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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 customer support 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.

Customer support teams in particular are feeling the squeeze. With the uncertainty of financial markets and the economy, customer loyalty is no longer guaranteed. In fact, according to Salesforce’s “State of the Connected Customer” report, 48% of customers expect a certain level of support to maintain their loyalty to companies. Yet many service organizations aren’t set up to perform at their best.

In our latest State of Work report, we set out to examine how customer support teams can drive productivity in today’s turbulent environment. Our findings revealed that most support 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 support professionals was 3,576 desk workers and executives across a range of industries in the following countries: the U.S., Australia, France, Germany, the U.K., India, Singapore, Japan and South Korea. The groups surveyed included office-based workers, remote workers, and those working in a hybrid model. We did not target Slack employees or customers for this survey.

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 support teams face, their productivity metrics, their use of automation and AI, and their views on employee experiences and wellness.
Support organizations stand to benefit the most from automation and AI

Customer service agents often spend a considerable amount of time on repetitive tasks like answering common questions, creating tickets, gathering customer feedback and directing customers to documented resources. While important, these tasks consume valuable time that could be allocated to more complex issues. This is where automation and AI come into play.

According to the survey, only 43% of support workers use automated processes. However, those who have embraced automation experience clear benefits. On average, support workers using automated processes save an impressive 3.4 hours per week. What’s more, 81% of these workers report that automation has had a positive impact on their productivity.

Automate the push and pull of real-time CRM data through Service Cloud for Slack

For many support agents and managers, a significant amount of time is spent switching between disconnected apps and knowledge systems. As a result, their customers get slower times to resolution and support models that often see them bouncing from agent to agent, causing frustration and low satisfaction scores.

Using the Service Cloud for Slack app, agents can easily find information and experts, manage cases and incidents, and field support requests—all in the Service Cloud Console for Slack. It brings together all the people, tools and data teams need to be their most productive. The result? Happier customers, happier agents.
The benefits of automation extend beyond just time savings. A majority (63%) of support workers say the greatest advantage of automation is its ability to help them achieve more with less time and fewer resources. This increased efficiency is crucial when many organizations are facing budget constraints and pressure to perform.

In contrast, AI adoption remains relatively low, with only 24% of support workers currently using AI in their work. AI has the potential to transform the support industry by improving ticket deflection and customer satisfaction. Integrating AI into support workflows can significantly improve efficiency and deliver a better overall customer experience.
### Most common support processes that get automated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>File sharing and storage</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer support (e.g. answers to frequently asked questions)</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending messages to colleagues</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique automations to make core tasks easier (e.g. automating tedious or repetitive tasks)</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing work orders and requests</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alerts (e.g. from third-party integrations to your main workspace)</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onboarding (e.g. automating access to certain tools and documents to new hires)</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests for time off</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expense approvals</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BASE: SUPPORT DESK WORKERS**
Salesforce’s support team resolves cases 26% faster with Slack

With more than 3,300 customer support agents around the world, Salesforce is deeply committed to creating the best customer-centric experiences—especially for its internal customers. In 2021, Salesforce turned to Slack to transform the way it tackles complex issues.

Swarms take place in Slack through a variety of public channels centered on different products and focus areas. When support agents need additional expertise, they can quickly fill out a workflow form in Slack with key information, such as the case number, urgency level and subject matter. This workflow automatically creates a swarm channel where engineers, product specialists and other agents can discuss solutions or dig deeper into their back-end systems to figure out a root cause. Participants can hop into quick virtual huddles for shoulder-to-shoulder collaboration, screen sharing and screen drawing. Best of all, discussions are saved in channels, so in the future, agents can search for resolutions to similar incidents.

With Slack as their productivity platform, Salesforce’s support team resolves cases 26% faster. Learn more about the Slack approach to case swarming in this on-demand webinar.
Another aspect to consider is improving meeting hygiene and encouraging asynchronous work when possible. A substantial 31% of support workers say that spending too much time in meetings and on email hinders their productivity. Furthermore, 41% believe that their meetings could be eliminated without causing any adverse problems. This suggests that there are opportunities to streamline communication and collaboration processes to enhance productivity and job satisfaction. For example, at Salesforce and Slack, we practice Maker Weeks, conduct asynchronous discussions through Slack whenever possible and have anchor days, when employees agree within their teams to come into the office.
Top ways support leaders can support productivity

- Flexible work schedules: 56%
- Flexible location: 37%
- Providing unique workplace benefits (e.g. lunch, snacks, games, etc.): 35%
- Making improvements to the workplace (e.g. more meeting rooms, quiet areas, etc.): 33%
- Encouraging people to bring their whole selves to work: 27%
- Meeting-free days: 16%
- Tracking activity metrics (e.g. time spent at work, emails sent, etc.): 15%
- Empowering us to automate work processes with low- or no-code tools: 14%
- Requiring employees to be in the office every day or most days when possible: 13%
- Employee resource groups (e.g. women’s employee resource group): 11%

Base: Support desk workers
Support leaders need to rethink how they improve productivity

In the customer service industry, performance and productivity metrics play a crucial role. From tracking the total number of support tickets to measuring the speed of issue resolution, these metrics provide valuable insights into the hard-to-strike balance between managing service costs and ensuring service quality. It’s no surprise then that 64% of support executives primarily rely on visible metrics such as hours spent online, the number of emails sent or lines of code written. Additionally, 54% of support workers feel pressure to respond to messages quickly to drive down time to resolution for their customers.

However, solely relying on these numbers place the emphasis on the wrong value: output. The value does not lie in speed itself but in what speed can deliver. Leaders should focus on streamlining how inputs are generated. Speed is paramount to delivering excellent service, and an agent equipped with the most efficient processes and tools can be far more productive than one who isn’t.

Slack unifies your team, customers, cases and incidents all in one platform. This drastically reduces the hours typically spent “swivel chairing” between systems, and empowers agents to work more efficiently. In fact, our service customers have seen an average of 15.1% reduction in cost per ticket and $3.4 million savings in improved productivity, according to “The Total Economic Impact” report conducted by Forrester.
The takeaway

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

The future of support productivity lies in three key areas:

• **First, keeping up with technology isn’t optional.** Support leaders should adopt automated workflows and start exploring ways to incorporate generative AI now. Automation can streamline processes, reduce errors and free up valuable time for agents to focus on customers. Meanwhile, artificial intelligence offers exciting possibilities for predictive analytics, personalized customer interactions and more.

• **Secondly, make hybrid work work.** Some aspects of collaboration are gained and others are lost through distributed support teams. Empower your agents with the right tools to make up for the lack of face time.

• **Support leaders must put the right tools in place to maximize service team productivity.** This means paying attention to the tools and processes that go into resolving each ticket, in addition to the final results. By centralizing the entire support workstream in one platform, you will likely see higher productivity and more satisfied customers.
Slack can help

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

- **Resolve complex cases quickly with swarming.** Empower agents to automatically loop in subject-matter experts and technical team members to quickly swarm on support issues or field requests for faster resolution with Salesforce Service Cloud.
- **Boost productivity with automation and AI.** Turn manual tasks into automated workflows and intelligently generate summaries or knowledge articles.
- **Approve admin tasks quickly, to focus on customers.** Structure approval information with the right approvers and account information from Service Cloud through easy to use no-code workflows.

Learn more about Slack for Support 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.