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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 IT 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 performance with fewer resources.

IT teams, in particular, are feeling the pressure. In the face of these macroeconomic headwinds, organizations are tightening their belts and scrutinizing every expense—and IT teams are increasingly asked to do more with less.

In our latest State of Work report, we set out to examine how IT teams can drive productivity in today’s turbulent environment. Our findings revealed that many IT teams are missing out on crucial opportunities to embrace more progressive, efficient ways of working. They’re not leveraging the potential of automation and AI to transform their work, and it’s time for that to change.
Methodology

Slack, a Salesforce company, conducted this global survey in partnership with the research firm Qualtrics between February 24 and March 21, 2023. The total sample size of IT professionals was 2,066 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. Surveyed groups included office, remote and hybrid workers. 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 IT teams face, their productivity metrics, their use of automation and AI, and their views on employee experiences and wellness.
IT leaders need to rethink productivity metrics

As IT leaders walk the tightrope between driving business outcomes and managing costs, it’s become more crucial than ever for leaders to find the optimal way to measure the productivity of their staff and organization.

But according to our data, IT leaders and workers are at odds over how to measure productivity.

We found that 33% of IT executives primarily rely on vanity metrics (e.g. hours spent in the office or online, number of emails sent, lines of code written, etc.). Conversely, IT workers think the ideal metric should focus on business impact:

Focusing more on visible work can lead to more performative work, defined as busywork with no real business impact, and more burnout. IT workers spend 37% of their time appearing productive without necessarily contributing to their company and team goals. Meanwhile, 60% of IT workers feel pressure to respond to messages quickly, even if they’re sent after standard working hours, and 54% feel pressure to let their colleagues or manager know that they’re at work and being productive. The result? More burnout and less actual productivity.

Determining the right mix of inputs and outputs is one of the biggest obstacles many IT leaders face when it comes to properly measuring productivity.

27% of IT workers want to be measured based on the achievement of team KPIs and goals.
“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

IT leaders need to rethink their approach to productivity metrics. A more balanced and holistic view of productivity, one that takes into account both inputs (like hours worked) and outputs (like goals achieved), could be the key to fostering a more productive and less stressful work environment.
How automation and AI can unlock major productivity

In today’s IT landscape, a majority of daily tasks are repetitive and transactional. These tasks, while necessary, can consume a significant portion of an IT worker’s time that could be better spent on strategic initiatives. This is where automation and AI come into play.

First, the good news. A majority of IT teams (68%) already utilize automated processes, and for those who have embraced automation, 91% report that automation has had a positive impact on their productivity.

On average, IT workers who leverage automated processes save an impressive 4.2 hours per week!

That’s a half-day’s work that can be repurposed toward more strategic tasks.
Most common IT processes that get automated

- Unique automations to make core tasks easier (automating tedious or repetitive tasks) 54%
- File sharing and storage 48%
- IT help desk customer service (e.g. answers to frequently asked questions) 40%
- Alerts (e.g. from third-party integrations to your main workspace) 40%
- Tickets and requests 39%
- Onboarding (e.g. automating access to certain tools and documents to new hires) 39%
- Sending messages to colleagues 35%
- Expense approvals 26%
- Requests for time off 25%
- Other 1%

BASE: IT DESK WORKERS
The benefits of automation extend beyond just time savings. A majority (66%) of IT workers say the greatest advantage of automation is its ability to help them achieve more in less time with fewer resources. This increased efficiency is crucial when many organizations are facing budget constraints and pressure to perform.

But automation can drive productivity within other teams too, and IT plays a crucial role in selecting the right tech tools that can enable everyone at an organization to automate their own unique processes. Sales, support and marketing teams in particular have historically low adoption rates of automation—36% of sales, 43% of support and 47% of marketing—even though a large portion of their work is repetitive and ripe for automation.

**Slack’s IT and sales teams fast-track deals**

At Slack, our sales team partnered with our business technology team to create an Approvals Bot for deals using Slack’s Workflow Builder. This saves a significant amount of time, as it automates parts of the approval process and helps close deals faster. In fact, Slack’s sales team saw 70% faster approval cycles as a result!

IT teams appear to be early adopters of AI, with 52% of IT workers currently utilizing AI in their work, the highest among all teams in an organization. By integrating AI into their workflows, IT workers can not only improve their efficiency but they can also enhance employee experiences.
Drive IT productivity by improving employee experiences

Our survey also found that productivity and wellness are not mutually exclusive. Job satisfaction, engagement, and mental wellness are top factors that contribute to productivity. Employees must be well to deliver results.

According to our survey, a striking 86% of IT workers say that feeling happy and engaged with their organization would enhance their productivity.

What’s more, 41% of IT workers say that spending too much time in meetings and email was their primary challenge to productivity, and 47% believe that their meetings could be eliminated without causing any adverse problems. This suggests that there are opportunities to improve meeting efficacy by encouraging asynchronous work and being more thoughtful before scheduling a meeting.
Biggest barriers to productivity among IT workers

- Spending too much time in meetings and email: 41%
- Difficulty coordinating or communicating with colleagues at work: 32%
- Switching between multiple apps or tools to get the job done (e.g. G-Suite, Microsoft, Jira, etc.): 30%
- Trouble staying motivated: 29%
- Difficulty staying focused: 29%
- Finding the information or context I need to move work forward: 29%
- Lack of clarity over my priorities: 26%
- Disruptive cost-cutting measures: 23%

BASE: IT DESK WORKERS
Boosting wellness and job satisfaction in the workplace is not about piling on more perks, but rather about providing employees with more flexibility in when and how they work. A significant number of desk workers (48%) report feeling more productive when they’re able to work during the hours they choose.

Implementing flexible work schedules requires thoughtful planning—some activities might be more productive in person. For instance, 52% of IT employees say that they feel more productive brainstorming in the office versus remotely, and 48% feel more productive making group decisions in the office compared with when they’re working remotely. What’s more, 52% of employees feel a stronger sense of community in the office, and 46% find short conversations easier to have in the office compared with remote settings.

On the other hand, workers say certain tasks such as deep focus work (50%), meetings (20%) and shallow work (31%) can be more productive 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.
Top ways IT leaders can support productivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work schedules</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible location</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making improvements to the workplace (e.g. more meeting rooms, quiet areas, etc.)</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing unique workplace benefits (e.g. lunch, snacks, games, etc.)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging people to bring their whole selves to work</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering us to automate work processes with low- or no-code tools</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracking activity metrics (e.g. time spent at work, emails sent, etc.)</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-meeting days</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requiring employees to be in the office every day or most days when possible</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee resource groups (e.g. women’s employee resource group)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BASE: IT DESK WORKERS
The takeaway

It’s clear that the traditional approach to IT productivity isn’t working as well as it could. By rethinking productivity metrics, embracing automation and AI, and focusing on improving employee experiences, IT organizations can unlock new levels of performance.

The future of IT productivity lies in three key areas:

• **IT leaders need to shift their focus to a blend of inputs and outputs.** This means paying attention to the resources and efforts that go into IT initiatives, in addition to the final result. It’s about viewing the process holistically and recognizing the value each step brings to the overall outcome.

• **IT leaders can drive massive impact by empowering others to use automation and AI.** Automation can streamline processes, reduce errors, and free up valuable time for all teams to focus on more strategic tasks. Meanwhile, artificial intelligence offers exciting possibilities for predictive analytics, personalized customer interactions and more.

• **Creativity is key when it comes to balancing flexible work schedules with in-person work.** In the modern workplace, employees value flexibility highly. Certain tasks are more productive in an office setting, while others are best done remotely.

Ultimately, the key to driving IT productivity lies in being open to change and willing to adapt. The potential benefits in terms of increased productivity, job satisfaction and overall business performance are too significant to ignore.
Slack can help

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

- **Boost employee productivity.** Eliminate information silos across teams and partners, unlock flexible working styles with Slack huddles and clips, and automate routine requests and tasks with Slack’s next-gen platform.
- **Optimize tech stack ROI.** Bring app integrations into the flow of teamwork, reduce context switching, and simplify engagement with Salesforce Customer 360.
- **Reduce security risks.** Protect sensitive communications internally and externally with Slack Connect, mitigate security issues faster with response automation, and prevent phishing and social engineering.

Learn more about **Slack for IT** or **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 or connect with us @SlackHQ.

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