full potential of engineers in three key ways:

- **Deliver quality code faster.** Deliver better code in less time by bringing your dev tools, teams and automated processes together in Slack channels.
- **Minimise incidents and downtime.** Resolve incidents faster with automated incident response, interruption-free troubleshooting and streamlined incident reviews.
- **Build culture in a digital world.** Strengthen engineering team culture and connection by breaking down silos across topics, distributed teams and working styles. Slack enables this through cross-functional channels, transparency and informality.

Explore Slack for engineering’s suite of tools and see how they can transform your team’s productivity today – and contact our sales team for more information.
About Slack

Slack is on a mission to make people’s working lives simpler, more pleasant and more productive. It is the productivity platform for customer companies that improves performance by empowering everyone with no-code automation, making search and knowledge sharing seamless, and keeping teams connected and engaged as they move work forward together. As part of Salesforce, Slack is deeply integrated into the Salesforce Customer 360, supercharging productivity across sales, service and marketing teams. To learn more and get started with Slack for free, visit slack.com/intl/en-gb/ or connect with us @SlackHQ.